

The Triumph of the Ridiculous

Nikos Raptis 31 March 2012

In the ZNet Commentary "Anno Domini 2012: One More Year Of Ridicule and of Hate", of March 17, 2012, it was mentioned that: "March 25th is the '4th of July' for the Greeks ... [there is a] possibility of having half a million Greeks greeting the members of the [Greek] government at Syntagma Square with a collective 'moutza' [insult] as they are standing on their elevated platform during the 'March 25th' parade ... A provocation during the parade, preferably a bloody one, could be a cause for postponing the [upcoming] elections or for worse developments in Greece."

Leni Riefenstahl, was a rather pretty lady and a film maker, who served as a "tool" of propaganda for Hitler. In 1935 she filmed Hitler's infamous Nuremberg Rally, which she named "Triumph des Willens" ["Triumph of the Will"]. The German word Willens [pronounced: vi' lens, exactly as the English word "villains"] is the [rare] genitive of the German noun "der Wille" [the will].

Did Riefenstahl know that her Nazi friends were "villains"? Of course she did? Did the Nazi "villains" triumph? Excepting some problematic individuals like Hitler, Himmler, and Goering, who committed suicide, a great number of the Nazis (top and low) "triumphed", thanks to the US elites; Werner von Braun is a "glorious" case, Heinz Alfred Kissinger's mentor in the US government was a top Nazi, etc. Riefenstahl, herself, did quite well. After her denazification, she went on working as an "artistic" photographer of ... negroes, etc. On the jacket of her book "The Last of the Nuba", published by the US company Harper & Row in 1973, she offers the world 12 pictures of herself from 1927 to 1973. Excepting the pictures after 1965, when she was smiling, because, by now, she was again a member of the dignified West, the only pictures that she is caught smiling are those of 1936; the apogee of the Nazi era.

Had Riefenstahl been alive today she would have been the right person to film the "Triumph of the Ridiculous": the "March 25th" national holiday parade, for 2012, in Athens, Greece.

The Greek governing elites for two weeks, in a panicky state, were planning their reaction to a possible protest (mostly through insults) against them by the Greek population at Syntagma Square, the traditional site for the parade.

This is the result of their consultation:

- They positioned snipers [!!!] on the roof of the Parliament building, just above the elevated platform that the officials stand during the parade.
- They forbade the presence of ordinary Greeks in the wider area of the parade at about a distance of 3 to 4 blocks around the Syntagma Square, by using about 4,000 policemen.
- They applied preemptive detaining of civilians, whom the police found to be "aesthetically" suspect. They detained around 300 persons in Athens.
- They shortened the duration of the parade, which normally used to last for a couple of hours, to 35 minutes.
- They vetted the few persons, mostly retired military, that were allowed to stand at the sidewalk opposite the officials.

So, the governing elites of Greece had the pleasure of having a military parade, in Athens, all to themselves, while the Greek population was absent. A joke, which, nevertheless, was taken very seriously by these elites, who became the laughing-stock of the Greek population.

Why was the Greek population absent?

For some the "introduction" of snipers in the events taking place in Syntagma Square for the last couple of years, was something that could not be ignored. Kids may like parades, but some parents wisely kept the kids at home.

For the mass of the very angry people of Athens, this absence and this silence proved that their maturity is considerable. By ignoring the parade fiesta and by avoiding to give a chance to the rulers to exploit a possible provocation to their favor, the ordinary people protected themselves and in the meantime made the ridicule for the rulers more loud.

"The day will come when our silence will be more powerful than the voice you are throttling today."

Addressing the martyrs of Haymarket at the Waldheim cemetery in Chicago, we can assure them that they were right. Syntagma Square, Tahrir Square, Tunisia, Wisconsin, Occupying, and more, and more, prove that they cannot throttle the voice of humanity.

Back to Athens: One additional factor for the restraint of the people of Athens was that the upcoming parliamentary elections, in about four weeks (early May), are pivotal for the Greeks. A postponement, or even a

cancellation, of the elections, which is the aim of the US, the Germans, and the IMF, will be a very bad development for the Greeks.

In other Greek towns, smaller than Athens, in Salonika, in Patras, in Crete, and others there were some loud insults against the governing politicians, but the "battle" was given in Athens and the people was victorious.

How about the governing politicians, after the "March 25th" events in Athens? Did they feel any shame? Of course not. Yet, is it shamelessness or is it a cynic and servile obedience to the dictates of the US, the EU, the IMF and other benevolent institutions of that kind?

The answer: servility presupposes shamelessness.

Suppressing anger for a moment and observing these people with a calm and cool gaze, one is bound to discover the "childishness" of all these "leaders"; W. Bush, Obama, Cameron, Sarkozy, Berlusconi, the Greek governing elites, the Pope, etc, etc. Yet, their childishness is dangerous and leads to criminal behavior.

Will this ridiculous childishness of these elites and of the economic deviates that control them prevail and be triumphant?

I hope not in Greece. A test of this will be the parliamentary elections in early May of 2012.

The situation in Greece is reaching the limits of rational patience. This drama must end.

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Antibiotic-resistant NDM-1 Is Undermining India's Medical Sector

Sonia Shah 31 March 2012

Some of modern medicine's most heralded interventions -- from routine surgeries to organ transplants and cancer treatments -- may soon be too dangerous. The viability of these procedures hinges on physicians' ability to use antibiotics to swiftly vanquish any bacterial infections that might arise in the course of treatment. For decades, physicians have been able to choose from hundreds of different kinds of antibiotics to do the job, including many powerful "broad spectrum" varieties that indiscriminately kill a wide range of bacteria. But over the past two decades, antibiotic

drugs have started to fail one by one, as bacteria with resistance to them have emerged and spread. Taming the new drug-resistant pathogens requires ever more toxic, expensive, and time-consuming therapies, such as a class of last-resort antibiotics called carbapenems, which must be administered intravenously in hospitals. In the United States alone, fighting drug-resistant infections costs up to 8 million additional patient hospital days and up to \$34 billion every year.

Now, the emergence in India of a particularly nasty form of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, which renders even the last-resort drugs obsolete, could bring about an era of unstoppable infections. To contain the bacteria, South Asian governments must quickly reform their public health practices and medical manufacturers must fast-track the development of new drugs. But with the Indian political establishment prioritizing building up its lucrative private health sector over making costly public health reforms, and policies aimed at recalibrating drug research and development in the West stymied, the political will to accomplish the job is scarce.

In India, antibiotic use is virtually unregulated. Antibiotics are widely available without a prescription and, as in the United States, affluent people tend to consume the drugs whether medically necessary or not -- for everything from colds to diarrhea. Meanwhile, when ill, India's poor tend to scrape together a few rupees to buy a couple doses of antibiotic at a time, enough to quell their symptoms but not enough to clear their infections. Both patterns of consumption contribute to the development of drug-resistant bacteria. So, it is no wonder that, even before the new super-resistant strain was first documented, over 50 percent of the bacterial infections that occurred in Indian hospitals were resistant to commonly used antibiotics.

Then, in 2010, a study of a New Delhi-area hospital found that 24 percent of bacterial infections there could resist the last-resort carbapenem antibiotics. Thirteen percent not only resisted carbapenem drugs, but overcame 14 other antibiotics, making treatment options exceedingly limited. The gene that conferred this extreme drug-resistance was dubbed "New Delhi metallo-beta-lactamase 1" or NDM-1. Scientists found that, unlike other drug-resistant bacteria, NDM-1 bacteria are able to quickly and prolifically spread their genes to other bacteria, easily jumping the barriers of species and genus. The pandemic potential of such a microbe is enormous. Indeed, according to Tim Walsh, a University of Cardiff medical microbiologist who has been chasing the dangerous gene, NDM-1 infections already turned up in more than 35 countries last year -- often in the bodies of medical tourists, who had traveled to India or Pakistan for cheap surgeries and other procedures. And NDM-1 bacteria have also been found in drinking water and in puddles around New Delhi.

Part of the problem in taming the bug is an ongoing failure to develop drugs to combat it. Despite growing global demand (and the World Health Organization's recognition that drug-resistant pathogens are one of the greatest threats to human health) the drug industry hasn't launched a new class of antibiotics to treat the class of bacteria susceptible to the NDM-1 gene in 45 years. As a result, there are only two imperfect drugs that can treat NDM-1 infections. The first, an antibiotic called colistin, was first sold over fifty years ago and fell into disuse in the 1980s, when less toxic drugs were developed using more modern methods. The second, tigecycline, is a pricey intravenous drug approved only for soft-tissue infections, not the urinary tract infections and pneumonias that comprise the majority of hospital-acquired infections. With more frequent use of these two limited drugs, it will be only a matter of time before NDM-1 bacteria can resist them as well.

According to the Infectious Diseases Society of America, the drug industry has actively avoided developing new antibiotics. This is a business decision: drugs that are prescribed for months and years, such as anti-arthritis or cholesterol-lowering drugs, and those for which patients and insurers will pay almost any sum, such as anti-cancer drugs, provide better return on investment. Antibiotics are costly to develop, only prescribed for a handful of days at a time, and, despite their curative powers, rarely fetch more than \$100 per course. Further, all antibiotics eventually render themselves -- and the R&D investment behind them -- obsolete, since their use inevitably creates new drug-resistant pathogens. The United States and the EU have formed a task force on the issue, but as yet, no promising new drug is in the pipeline to treat NDM-1 bacteria. As a result, says Ramanan Laxminarayan, director of the Public Health Foundation of India, "places like India will just have to wait" as NDM-1 continues to evolve and spread.

Creating tomorrow's antibiotics is a huge challenge, but it is only half of the battle. Stanching the spread of NDM-1 and other drug-resistant bacteria will also require greatly improved stewardship of today's antibiotics: better surveillance of resistant strains, better control of infections in hospitals, and improved sanitation and hygiene. Here, Indian political priorities, and the country's haphazard sanitary infrastructure may prove disastrous.

In the wake of pro-market reforms in the early 1990s, India's economy has been expanding at a rate of 8 percent a year. But despite this growth, government spending on health hovers at around one percent of GDP a year, a proportion that critics condemn as far too low for a country with a prospering economy that is still heavily burdened by infectious disease. (Only Burundi, Cambodia, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Sudan spend proportionally less.) In India's finance-starved public hospitals,

overcrowding is common and corruption rife. Nearly one-third of patients report having to resort to bribes just to get clean bed sheets. In most, says Laxminarayan, "you will find a person in the bed, another person under the bed, and one on the side of the bed." Patients' relatives, often the sole providers of nursing care, crouch on crumbling walkways outside hospital buildings under the blazing sun. The infamous open sewers of India's slums ooze nearby. These conditions are ripe for the rapid spread of pathogens, including NDM-1.

As the country's stunted public health infrastructure languishes, the private health sector has boomed. Encouraged by government tax exemptions, corporate hospital chains such as Apollo and Fortis, which are owned by large pharmaceutical and technology companies, dot the landscape, islands of apparent sterility amid the grime. Now, 80 percent of total Indian health expenditure goes to private clinics and hospitals. Besides caring for India's affluent, many of these hospitals market their upscale services to "medical tourists," patients from the UK, the United States, the Middle East, and elsewhere, who fly to India for procedures that are cheaper and quicker there than they would be home. It is a growth industry that brings in hundreds of thousands of foreign patients and over \$300 million annually now, which is set to top \$2 billion in coming years.

It was in the bodies of medical tourists who had traveled to India and Pakistan that the new super-resistant gene was first discovered by British scientists in 2009. But when those scientists named it "NDM-1," after the city from which it seemed to originate, and warned that other medical tourists might be at risk, Indian politicians, news media, and physicians cried foul, suggesting a conspiracy to undermine the medical tourism sector. India's National Centre for Disease Control spent days openly denying the public health relevance of NDM-1. Government authorities sent letters to Indian researchers who had collaborated with British scientists on the NDM-1 studies, demanding that they disavow their research. They also tried to prevent scientists from taking samples of NDM-1 out of India for research purposes.

Better nationwide surveillance of infectious pathogens could help target containment efforts, but here, too, capacity is limited.

India's disease surveillance program collects information from only 2 of the country's 640 districts. Precious few hospitals have the well-equipped labs required to conduct microbiological sleuthing. Without convincing nationwide data, it's all too easy for politicians to dismiss reports about NDM-1 as the exaggerations of outsiders.

As the controversy over NDM-1 swirled, in 2011 New Delhi convened an advisory committee on the issue of antibiotic resistance which floated a proposal to ban the sale of antibiotics without a physician's prescription,

and restrict the use of last-resort IV antibiotics to highly specialized hospitals. But after pharmacists went on strike in August 2011, the proposal was withdrawn. Experts say the move was nothing more than a gesture, in any case. The policy had little chance of being implemented and enforced: In India, health policy is implemented at the state level, not the federal level.

Nobody knows how many people may have already died from NDM-1 bacterial infections, nor how many more may sicken or die should the gene become more widespread. It may be that NDM-1 has to gain more notoriety and "get a lot more scary," as the Times of India put it last spring, before political will to do something about it coalesces. For now, experts such as Walsh estimate that NDM-1 bacteria silently lurk in the guts of up to 200 million people in India alone, evolving, exchanging genes with other bacteria, and being shed into the environment. In an interconnected world, they will not remain quarantined there for long. www.zcommunications.org

Worker Ownership For the 21st Century?

Laura Flanders 29 March 2012

It may not be the revolution's dawn, but it's certainly a glint in the darkness. On Monday, this country's largest industrial labor union teamed up with the world's largest worker-cooperative to present a plan that would put people to work in labor-driven enterprises that build worker power and communities, too.

Titled "Sustainable Jobs, Sustainable Communities: The Union Co-op Model," the organizational proposal released at a press conference on March 26 in Pittsburgh, draws on the fifty-five year experience of the Basque-based Mondragon worker cooperatives. To quote the document:

"In contrast to a Machiavellian economic system in which the ends justify any means, the union co-op model embraces the idea that both the ends and means are equally important, meaning that treating workers well and with dignity and sustaining communities are just as important as business growth and profitability."

It might not sound like big news to members of their local food coop but it's revolutionary stuff in the context of industrial production. The United Steelworkers represents some 1.2 million members; the average steel plant

requires millions of dollars of investment, and there's history here when it comes to worker ownership—some of it painful.

Thirty-five years ago, when local steelworkers and a statewide religious coalition put forward a plan to transfer the Youngstown Sheet and Tube steel mill to worker and community control, the USW's attitude was very different. As recounted by Gar Alperovitz in his (recently updated) "America Beyond Capitalism:"

"In the late 1970s the union saw worker-ownership as a threat to organizing, and it opposed efforts by local steelworkers to explore employee-owned institution-building in cities like Youngstown."

This Monday, Leo Gerard, forward-thinking president of a very new kind of international USW, had this to say:

"To survive the boom and bust, bubble-driven economic cycles fueled by Wall Street, we must look for new ways to create and sustain good jobs on Main Street.... Worker-ownership can provide the opportunity to figure out collective alternatives to layoffs, bankruptcies, and closings."

"The union's gone through a huge transition," Alperovitz told me when I reached him at his office shortly after the press conference. "This is a real declaration of a new direction for labor."

It's been a few years since the USW first became curious about the Mondragon cooperatives after they had a good experience working with GAMESA, a co-op friendly Spanish wind turbine outfit that opened up three plants in Pennsylvania. In 2009, with their Spanish colleagues' help, Gerard sent a delegation to the Basque region of Spain to investigate Mondragon, now a \$24 billion global operation. Since then, the USW has worked slowly with Mondragon and the Ohio Employee Ownership Center (OEOC) a university based coop-outreach center founded by one of the organizers of the Youngstown initiative, to fine tune the US version presented Monday.

For the details of the proposal, check out the model for yourself. The full text of the union co-op model is available at www.usw.coop or www.union.coop. The template is intended to be a living document, write the authors, "subject to continuous revision and improvement based on user feedback and applied experiences."

The key elements of the plan are jobs trump profit margins; every worker has one vote, and worker-owners don't just "own," they are expected to participate in management. Also, social transformation: "A key part of the co-op's mission is to support and invest in their communities by creating jobs, funding development projects, supporting education, and providing

opportunity."

However the details are applied, the point is to get more experiments up and running. "The more we can do, the better," says Alperovitz. "We'll learn and along the way legitimate the idea."

There are political implications, says Carl Davidson, national co-chair of the Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism and a Pittsburgh local, who has studied Mondragon and attended the press conference Monday. "It's a radical structural reform that produces not just a better contract but alters relationships of power."

In an era of high unemployment, low levels of union membership and attacks from all sides on the political power of labor, US workers have less ability than ever to "check" corporate power through mass mobilization and traditional labor tactics. The worker-ownership model presents another way to exercise power. If workers can raise sufficient investment capital and find stable markets they can do better than "check" corporate power, they can (to use Alperovitz's word) "displace" corporations.

At the very least, the USW/Mondragon move puts a new idea on the table. Will it change the equation the next time the federal government is bailing out an auto company, for example? What if, instead of pumping public money into the same-old private enterprise, public money powered up a new worker-owned operation, run by new rules for different outcomes? (Labor and community welfare, say, instead of profits to be skimmed off by top-level shareholders?)

The opening up of that question to serious public dialogue is a major step, but Monday's announcement introduced more than a concept. The organizers also introduced workers involved in a new industrial laundry they're calling the Pittsburgh "Clean and Green Laundry Cooperative" modeled in part on similar projects in Cleveland. Plans are afoot for union co-ops in Cincinnati, too. The Pittsburgh laundry's slated to open in the beginning of June.

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Science and Democracy

Vandana Shiva 29 March 2012

In an interview to the journal Science, the Indian Prime Minister Dr. Man Mohan Singh, chose to focus on two hazardous technologies – genetically engineered seeds and crops in agriculture and nuclear power – as vital to the progress of science in India, and the “salvation for finding new development pathways for developing our economy”.

He also identified NGO’s as blocking this “development”, and involved the foreign hand.

The Prime Minister’s interview saddened me. It saddened me because the Prime Minister seems out of touch with science, as well as the people of India whose will he is supposed to represent in a democracy. To label the democratic voices of the citizens of India as “foreign” and as “unthinking” is an insult to democracy, to the people of India, and to the part of the scientific community which is dedicated to science in the public interest and to understanding the safety aspects of hazardous technologies like nuclear and genetic engineering. The Prime Minister’s statement is also a trivialization of the regulatory framework for biosafety and nuclear safety.

It is because these technologies have safety implications in the context of the environment and public health, we have national and international laws on Biosafety in the context of GMO’s, and nuclear safety in the context of nuclear power. The Prime Minister should be legally bound by these frameworks. The debate on safety is vital to our science, our democracy and our ecological security, food security and health security.

The Prime Minister is misleading the nation by making it appear that the only voices raising caution in the context of these hazardous technologies are “foreign funded NGO’s”. The most significant voice on Biosafety is Dr. Pushpa Bhargava who is the father of molecular biology in India and is the Supreme Court Appointee on the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee which is the Statutory Body which regulates GMO’s for Biosafety under the 1989 rules of the Environment Protection Act. Dr. Bhargava was also on the National Knowledge Commission.

The most important voice for nuclear safety is Dr. A Gopalakrishnan, the former Atomic Energy Regulatory Board Chairman.

The Prime Minister should be listening to these eminent experts for the development of a responsible and democratic science, not creating a bogey of the “foreign hand” and starting a witch hunt of public interest groups and social movements who are the very life blood of a democracy.

This attack on movements engaged in issues related to safety of genetic engineering and nuclear power needs to be viewed in the larger context of the mega bucks foreign corporations are looking at by pushing GMOs and

nuclear power plants in India. The Prime Minister has succumbed to these pressures, and sacrificed India's food sovereignty and energy sovereignty. He signed the US-India Nuclear Agreement, and the deal got the approval of Parliament only through the "cash-for-votes" scandal. The Prime Minister also signed the US – India Agriculture Agreement, which seeks to put India's food and agriculture systems in the hands of global corporate giants like Monsanto, Cargill and Walmart.

The push for FDI in retail was stopped by Parliament. The recent election results show that the people have also rejected the UPA policies focusing on the interests of global corporations while trampling on the livelihoods and democratic rights of the people of India.

We have already seen the high costs of the destruction of our Seed Sovereignty in cotton after the entry of Monsanto. 95% of our cotton seed is now owned and collected by Monsanto through licensing agreements with 60 Indian seed companies. Seed costs jumped 8000%, pesticide use increased, crop failure increased, farmers debt increased, and with debt, the epidemic of farmer's suicides emerged.

The Prime Minister talks of a "double whammy" of disease – but he describes it as an "opportunity". He fails to address the "double whammy" in the food and agriculture crisis, 250,000 farmers' suicides, and half of India's children suffering from severe malnutrition. GMOs are not a solution to this double whammy. They are aggravating and deepening the crisis of debt linked to capital intensive non-sustainable agriculture based on seed monopoly, which destroys food systems that produce healthy and nutritious food. The solution to farmers' suicides and children's malnutrition is the science of agro ecology and the development of ecologically intensive, low cost production which increases the production of food and nutrition as we have shown in the Navdanya report "Health Per Acre".

Navdanya's report "The GMO Emperor has No Clothes" provides empirical evidence on the performance of GMOs in farmers' fields, not in Monsanto sponsored propaganda. GMOs have failed to increase "yields", reduce the use of pesticides, or reduce the prevalence of pests and weeds. They have, in fact, increased chemical use, and led to the emergence of super pests and super weeds.

To impose a failed technology with extremely high social and ecological costs undemocratically on India in the name of "science" is anti science and anti democracy. It is anti-science because real science is based on the new disciplines of agro-ecology and epi-genetics, not the obsolete idea of genetic determinism and genetic reductionism. The latest science in energy is renewable energy, not nuclear.

Yet the Prime Minister under the influence of global corporations, will stop at nothing to destroy the nation's seed sovereignty, food sovereignty, energy sovereignty, and health and nutrition security. The attack on NGOs should be seen along with the attack on India's Biosafety regulatory framework. There is an attempt to dismantle the Biosafety rules under the Environment protection attack and replace them with the Biotechnology Regulatory Authority of India (BRAI) which would rob the states of the powers they have under the Constitution and in the current Biosafety laws. After all, 13 states stopped the Bt Brinjal. To blame the moratorium on Bt Brinjal on the foreign hand is to turn a blind eye to the role of the states under federal structure of our constitution.

The proposed BRAI will also rob citizens of their right to justice and biosafety by blocking them from approaching civil courts. The corporations will be deregulated, citizens will be policed.

The Prime Minister's attack on movements in his interview in Science is part of this larger attack on democracy and people's rights in order to undemocratically promote the role of global corporations in the vital sectors of food and energy.

The debate on Genetic Engineering and Nuclear Power is a test case of the intense conflict between corporate rule and democracy, between corporate science pushing hazards, and public science calling for safety. It is a contest between science and democracy on one side, and propaganda and dictatorship on the other.

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Renewed contradictions for Ronnie Kasrils

The leftist spy who came in from cold Pretoria

Patrick Bond 26 March 2012

'I don't have the stomach or the taste to serve any more at this level,' said the normally ebullient Minister of Intelligence Ronnie Kasrils, as he quit

after fourteen years of service to the South African government. It was late September 2008, just after Thabo Mbeki was palace-couped.

Kasrils' intelligence service was by then an international laughingstock, with spy-versus-spy intrigue spilling out wide across the political landscape. His own troops were locked in unending, ungovernable, internecine battles against each other's factions, using hoax emails, other disinformation and extraordinary political contortions unknown in even the ugliest Stalinist traditions of the African National Congress (ANC). Recall that Mbeki's police chief Jackie Selebi was also the head of Interpol, and to have the mafia penetrate such high levels made South African security farcical at best.

None of this was Kasrils' fault, of course; such fights continue to this day, and leading police officers Bheki Cele and Richard Mdluli have allegedly amplified the Mbeki-era traditions of graft. But the intrigue was so murky in September 2008 that when an obscure judge made an offhanded, seemingly flippant remark about Jacob Zuma being a victim of political conspiracy, it was a catalyst for the ANC's Zumites to unceremoniously evict Mbeki seven months before his term was due to end.

To last so long in that immoral swamp required a firm constitution, and to then extricate from the mire was a heroic task. Kasrils was (and remains) the continent's highest-profile revolutionary from the white race, and in spite of all the muck nearby, he exudes an exceptionally powerful moral influence. Kasrils also played crucial leadership roles as minister of water, deputy minister of defense, and leadership in the ANC's Umkhonto we Sizwe armed wing and SA Communist Party dating back nearly five decades.

The contradictions he faced during his era in power were overwhelming. They deserve, I believe, serious consideration; in some cases, much more decisive resolutions than we've witnessed; and now renewal, in the dialectical spirit. Exploring and transcending both the exercise of power (thesis) and counter-power activities by progressive civil society (antithesis), in order to find a new synthesis and yet new contradictions, is my objective in the coming pages.

Contradictory Kasrils

Last week Kasrils visited us at the University of KwaZulu-Natal as a Time of the Writer festival guest at the Centre for Creative Arts and speaker at the Centre for Civil Society's seminar on authoritarianism and corruption. A student here in the early 1960s, he reminisced about his disputes during economics classes with the 'reactionary' Professor Owen Horwood – later an influential apartheid Finance Minister – because of Kasrils' opposition to Bantustan policy.

He returned for this visit because in 2010, Kasrils' beautiful biography of his late wife Eleanor, *The Unlikely Secret Agent*, won SA's main book award (the Sunday Times Alan Paton non-fiction prize) and his compelling autobiography *Armed and Dangerous* had its third edition in 2004. His presentations last week celebrating writing, women and radical politics were thoughtful and humorous.

Like most who meet Kasrils, it took me only four discussions to depart so charmed as to confess I will now blindly follow him on any madcap adventure – albeit one in September 1992, when he marched 80 000 protesters to the 'Ciskei' government's doorstep, left dozens to return home in coffins, after pro-apartheid armed forces opened fire. But dangerous as he has been, armed or not, this is the kind of mensch who would have us cracking up on our way to the gallows, more gregarious and fun-loving than any lefty I've ever known.

That charm in turn calls for even more critically-sympathetic reflection about how a South African nationalist-communist spy might come in from the cold. We might attempt this via the dialectic method, which respects tension and contradiction, which contextualizes so as to point the way forward to social progress, and which seeks to understand interrelations of economy, politics, society and nature.

Kasrils was quite right to finally quit the Pretoria regime, as he witnessed extreme abuses of power within his beloved ANC, and on occasion was attacked – without merit, he insists – for allegedly being a guiding force in the network of Mbeki supporters trying to halt Zuma's presidential push.

The worst of it, he recounts, was when in early 2006 the Young Communist League leadership accused him of setting up a 'honey trap' for Zuma, who was accused of rape a few weeks earlier by an openly HIV+ lesbian known as Khwezi. The future president was acquitted after a trial in which misogynist patriarchy by Zuma and his supporters was on blatant display.

Kasrils had known the 30 year-old victim for a quarter of a century (as had Zuma) because her parents provided a safehouse during anti-apartheid military missions deep in Durban's townships. He was drawn in against his will in a peripheral way, making clear that Khwezi should sort out the charge with professional aid, not old family connections to the Minister of Intelligence. But that moment was when the break with Zuma became irreparable.

Given his despondency about the ANC's subsequent trajectory, time and time again in several conversations Kasrils reminded of what he is

accused of sounding like by journalist Alistair Sparks: an end-of-apartheid verligte (Afrikaner enlightened reformer). But now Kasrils feels there is far more at stake: saving not only the liberal gains that the likes of FW de Klerk (verligte-in-chief) grudgingly surrendered two decades ago, but also reviving prospects for a broader left turn in coming years.

Given Kasrils' larger-than-life personality, the best approach might well be to treat him as would Karl Marx, as recommended in *Das Kapital*: 'Individuals are dealt with here only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, the bearers of particular class-relations and interest.'

You could add race/ethnic, gender and generational relations as well, since most of these divisions are also being amplified under conditions of class apartheid. Unfortunately, Kasrils is yet to pronounce on deeper-rooted economic policy corruption – i.e. the numerous neoliberal policies adopted after 1994 – aside from firmly endorsing the country's 1996 structural adjustment policy ('Growth, Employment and Redistribution', GEAR), at the time, as part of the Arms Deal.

Instead, Kasrils' current focus on corruption highlights mainly the acquisitiveness of the political-bureaucratic petit bourgeoisie, aspiring to great wealth for little effort.

The wretched of the ANC

His naming as 'WaBenzis' several former colleagues – including the late defense minister Joe Modise and current SA Communist Party chief Blade Nzimande – certainly helps personify the problem. As Kasrils griped in our seminar, 'South Africa is regaled by one revelation after another involving luxury limousines, lavish banquets, expensive hotel bills and other extravagant follies.'

His own 'economic category' might be described best as a small-c communist. Kasrils' trajectory of race/class-suicide began on Sharpeville Day in 1960 when, as he told the Time of the Writer audience, his white colleagues at Johannesburg's Lever Brothers film advertising division were stunned when he sided with black staff, as reports came in of the 69 murders. As for his hostility to Zionism, Kasrils (from a Jewish background) came to understand the Israeli occupation of Palestine and became the continent's leading campaigner for Middle East justice and the 'one-state' solution needed to avoid making permanent the region's bantustanization.

He sums up the rise and fall of his vision for a socialist South Africa simply and accurately: 'Regarding national liberation, as Vladimir Lenin put it, the character of the outcome depends upon the organised strength of

the working class. For quite a period of time we saw the left rising and becoming strong and then post-1990 we see the rightwing agenda becoming so strong with its alignment to capital.'

You can't argue with that, but the depth and intensity of South Africa's contradictions require more than a simple class correlation as explanation. Instead, with dialectical method, Lenin remarked how social development 'proceeds in spirals, not in a straight line; a development by leaps, catastrophes, and revolutions; "breaks in continuity",' leaving us to link what we observe at surface level into 'a uniform, and universal process of motion, one that follows definite laws.'

Theoretically, those laws of exploitation, it seems to me, were initially understood best by Marx in *Kapital* in 1867, elaborated in North-South (and capitalist-noncapitalist) terms by Rosa Luxemburg a century ago, and translated to African post-colonialism by Frantz Fanon fifty years ago. The critiques of capitalism, imperialism and nationalism by these revolutionary theorists still work well today, especially in a South Africa where migrancy, gendered roles and deep racial divisions in the division of labour, ecological degradation and capitalist crisis tendencies persist and indeed worsen.

But it is in the realm of degenerate political leadership that we see Kasrils' next set of contradictions, as he gradually breaks from the ANC and loses all respect for the Communist Party (or so it seems), while lauding trade union and other civil society activism. He quoted from Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* in his seminar last Friday, aiming these words at his former comrades who lost touch with the masses: 'Privileges multiply and corruption triumphs, while morality declines.'

Fanon's subsequent three sentences are yet more appropriate: 'Today the vultures are too numerous and too voracious in proportion to the lean spoils of the national wealth. The party, a true instrument of power in the hands of the bourgeoisie, reinforces the machine, and ensures that the people are hemmed in and immobilized. The party helps the government to hold the people down.'

The arms bazaar

By many accounts in critical civil society, the 1997 Arms Deal was the font of South Africa's large-scale corruption, the source of so many contradictions that drive Kasrils' dialectic. He had, after all, spent the late 1990s arguing the case for the deal, on grounds that it could 'stand up to the closest scrutiny' because the process was 'meticulously professional and objective.' For the two leading experts on the Arms Deal, Paul Holden and Hennie van Vuuren, 'It almost beggars belief that this claim could be made.'

Kasrils also notified parliament of 'Major offset or counter-trade agreements so that for every rand spent abroad, the same amount will be invested in SA. Such packages will be of enormous benefit to our GEAR strategy. A tremendous boost to our economy and Treasury.' Latest estimates from the Sunday Independent are revealing: of R114 billion promised in Arms Deal offsets, only R4 billion was delivered.

Kasrils' defense last Friday was that the post-apartheid armed forces desperately needed the highest-technology weapons, but this did not leave his audience convinced. Exclaimed anti-corruption campaigner Marianne Camerer, 'How can you sleep at night?!'

Kasrils' answer: he's sleeping well because as far as he could tell, the Arms Deal didn't corrupt at ministerial executive level in major transactions, though he now concedes that at secondary level, the company-to-company transactions had plenty of holes. Schabir Shaik's facilitation of the French firm Thales' access to Zuma – for a reported R500 000/year – was an obvious example, and as Kasrils later put it, 'Zuma was by then willing and ready for corruption.'

It was recently revealed that Zuma spokesperson Mac Maharaj was another conduit for Thales dirty funds, via an offshore account. These were men Kasrils relied on for life-and-death missions during the armed struggle against apartheid, though in at least in one case, Mo Shaik (who is now moving from heading the SA Secret Service to a Development Bank of Southern Africa job), there was finally a reconciliation with Kasrils.

But as Kasrils told me, this wasn't the same Zuma he'd gotten to know as commander during MK operations, 'a simple, decent comrade.' Kasrils' unsatisfactory theory of corruption seems largely based upon the numbers of wives and children that the former exiles were responsible for upon returning to South Africa two decades ago.

It's a potentially racialising theory because as he pointed out in seminar, the white middle-class radicals who returned from abroad weren't faced with anything like the same material pressures of household reproduction. And so when Kasrils began raising the critique of Zuma's corruption within the Communist Party, for example, he confided that he found no resonance from black comrades, only from whites and Indians.

I asked whether, like other vocal critics of South Africa's elite transition who were purged from the Party because they were communists (the names Jara, Satgar, McKinley come immediately to mind), this fate would befall Kasrils, he smiled and confirmed he was no longer in leadership nor

a member of a branch – but hadn't been expelled. Yet.

Flirting with Zimbabwe, flunking the xenophobia test

Looking more broadly at morally-exhausted nationalism, what of the so-called Zanufication of the ANC? The phrase was first used by SA Communist Party deputy leader Jeremy Cronin in 2002, and the backlash from Mbeki's ranks was so strong that a humiliating apology was wrenched from the country's next-highest profile white revolutionary.

True, Kasrils quickly confirmed, Zimbabwe's Zanu(PF) ruling elite is 'absolutely disgusting. We were their guests in exile and so we were mum over the Fifth Brigade [i.e. the Mugabe government's mid-1980s' massacre of 20 000 Ndebele people]. But you do that and you're caught in a trap.'

Yet in 2005, in the midst of Mugabe's most zany, self-destructive activity, Kasrils pronounced in a speech that his regime and South Africa's shared a 'common world view' and would 'march forward shoulder to shoulder'.

When asked about this contradiction, Kasrils replied: 'Sometimes it's the context. They were our guests on that occasion, and we were signing a standard Defense Accord.' He looked deeply regretful, but tragically, there is nothing incorrect about his remark.

Kasrils did, in retrospect, warmly endorse the SA Transport and Allied Workers Union's April 2008 refusal to trans-ship three million Chinese bullets from Durban to Zimbabwe; Mugabe had ordered them to prepare for potential electoral defeat. (According to some reports, the Zimbabwe army finally acquired these via Angola after all the other ports in the region were declared no-offload zones for the weapons by courageous dockworkers.) Ten months later, the same unionists declared they would not unload Israeli goods, which warmed the progressive world's heart, especially that of the newly-retired Kasrils, who stepped up his exceptionally admirable Palestine advocacy.

Of course, blowback from the ANC's pro-Mugabe policy occurred in late May 2008, when with refugees streaming across the border to escape Zanu(PF) violence, more than sixty murders and 100 000 terrified displacees resulted from a heartbreaking xenophobia outbreak. 'We are not just seeing spontaneous xenophobic attacks,' Kasrils told journalists at the time, 'There are many social issues at the root of the problem, but we have reason to believe that there are many other organisations involved in sparking the attacks.'

Really? There was no grounding for such conspiracy theory within sound intelligence. As Kasrils confessed, 'Of course we were aware something

was brewing. It is one thing to know there is a social problem and another thing to know when that outburst will occur.' Stupidly, his National Intelligence Agency director general initially blamed xenophobia on a 'Third Force' that was 'deliberately unleashed ahead of next year's general election.'

To his credit, Kasrils later admitted these were 'misguided' theories, and regarding official impotence, 'there has not been the kind of intelligence that has been able to, say, pinpoint exact details. Even now, two weeks into the mayhem, there's not that great a possibility of being able to say.'

Resolving that particular contradiction, today Kasrils is a high-profile board member of Cape Town's most effective anti-xenophobia organization, People Against Suffering, Oppression and Poverty.

But what happens next, if there's another stolen election in Zimbabwe like those of 2000, 2002, 2005 and 2008? Contrary to hopes within that country's democratic movement, Kasrils does not foresee Zuma intervening to ensure a free and fair election through enforcement of Mbeki's September 2008 Global Political Agreement. In contrast, he says, 'I thought Mbeki was getting the better of Uncle Bob. There were some changes in the election modalities, thanks to Mbeki's niceties.'

This isn't how Zimbabweans see it, for in March 2008, Mbeki laid down the law just as the opposition Movement for Democratic Change felt they had clearly won the majority of votes in the presidential election's first round, having verifiable cellphone photos of poll results in each station immediately emailed to Harare headquarters for independent counting. Mbeki was the spoiler by ordering that Morgan Tsvangirai agree to a run-off vote in June, a race from which he soon had to withdraw because hundreds of his supporters were being killed or injured.

What if this happens again? Kasrils is adamant: 'Sanctions. Absolutely, what else is there to do.'

Given the ANC's ongoing commitment to Zanu(PF), it would be a great service for Kasrils to help open this debate if Zimbabwean comrades request it. The precedent is, once again, the Congress of SA Trade Unions' threatened mid-2000s blockade of the Zimbabwe-SA border at Messina.

ANC secrecy

Another area of contradiction in which Cosatu's support is vital, is the Secrecy Bill, the legislation that Kasrils originally introduced in early 2008 but that he now virulently opposes. As the Mail&Guardian reported four years ago, 'Kasrils portrayed it as striking an enlightened balance

between the need for secrecy and the constitutional imperative for open and accountable government. However, the M&G raised concerns that it would lead to a blanket of secrecy over government affairs.'

By mid-2008, Kasrils' internal ministerial review commission – consisting of Joe Matthews, Frene Ginwala and Laurie Nathan – warned of very negative consequences of providing 'so sweeping a basis for non-disclosure of information,' reminiscent of 'apartheid-era secrecy laws.'

That commission criticized Kasrils on several other grounds: 'The enormously wide mandate initially given to NIA to gather political intelligence, that some current methods of intrusive surveillance are unconstitutional and that a policy culture persists in the spy agencies that insists they should be allowed to "bend the rules" when necessary.'

Again to his credit, Kasrils recognized many of these problems, and by late 2011 he was in the lead of the civil society campaign against the newer and even more totalitarian version of the bill. It was, he claimed at a Wits University rally, 'turning into a Frankensteinian monster, a dog's breakfast of toxic gruel.'

Kasrils also attacked parliamentary oversight: 'All of those in the committee dealing with the bill, from every single party, are all woefully failing.'

These are the kinds of dialectical discussions which Kasrils invites: vast contradictions in past practices, conjoined with an ability to track degenerative trends and openly speak out today.

Privatisation and protest

That reminds me of the last time I ran into Kasrils, on September 3 2002, when dozens of protesters disrupted the 'Water Dome' conference panel his Director General Mike Muller had arranged with European privatisers as part of the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development. Kasrils was livid, accusing me (!) of organizing the humiliating toyi-toyi (a task for which this armchair academic is quite incapable).

A decade ago, this was one of South African society's hottest issues, along with the Mbeki government's denial of AIDS medicines that left more than 330 000 people to die unnecessarily, according to a Harvard Public Health School study. Many of us were called 'ultra-leftists' during this era, because from around late 1999 in Durban's Chatsworth township and Soweto, a new left had emerged to contest urban social services.

The argument, especially against Kasrils' predecessor Kader Asmal, was

that the 1994 water White Paper mandated full cost recovery, ignoring the implicit promise for a Free Basic Water 'lifeline tariff' mandated in the Reconstruction and Development Programme. Asmal, whom I briefly served as an advisor, was cross that a water-rights advocacy movement was rising, and he very decisively rejected Free Basic Water, once – to deter me raising this with his staff again – writing me the sternest letter that I've ever received (probably drafted by Muller).

There was great delight in February 2000 when Kasrils announced that at least 6000 liters per household per month would be provided to all residents of South Africa free. The catalyst was his meeting a Transkeian peasant who had turned away from one of Asmal's water taps and gone to a dirty river for water, simply because the 100 percent cost recovery fetish of Asmal and Muller meant the new piped water was unaffordable.

Kasrils' policy reversal represented to many of us the finest of the ANC's traditions, so different from the staged imbizos that Mbeki was running around the country, none of which led to policy changes.

The problem reached tragic proportions in August 2000 when Ngwelezane officials took the 1994 White Paper seriously and cut off more than 1000 households because the R56 (\$8) connection fee was too high. That same month, Kasrils drove the Free Basic Services policy into the ANC's municipal election platform for the December 2000 vote. By 2001 the promise had become policy – yet with a catch: Muller ensured that the consultancy that was most responsible for opposing Free Basic Water during the Asmal years (Palmer Development Group) was the outfit chosen to design its municipal implementation.

The only outcome possible was sabotage of Kasrils' intentions. Ironically it was here in Durban – the model for the 6000 liters because a drum was provided to residents that was actually cheaper for the city to fill each month than send out small bills and make collections – that the sabotage was most decisive.

From 1997-2004, according to municipal data, the real price of Durban residential water doubled, leading to a drastic contraction in consumption by an estimated million of the city's poorest residents (by one third, from 22 000 to 15 000 liters per household per month) – even during epidemics of AIDS, cholera and diarrhea. The reason for this was that after the small tokenistic amount, the next block's price rose so high so quickly that it was soon considered the second most inequitable (behind Pietermaritzburg) in all South Africa, and the worst of five major cities surveyed by the United Nations a few years later.

This city, regrettably, was the model for Free Basic Water, yet it should

have been understood as an example of South Africa's most venal public policy: brutal neoliberalism applied to social services but with tokenistic welfarism. In other words, the struggle for decommodification in which Kasrils had initially appeared as a top-down hero, was now twisted into a system for even deeper state surveillance and disciplining techniques, such as pre-payment meters.

The case of Veolia

Was Kasrils a water privatizer? Definitely not, he repeatedly claimed. Yet his earlier commitment to 'public-private partnerships' (a euphemism for commodification, commercialization and as in this case, privatization) hit hard here in Durban, home to the country's leading grassroots environmental justice campaigning group, the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (<http://www.sdcea.co.za>).

Kasrils arrived in mid-2001 to open an industrial waste-water recycling plant in South Durban, owned by the world's largest water privatizer, Paris-based Vivendi, claiming, 'Durban has not only implemented some very effective water conservation and demand management programmes, it has also managed to be extremely innovative in the ways in which to provide water to poor and indigent households.'

Actually, protesters were up in arms about those rising prices and disconnections. From Chatsworth they filed the first court injunction requested by any South African community group against municipal cut-offs, on grounds of water rights. They lost, but the anger at water commodification grew here and everywhere.

Yet at the Vivendi plant's opening, Kasrils announced, 'Public-private partnerships enable a synergy between the best that Government and the private sector have to offer.'

The 'best'? This was true for Vivendi profit-taking and for two huge South Durban polluters which were its only water purchasers, the Mondi paper mill and the Sapref oil refinery owned by Shell and BP. Their price of water was cut nearly in half by Vivendi, from R5.40/kl to R2.80, because Durban municipality priced the incoming water to Vivendi so generously.

But at the same time, SDCEA activists were demanding these firms be closed, in part because they were primary causes of the world-leading asthma rate of 52 percent at the nearby Settlers Primary School.

Then there was the financial downside. South Africa would pay a steady profit stream to Vivendi's French shareholders, in an era in which the country's balance of payments deficit soared to amongst the world's worst

(by 2009 this left South Africa with the reputation as the riskiest of 17 peer emerging economies, according to The Economist).

Ironically, fairly sophisticated R&D capacity in the South African engineering sector for water recycling already existed, given that the Durban wastewater treatment facility utilises merely sand and carbon filters, ozone and chlorine.

Asked about these in an interview last weekend, Kasrils rebutted that at least the Durban municipality's capital was saved for redeployment elsewhere, thanks to the French investment.

Yet implicit rates of return and profit/dividend outflows were so substantial that it would have made sense for the city to have taken on the project internally, if merely for the sake of expanded municipal capacity and ownership. It would have been a much better use of money than building a second world-class stadium – now considered a white elephant – with the city's large reserves a few years later.

Indeed, Engineering News reported that by 2014 there will be an estimated \$240 million in South African water and wastewater outsourcing revenues, so to permit foreign, for-profit suppliers into this market without developing national and local capacity was a misjudgment.

Setting aside the deal's flawed economics, a more extreme political contradiction loomed: Vivendi wasn't a good business partner, in contrast to Kasrils' 2001 claim about the world's largest water privatiser: 'a number of French companies heeded the call to withdraw from South Africa in the interests of breaking the apartheid government through economic sanctions. I believe it was in 1985 that the French government decided to stop all new investment in South Africa, a year before the European Union made a similar ruling.

Kasrils then offered this specific praise: 'Vivendi Water respected this decision and it was only after the release of Nelson Mandela and his inauguration as our first democratic president that Vivendi took the decision to invest locally.'

Yet simultaneously, Vivendi's operations in other countries were rife with corruption, as the 2001 report 'Dirty Water' by Friends of the Earth International showed. The month after the South Durban deal was done, in the Italian city of Milan, 'a senior manager in Vivendi's water division was convicted for bribery and received a prison sentence' while four years earlier, 'junior French minister Jean-Michel Boucheron was jailed for two years' and fined the equivalent of a million rand after a Vivendi bribe was

revealed.

In another case, according to the Dirty Water report, Vivendi executives were ‘convicted of bribing the mayor of St-Denis to obtain the water concession.’ Vivendi privatization in Puerto Rico was already recognized as a world-class consumer disaster, and in England in 1998, Vivendi’s waste disposal operation ‘was listed by the Environment Agency as the second worst polluter in the UK.’ A year later, Vivendi was hit with seven prosecutions for waste management pollution. Health and safety violations were rife in Vivendi operations by the late 1990s.

Perhaps most ironically, in 2003 Vivendi changed its name to Veolia, and quickly became one of the leading targets of Palestinian activists demanding sanctions and disinvestment. By 2006, Irish campaigners started to succeed against the world’s largest water firm, as contracts were canceled due to Veolia’s participation in Israel’s occupation of Palestine.

According to campaigners, Veolia ‘is helping to build and operate a tramway linking illegal settlements in East Jerusalem with Israel. Not only do the settlements contravene article 49 of the 4th Geneva Convention forbidding an occupier transferring its own civilians into the territory it occupies, but in most cases the establishment of the Israeli settlements involved war crimes too. The tramway tightens Israel’s hold on occupied East Jerusalem, ties the settlements more firmly into Israel and undermines chances of a just peace for the Palestinian people.’

The BDS fight against Veolia has included a great many victories, all of which were after Kasrils left the water ministry. To his credit, the 2001 grand opening can be revisited and Palestinian solidarity politics renewed in only one way, which he has provisionally agreed to: a ‘street closure’ of Veolia’s South Durban plant, one day soon. This would resolve several interlocking privatization contradictions created by Kasrils eleven years ago, and push forward one of the world’s most difficult dialectics of economy-society-nature.

More water wars

But there were many other contradictions associated with early 21st century water politics, and this is only a partial list of civil society grievances against Kasrils recorded at a meeting he hosted at the time of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in mid-2002:

- The SA Municipal Workers Union opposed the private-sector and NGO-oriented rural water programme and the promotion of public-private partnerships in municipal water delivery;
- Some community organisations, social movements and NGOs, mainly

affiliated to the National Land Committee and Rural Development Services Network, complained that most taps installed after 1994 quickly broke and that millions of South Africans remained without water, arguing that Kasrils did not take seriously the RDP promise of 50 litres per person per day of free water;

- Environmentalists in the Group for Environmental Monitoring, Environmental Monitoring Group, Earthlife and the Soweto and Alexandra civic associations complained that Kasrils championed unnecessary Lesotho dams;
- Many civic groups protested intensifying municipal water cut-offs, with fierce demonstrations in the townships of Gauteng, Durban, Cape Town and several smaller towns;
- Criticism continued against low infrastructure standards, such as mass pit latrines in urban areas.

Because of the failure to resolve any of these state-society contradictions over water commodification and ecological destruction, Kasrils grand opening to the left with Free Basic Water soon appeared as a shut door. 'You were seen as our main enemy', he told me last week, 'because when we offered 25 liters you ungratefully insisted on 50,' and yes, in retrospect, there was a degree of self-defeating, arrogant posturing by myself and many others on the independent left, especially after the empowering march of 30 000 people against the ANC government and World Summit in late August 2002.

The tensions ratcheted up, and in his April 2003 budget speech to parliament, Kasrils went after the jugular of the man who had actually surpassed him as the most notorious white revolutionary living in South Africa, John Pape, of the International Labour Research and Information Group in Cape Town. Noting that a few months earlier, Pape was extradited to the US to stand trial for his early 1970s participation in the Symbionese Liberation Army (an urban guerilla group in California best known for kidnapping newspaper heiress Patty Hearst), Kasrils attacked him as a 'phoney revolutionary.' (And me and a few others, too.)

Pape, according to Kasrils, 'glorified the use of incorrect information in a paper entitled "Down With Missionaries and Objective Academics". He encouraged his labour education colleagues not to present facts to help workers make their own decisions but rather to "lead" them to support their desired positions and courses of action. I have nothing personal against the man but misleading working people by withholding concrete facts or deliberately providing them with incorrect information is no basis for long term political success.'

Had Kasrils ever read this 1998 paper? If he had, I sense he might have agreed with Pape's actual concerns, on the one hand, that, 'The missionary sees union members as passive zealots who chant slogans and repeat key phrases without being able to analyse or criticize,' and on the other hand, that 'The objective academic sees unions as debating societies, not as organizations engaged in struggle.'

Seeking a route out of these traps, as even a Los Angeles Times reporter could recognize, Pape's main thesis was the opposite to Kasrils' allegation. He argued 'that union leaders had to cultivate critical thinking among their members, not lock-step militancy.' The newspaper cited these sentences from Pape's article: 'It is dishonest to pretend we don't have opinions. But it is also destructive to use our views as a sledgehammer to hit people over the head. Sledgehammer tactics will silence differing opinions.'

Indeed at the time, that appeared to be Kasrils' objective: sledgehammering his critics.

With Pape in prison, fellow researcher David McDonald replied to Kasrils' charges: 'It is morally reprehensible that Water Affairs and other government agencies have not been researching the cutoff situation themselves and sharing this information with the public. Apparently they would rather attack academics whose data does not fit their rosy picture of service delivery than do the difficult work of research themselves.'

McDonald added, 'Sadly, the cutoff saga continues, and the new white paper on water services makes it clear that cost recovery remains at the heart of government's water delivery strategy. Those who do not pay their bills will continue to face the wrath of budget-conscious bureaucrats.'

Kasrils' rejoinder was that thanks to his policies, no one should be cut off entirely – because of the guaranteed free supply. Rebutted McDonald, "Free services" are just part of this cost recovery continuum. Once the meager supply of free water is consumed, water flows will be restricted or cutoff if not paid for, despite the fact that millions of low-income households cannot afford to pay for the water they need. The city of Durban, the first to introduce free water, is still cutting off as many as 1000 households a day.'

Johannesburg townships witnessed the toughest battles over water, and at one point in 2004, Kasrils attacked the openly socialist Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) for destroying the pre-payment meters which Kasrils endorsed as a delivery system for at least the basic minimal free supply of 25 liters per person each day.

As he wrote in This Day newspaper in April 2004: ‘Attempts by misguided activists such as the APF to stop municipalities from managing their water systems sill probably undermine people’s water supplies and turn the hard won “right to water” into an empty tap, the right to a healthy environment into an open sewer.’

APF leader Trevor Ngwane replied: ‘Does Kasrils not know that these devices are banned in Britain, where they are considered a public health threat. Here we have AIDS, and tens of thousands of our people dying from diarrhoea, cholera and dysentery each year. So the threat of losing access to water – and hence our lives – is even more immediate.’

Ngwane continued, ‘Last May, Kasrils promised he would help by “naming and shaming” municipalities like Johannesburg which disconnect people and deny them lifeline supplies. We are still waiting for Kasrils to make good on his promise. Good riddance if, in the next cabinet, he is moved somewhere less damaging to the public health.’

Damn dams

A decade ago, this was the destructive tone of the debate between the impotent left-left and those few in the ANC’s left flanks who exercised a certain kind of delimited power. The early 2000s conflict was as acute in relation to Johannesburg water as it was for access to AIDS medicines. In 2001, another French firm – Suez (whose subsidiary was implicated in corruption associated with Lesotho dam construction) – was hired to commercialise the city’s retail supply, and let the rich continue to pay a relatively lower post-apartheid price compared to poor people (even Palmer Development Group data showed), while unemployment and inequality soared in South Africa’s meanest city.

I lived in Johannesburg then, and worked at Wits University’s public policy school. It was not hard to break with Asmal over his decision to hire the same corrupt construction firms to build the second Lesotho dam in 1998, since those two dams were responsible for quintupling the price of water to consumers, as well as destroying sensitive ecologies.

In 1999, Kasrils as the new water minister inherited the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, which soon became the highest-profile corruption case in the Third World. Even the World Bank began to debar some of the dozen multinational corporations convicted of bribing Lesotho officials, one of which (the giant Canadian civils firm Acres International) effectively closed due to the revelations.

In last week’s UKZN seminar, Kasrils claimed that he and Muller were

the driving forces in speeding up Bank investigations, yet from our perspective in civil society, Pretoria was regularly turning a blind eye to corruption by the same firms. I have found no account of Kasrils' own attempt to deter further SA government contracts with SA firms like Group Five, Concor, LTA, Ninham Shand, Knight Pièsold and Keeve Steyn, or others associated with the LHWP corruption, and in overseeing the second Lesotho mega-dam's construction, the same firms were hired.

Subsequently, as Kasrils confirmed with genuine disgust during our seminar, the main Basotho official guilty of taking bribes, the head of the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority, Masupha Sole, served a few years in jail but in August 2012 was rehired as a top Authority official.

There was another problem, though: it appeared Kasrils had a Soviet-era fascination with massive dams, something that at least Asmal had tempered by chairing the World Commission on Dams from 1998-2001. After copious evidence of mega-dam destructiveness, that Commission suggested quite restrictive conditions for dam-building, and as a result was rudely rejected by the World Bank and also by Kasrils and Muller.

In May 2001 after a trip to China, Kasrils witnessed what can reasonably be called the most extreme attack by human beings on nature, the Yangtze River's Three Gorges Dam: 'I must state my admiration for the determination and care with which the Chinese government is promoting this vast undertaking.'

This contradiction is formidable, and last December, when I visited the upper reaches of the dam's impoundment near Chongqing, I witnessed why the Chinese government itself confessed, a few months earlier, their struggle to address 'urgent problems in terms of environmental protection, the prevention of geological hazards and the welfare of the relocated communities' (there were nearly two million people displaced).

Four years earlier, Yangtze River Forum secretary general Weng Lida also admitted these 'problems are all more serious than we expected,' and other senior officials worried about frequent landslides, pollution, and environmental 'catastrophe', some in the wake of several 'major chemical spills and algae outbreaks that have contaminated the country's rivers and lakes, leaving millions of people without safe water for days and weeks at a time,' according to Probe International, a Three Gorges Dam watchdog.

Even Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, a geologist, conceded pollution control was lacking at the Three Gorges dam. There is also a new awareness of how a dam in central China I visited, Zipingpu (upriver from the town of Dujiangyan), had caused the May 2008 earthquake that killed more than 80 000 people.

These eco-social antitheses to Kasrils' hydropower thesis have not yet created a new synthesis, but last week he remarked that he'll soon go back to central China for another look at the Three Gorges, given that he's in the process of setting up a China-South Africa Friendship Society. Such a society, we agreed, should seek civil society linkages – after all these are the two leading countries I know of in protests per capita – and avoid some of the sleazier relations that characterize China's interests in Africa.

Conclusion

After a few days of contemplation, I am certain that the way that John le Carré's great novel *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* was described by Time magazine – 'a sad, sympathetic portrait of a man who has lived by lies and subterfuge for so long, he's forgotten how to tell the truth' – is the polar opposite of how to understand Ronnie Kasrils' renewed life on the left. After a chilly period as a genuine revolutionary trying to find a way forward within a blatantly corrupt version of 'post'-colonial neoliberal nationalism, in which his own best instincts were confounded by an adverse power context and bureaucratic distortions, Kasrils should be warmly welcomed for any initiative he pursues, and I look forward to doing so, in coming months and years.

(It might be easier to accuse others around Kasrils of ongoing lies and subterfuge, including his main water policy advisor Muller, a National Planning Commissioner who, dangerously for Gauteng and Mpumalanga residents, appears to be in Mbeki-style denial about the region's Acid Mine Drainage crisis. Another is the man who self-interestedly misinformed Kasrils about Joe Slovo's seven months as housing minister, the World Bank's Billy Cobbett, before Kasrils delivered the Eastern Cape's 2010 Slovo Memorial Lecture through remarkably rose-coloured glasses.)

The method above, in which older contradictions are explored against newer wisdom and recommitments – e.g. on the Secrecy Bill, Zimbabwe, xenophobia – isn't fool-proof, and many further debates remain about areas of nuance regarding the Arms Deal, water pricing, dam-building, wastewater privatisation and the like.

What seems profoundly different, though, is an appreciation by Kasrils that a very wide range of progressive social actors, including once-derided ultra-lefties (like myself), could perhaps be part of that renewed movement leftwards, 'in spirals, not in a straight line' (Lenin). We can only hope that with his exuberance and unfailing energy, Kasrils continues to spiral up and outwards, gathering more former skeptics like myself along for his ride.

But for those others facing situations in which power can be exercised as decisively as did Kasrils, likewise we might wish for further ‘catastrophes’ and ‘breaks in continuity’ – like those ‘eight days in September’ 2008 – to hasten the working of the dialectic. If we’re correct, then further contradictions regarding the fight against class apartheid require exploration, to get us to that ‘universal process of motion, one that follows definite laws.’

Along with Ashwin Desai and Trevor Ngwane, there’s a strong sense I’ve had in recent years that the ‘uneven-and-combined’ character of South Africa and its urban social resistances require much fuller treatment (**Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**). As that too proceeds, I will always think back to the March 2012 conversations with Ronnie Kasrils about his own contradictions, and seek to renew these in some way in search of a better understanding of power: an understanding that he too is grappling with so courageously, given how far he has come in from the cold of Pretoria.

Banking "Technocrats" Undermine Democracy

[More at The Real News](#)

Gerald Epstein interviewed by Paul Jay 27 March 2012

PAUL JAY, SENIOR EDITOR, TRNN: Welcome to The Real News Network. I’m Paul Jay in Washington.

In September 2011, at a time when the sovereign debt raiders, as some people call them, were focusing on Italy as their next target, the European Central Bank sent a letter—supposed to be secret, but it was leaked. And in this letter it gave very direct instructions, you could say, to then prime minister Berlusconi about privatization, lowering pensions, changing hiring and firing, regulations and laws—all things one would think should be the outcome of the political process within Italy. So what is this about banks telling countries how to govern themselves?

Now joining us to talk about this process in Europe, and also how this shows up in the United States, is Gerry Epstein. Gerry is the codirector of the PERI institute in Amherst, Massachusetts, but today he joins us from New York. Thank you for joining us, Gerry.

GERALD EPSTEIN, PERI CODIRECTOR, UMASS AMHERST ECONOMICS PROF.: Thanks for having me, Paul.

JAY: So talk a bit about the significance of what happened last September, the memorandum, and what's happened since in terms of these quote-unquote "technocrats" becoming the leaders in Italy and Greece, and the role of the banks in this process.

EPSTEIN: Yeah. We have this trend now where instead of democratically elected governments controlling these countries, so-called technocrats, the central bankers, are coming in, taking over as the prime ministers of governments in Italy, in Greece. In Italy we have Monti, and in Greece we have Papademos. These are supposed to be neutral arbiters of economic policy, but in fact are mostly doing the bidding of the large banks. And the other European countries, especially Germany, they want austerity.

And what's amazing to me about is they're going way beyond any kind of narrow policies with respect to debt repayment, monetary policy. They're going into the deep core of social and economic policy in many of these countries. And that letter from the central bank, the European Central Bank, that you described went to the highly contested issues that have plagued Italy for many years about labor laws, privatization, and many others.

JAY: Well, let's look at some of the things that they're demanding in this memorandum and more generally, putting pressure on these governments and others. And, of course, the United States, we see very similar things, where state governments have been elected through a supposed democratic process—I suppose people have a lot of questions about just how democratic is, for a lot of reasons, including how much money can get thrown at these elections now—but somewhat similar policies being demanded. So, first of all, there's this issue of privatizations, which seems to be one of the main objectives during this crisis, to get privatizations through. So what does that look like in Europe?

EPSTEIN: Yeah. In Italy, the letter from the European Central Bank to the Berlusconi government said, you have to pursue privatization of public services. And this includes water, privatization of water. And, in fact, just months before, there had been a referendum in Italy about privatization of water, and the voters had rejected it. And now the so-called independent technocratic European Central Bank is coming in and telling them to overthrow what the people have decided and engage in privatization.

Another important goal of these kinds of so-called technocratic policies is

to gut labor protection laws. In Italy there are strong protections for—in terms of hiring and firing. And what they're trying to impose are these so-called labor flexibility, with the idea that this is going to generate more economic growth and more employment. But as David Howell from the New School for Social Research, Dean Baker, and others have shown, labor flexibility does not lead to more employment and more economic growth; it just leads to lower wages and higher profits.

JAY: The other thing that seems to be very much in target or focused on is pensions in all countries, the idea, I guess, of lowering pension age and qualifications. Why is that such a big issue in Europe?

EPSTEIN: Well, it's such a big issue in Europe because that's—for two reasons. One is it's a big liability of the government, and so there is a big—a high degree of budget impact on that. But the second is trying to undermine the power of labor and forcing workers into the hands of the banks. So if you reduce public pensions, not only do you make it so that workers have to take any job they can get to support themselves and work longer, but it also gives more room for private pension plans. And as we know from the debate over privatizing Social Security here in the United States, that's been one of the long-term goals of finance. Indeed, the general push of all of these policies is to gut the welfare state as much as policy and return all of these kinds of protections to profit-making opportunities for banks and other private companies.

JAY: Is part of what's happening here—if you look at sort of the underlying economic forces at play here, I mean, one part of it is—and we've talked about this on The Real News quite a bit—the willingness and desire of various elites and financial elites to take advantage of the crisis to undo social policy, New Deal type things in the U.S., welfare safety net in Europe, and all that, and take advantage of sort of the weaker hand of labor and people during this crisis is one thing. But is there also another part of this, which is there's just so much capital with nowhere to go, that because of this unequal distribution of wealth and income, this massive amount of capital in very few hands, and the real economy not a great place to invest in, so what you need to do is pick apart what's—there is of the public sector as a place for this capital to go to? Is that part of what's going on here?

EPSTEIN: Yeah, I think that's a good—I think that's an important aspect. They're trying to destroy all of the publicly provided markets to find new markets in, particularly, a period of slow growth. And in a particular a period when they're actually pushing austerity, the size of the overall pie isn't going to grow much, so they have to chip away at previously protected parts of it.

Part of what is so evil about this whole approach is the transformation, the distortion of language that is part of it, the use of the term technocrat to hide the fact that Trichet, that Monti, Draghi, all of these people have very, very close ties to the big banks. Most of them worked at one time or another for Goldman Sachs or other big financial firms. We have the same kind of thing, of course, in the United States, where we had Larry Summers, who works for the financial sector and makes millions of dollars doing so, being put forward as a quote-unquote "technocrat". We have the Federal Reserve that has engaged, as you know, in all kinds of backdoor bailouts of the financial sector again seen as sort of a technocratic solution, but we see the revolving door between the Federal Reserve and the private financial sector, using the term fiscal consolidation for gutting public services and generating unemployment. All of this is Orwellian language, which is meant to obscure what is really going on, which is the takeover of democratic control, which, as you said, is already undermined by money, and putting it firmly in the hands of the financial sector.

JAY: Yeah. I love this term, technocrat, because it gives this sense that there's this objective problem with an objective set of policies, and the whole society needs to take its medicine, but politicians are too vulnerable to public opinion, so you need some technocrats that are just going to pragmatically do what needs to be done, as if all of this is above interest and has nothing to do with the financial sector. I mean, you're right. It's pure Orwell.

EPSTEIN: And in The Financial Times, there was an article recently talking about the profile of Papademos, the prime—the technocratic prime minister there, saying that he was heading up a caretaker government, you know, as if the Greek people are a bunch of infants and they have to—we have to wait till they can grow up and exercise their democratic rights.

Part of the frustrating thing is that these kinds of elite pushes to control these democratic systems are possible because the left is so divided in the European countries, and divided here in the United States as well, of course. Part of the left in Italy, for example, didn't protest when this letter came out, because they were so focused on just trying to get rid of Berlusconi, and they've accepted Monti as a prime minister because they were just so happy to get rid of Berlusconi. So I think there's a great need for the left forces in all of our countries to really unite to oppose these kinds of policies. We have to break this whole lock-hold of anti-democratic structures that have been built up by the elites under neoliberal policies over the last 20 years, so that once we have more democratic elections and vision, we actually have the ability to implement them.

JAY: So I guess at the moment the issue is if people want to take this up, they need to hit the streets.

EPSTEIN: Not a bad idea.

JAY: Thanks for joining us, Gerry.

EPSTEIN: Thank you.

JAY: Thank you for joining us on The Real News Network.

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Gerald Epstein is codirector of the Political Economy Research Institute (PERI) and Professor of Economics. He received his Ph.D. in economics from Princeton University. He has published widely on a variety of progressive economic policy issues, especially in the areas of central banking and international finance, and is the editor or co-editor of six volumes.

How Protest is Being Outlawed

Laurie Penny 26 March 2012

Alfie Meadows still hasn't grown his hair back. When they rushed him into theatre for emergency brain surgery after his injury in a demonstration against the tripling of university fees, doctors shaved the 20-year-old's shoulder-length locks, the style that announces to the world "I am a philosophy student". Now the thatch is gone, exposing a hand-length scar across his skull, he looks much younger. Thin and shy with eyes that dart downwards, Meadows speaks rarely, and never about his legal case against the Metropolitan police officers who his lawyers claim nearly killed him. This week he goes on trial for violent disorder for his actions that day, a charge that could land him in jail.

The message being sent may as well have been printed on official police stationary and distributed outside the court: in protest situations, police are never in the wrong. Meadows is among the most high profile of dozens of protesters who have been tried for serious public order offences over the past eighteen months. As emergency measures against public assembly and popular protest are passed in time for the Olympics, any political direct action more energetic than standing silently with a few signs in

designated areas is becoming functionally illegal in Britain.

The narrative of public dissent is being rewritten with astonishing speed. As police continue to crack heads with impunity, peaceful protesters are handed down harsh deterrent charges. Ten defendants in the Fortnum and Mason trial were recently given six-month suspended sentences for aggravated trespass, essentially for standing around in a grocery shop with some leaflets. I was there at the time, and the worst I saw was some slogans against corporate tax avoidance being carefully wrapped on printed ticker-tape around large stacks of Earl Grey tea. For those swept up in last year's riots, meanwhile, there hasn't been a crumb of mercy. As I write, teenagers are still in prison for creating Facebook events.

Whatever we think about how these young people behaved, we should have the decency to call them what they are: political prisoners. That this government has run out of ideas for enforcing austerity beyond frightening people into compliance may be of little comfort to those whose young lives and job prospects will be blighted by deterrent jail sentences.

As with music and angular haircuts, so with public order policing -- the Americans are at least a year behind us in keeping up with the latest trends. This week, during another brutal crackdown on Occupy Wall Street, skulls were stomped on, heads were cracked into windows and journalists were dragged or shoved away from the scene as anti-capitalist protesters attempted to peacefully reoccupy Zucotti Park, site of the original encampment that drew international attention last September.

From behind hastily-erected police barricades, I watched as a curly-haired girl in green appeared to begin having a seizure during her arrest, flopping about on the pavement with her hands cuffed and passing out more than once before police eventually allowed an ambulance behind the lines. As she was stretchered away, protesters standing near me speculated that the NYPD would have to put the girl -- later identified as 23-year-old Cecily McMillan -- on a felony charge to "get out of this one".

Sure enough, McMillan was released into custody the next day and charged with assaulting a police officer, a crime that could see her serving over a year in prison. I thought of Alfie Meadows, whose trial in London will send the same message to anyone thinking of joining the cultural backlash against austerity and kamikaze capitalism. If you protest, the police can do what they like to you. Any sort of public dissent can and will be met with force. You chose to protest, so you asked for it. Next time, make it easy on yourself -- sit down, shut up and stay at home.
www.zcommunications.org

Volcano of class struggle ready to erupt

Leila Messaoudi, Gauche Révolutionnaire (CWI in France) 23 March 2012

As we post this article on France, the recent brutal shootings in Toulouse have left the country in a state of shock. The CWI unambiguously condemns those terrible actions. These events could potentially affect the development of the presidential election campaign in the next days and weeks. The article below, which addresses and explains the main features of the elections, has been written before these dramatic killings.

On Sunday 18 March, the anniversary of the Paris Commune, around 100,000 people (according to most media reports), chanting the Internationale, marched through the streets of Paris in response to the call of the candidate of the Front de gauche (Left Front), Jean-Luc Mélenchon, to “re-take the Bastille” and start a “civic insurrection”. His speech to the demonstration was full of references to France’s revolutionary past. Mélenchon stated that his electoral campaign desires to “open the breach towards the French volcano that all Europe is waiting for”.

If, on the surface, France appears relatively calm in comparison with the storm of mass protests and general strikes that have unfolded in Southern Europe, the lava of the French ‘volcano’ is indeed boiling. This year’s presidential elections are taking place against the background of looming and widespread social anger. At the moment, this finds its expression in a sharply polarised electoral landscape, of which Sunday’s Left Front gathering in the capital is only the latest, and probably clearest, manifestation.

Significantly, all the candidates in the presidential election campaign have been seen on TV standing in front of, or inside, the big industrial workplaces that are in danger of closure, surrounded by the media. Never before have presidential candidates been so keen to visit factories all over the country, in the attempt to present themselves as ‘working-class friendly’ politicians.

Polarisation

People who want to vote do not necessarily expect big changes from the polls, but many are willing to use these elections to get rid of the hated Sarkozy and give him a strong slap in the face. Hence, Sarkozy’s camp is

desperately trying everything to recover from his low poll ratings, including trying to play “the people” against “the elite” – as if Sarkozy was not an integral part of the latter – by multiplying blunt racist provocations to win back voters from the Front National (FN), or engaging in a populist ‘anti-Europe’ and protectionist turn, after having profiled the President as the saviour of the continent and of the common currency.

For two years, Sarkozy has lost more and more support in the population. Since his election in 2007, his electoral base has been severely restricted. The successful pulling of a whole section of the working class electorate towards his campaign, as he managed to do five years ago, seems now out of reach. In a poll at the beginning of February, only 12% of manual workers and 17% of white-collar workers declared they would vote for Sarkozy in the first round.

The supposed “President of Purchasing Power” is now largely identified as “the ‘bling-bling’ President”, only friendly with the super-rich. The declarations of his multi-millionaire wife Carla Bruni stating that the presidential couple “live very modestly”, or of his Interior Minister, Claude Guéant, pretending that Sarkozy lives a life of “extreme austerity” have only added to the insult that Sarkozy’s lifestyle represents in the eyes of the millions of people who have suffered under his rule from an endless series of attacks on their living standards.

Eight million people in France are now officially poor. Since Sarkozy came to power, unemployment has gone up by 20%, but three million unemployed people have disappeared from the official state figures, written off the lists and left without any financial resources. A large part of the population is worrying about social issues. A survey published on 23 February by ‘La Croix’, a Christian newspaper, announced that 79% of the people interviewed felt their country was in a “full crisis” with 66% declaring they will have to cut back expenditure on essentials in 2012.

Francois Hollande’s campaign

Within this context, the Socialist Party (PS) candidate François Hollande has understood that something had to be done to catch up with the large discontent which exists in society. Hence a bit more of a left tone can sometimes be heard in his campaign.

Hollande paints himself as the candidate of “change” and “unity”, and tries to put more emphasis on growth than on austerity in his rhetoric. He argues for the creation of 60,000 teaching jobs if he is elected, and stands in favour of cancelling €29 billion worth of tax breaks introduced by Sarkozy. He has also surprised a lot of people – including in his own team of advisers – by suddenly arguing for a 75% tax on people who earn over

€1 million a year. He promises to separate retail banking activities from investment banks, denounces bankers' pay as 'indecent' and targets the world of finance as his "main enemy".

However, this is only one side of the coin. When he visited London at the beginning of March, the PS candidate, in a press interview, stressed the fact that "The left has been in government for 15 years during which we have liberalized the economy, opened the markets to finance and privatisations. There is nothing to worry about." Hollande clearly defends the European Union project and the need to reduce budget deficits. He wants to make clear he is a quiet and responsible administrator, seriously committed to balancing the country's books. For instance, his extra 60,000 teachers pledge is not based on rising public spending, but just on limiting hiring in other, already understaffed, sectors.

Hollande tries, on the one hand, to be seen as more left and more popular but, on the other hand, not losing credibility before the markets which he does not want to alienate for that matter. Hence the more 'leftish' proposals of his electoral programme are regularly 'corrected', sometimes completely contradicted, by more right-wing moves, aimed at reassuring the capitalist class – as well as the right-wing in his own party – about his intentions.

Hollande's proposals to raise taxes on millionaires can gather a certain support, seeing the enormous class anger which exists amongst French voters against the ultra-rich elite. The obscene profits of the 40 biggest French companies quoted on the stock exchange (which reached €73.5 billion in 2011), or the 24% rise, last year, of executive bosses' pay (already the best in Europe) can only provide arguments for proposals such as these.

As socialists, we are obviously in favour of every measure which goes in the direction of a fairer redistribution of wealth. But it is important to understand that even if those taxes are implemented (which is far from certain), as long as the ownership of the main levers of economic activity remain in private hands, the owners of capital will not hesitate to use their economic power to undermine measures like this, notably through threatening the flight of capital. That is why Hollande's proposals to 'tax the rich' could be short-lived or might not even see daylight at all. The humiliating U-turn towards austerity engaged by the PS-PCF government of François Mitterrand in 1983, two years after having taking office, is a graphic example showing that a policy of social reforms, while leaving capitalist rule over the economy unchallenged, is absolutely unsustainable. Though 58% of the French population considers that Francois Hollande 'represents change', it is easier for him to capitalise on a hated president than to deliver once in power, especially in the context of an economic

crisis in which the ruling classes everywhere are engaged in a bitter class war against the workers and the poor. Not less significant, according to a poll, 61% of the people who will vote for Hollande explain their votes with the idea of beating Sarkozy, and only 39% supporting Hollande's project !

The neo-liberal record of the PS in government during the 'plural left' years of 1997-2002 was one of privatisation going even further than what the right-wing had achieved when it was in power before. Similarly, the legacy of his party in regional administrations is a warning that the pendulum of the PS could swing back to the right very quickly.

Nevertheless, under working class pressure and some expectations that Hollande would deliver 'something different', he might try to win some time by delivering a few concessions and limited social measures in the early stages of his presidency. His declared aim to re-negotiate the European fiscal treaty has raised worries among the European establishment about possible moves in this direction, which could bring him into some conflict with the 'orthodox' austerity advocated especially by the German ruling class.

When it comes to the workers and the youth, some sections will vote for Hollande just to strike a blow at Sarkozy, whatever they think of Hollande himself. For the moment, these layers are mainly trying to limit the consequences of the crisis for themselves and their families, and their main concern is who is the best candidate to win against Sarkozy? In most opinion polls, Hollande used to lead in both the first and the second rounds until recently. However, the polls of the main survey organisations suggest that the gap between him and Sarkozy is now lessening, some even putting Sarkozy ahead of the PS candidate in the first round. One recent poll put Sarkozy at 30% and Hollande at 28%.

If there is a remobilisation around Sarkozy, it is much more from the apparatus of his own party – the UMP - than a real wave of enthusiasm in society. In practice, he has won few new voters since the official announcement of his candidature. Still, these developments, combined with the scepticism among some layers because of the legacy of past PS policies and what are quite broadly seen as Hollande's 'vague promises', have increased the questioning of some about the PS challenger being sufficiently strong to even win against Sarkozy. Though not the most likely prospect, a Sarkozy victory cannot be ruled out. Such a scenario would undoubtedly open a huge crisis in the ranks of the PS, as well as a new phase of explosive class confrontation in the country.

Mélenchon and the Left Front

Also, new upsets have risen in Hollande's camp, as another candidate is

increasingly creating a ‘splash’ in the presidential campaign and complicating an easy PS victory in the first round; namely Mélenchon.

For most radicalised working class layers who have been trying to fight back for five years against Sarkozy’s policies, the question around the elections is a double one. It is not only about how to sack Sarkozy but also how to put forward at the same time a real alternative to the capitalists’ policies represented more or less by the main establishment candidates.

Within this context, Mélenchon, the candidate of the Left Front, is seen by a lot of workers as the only left candidate. About 300,000 copies of the Left Front’s programme (“The Human First!”) have been sold within a few months.

The Left Front was formed by an alliance of the Communist Party (PCF) and Mélenchon’s smaller party, the Left party. Modelling himself upon ‘Die Linke’ in Germany, Mélenchon’s career has important similarities to that of Oskar Lafontaine, a leading figure in that organisation. Mélenchon is a former member of the PS and was former prime minister Lionel Jospin’s national education minister for professional education between 2000 and 2002.

A lot of workers – especially those coming from traditional working class areas and from a PCF background – as well as a noticeable layer of youth, are attending his huge rallies. Noticeably, in his rally on Sunday, a number of delegations of workers coming from workplaces currently engaged in industrial battles were present.

The dynamism and attraction of his campaign is reflected by the fact that, while for the first time since 1974 the PCF doesn’t have a candidate of its own, the candidate this party supports is getting an echo much beyond the PCF’s traditional electorate. While Mélenchon was still at 5-6% last September, and 3.5% one year ago, he received 11% support in the last opinion poll [A new one, published on March 22 by the newspaper ‘Les Echos’, put him at 13%, just half a percent behind the National Front (FN) far-right candidate Marine Le Pen – Socialistworld.net]. In comparison, in the last presidential election five years ago, the PCF candidate Marie-Georges Buffet only received 1.93%.

Mélenchon combines republican rhetoric influenced by the French revolution with a mixture of working-class aims. He calls on the people to “take power”, arguing for a “civic insurrection”, a “citizen’s revolution” and other similar radical-sounding slogans which, though being vague, are getting a positive echo among those layers of workers, activists and young people who are looking for something left, more radical and different from the ‘glossy’ and demagogical character of Hollande’s campaign.

Challenging the idea that the working class has to pay for the crisis of the system and to accept austerity policies, attacking the financial markets and the mass media, talking about 'ecological planning', women's and abortion rights, Mélenchon opens a number of doors for a debate that the ruling class is not necessarily keen or enthusiastic to bring into the spotlight. He argues for a rise in the minimum wage to €1,700 and retirement at 60 years old, for the nationalisation of the profitable oil company Total and other energy suppliers. The class character of the arguments used by Mélenchon to attack the FN, unmasking this party's pro-business policies, also contrasts with what has been heard generally in the last decades from the main French politicians.

In the present crisis of political representation for the working class, reinforced by the failure of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) to offer a response to this problem, genuine socialists cannot ignore these developments but should, on the contrary, engage in comradely dialogue with those layers of workers and young people who look sympathetically towards Mélenchon's campaign.

At the same time, it is also necessary to point to the political weaknesses and limitations of his programme. Although Mélenchon mentions capitalism, and calls for "an end to the privileges of capital", his proposals fall short of providing a real way of finishing with this system, and do not draw a comprehensive picture of what the alternative to the system should be. In reality, his programme reflects a certain attempt to target mainly speculative, financial capital, rather than challenge the capitalist functioning of the economy as such. Reclaiming France's revolutionary heritage, Mélenchon tempers his reference to the red flag, the Internationale and the Paris Commune with the tricolour flag of the bourgeois revolution, the French Republic and the Marseillaise. On the one hand, Mélenchon refers to the solidarity with the struggles of the Greek people and others, raising some elements of the necessary internationalist outlook; on the other hand, the 'French republican' side of his rhetoric, particularly emphasised during his speech in Paris last Sunday, could be an obstacle to address especially layers of the immigrant population. Many people present at the demo on Sunday didn't miss to notice the weak and abstract content of the speech Mélenchon delivered.

Rather than arguing for the taking over by the working class of the banks and big companies, Mélenchon's project argues in effect for a mixed economy, through limited nationalisation and a stronger public sector. Also, if we fundamentally agree with the general idea that working people should "take power" and if we are in favour of a common struggle, addressing the broader working class, to campaign towards this aim, unfortunately we believe that such a slogan from Mélenchon is simply to

gather support for himself in the elections rather than a commitment to build a serious fight by the majority to challenge capitalism and build a socialist society.

This being said, we still believe that a big vote for Mélenchon will be an unmistakably positive sign for the working class and would move ahead the debate on how to build the fightback and which policies are needed against capitalist attacks. If, at the moment, the core of activists keeping Mélenchon's campaign on its feet are essentially PCF members, the other component of the Left Front, the Left Party, remaining mainly an electoral label, that does not mean that it will necessarily remain the case. We have to follow carefully what will become of this support in the coming period. A broad public appeal by Mélenchon, following a large vote, to join actively the fightback and to transform the electoral success of the Left Front into a new mass working-class party, would probably resonate in the minds of many workers, young people, unemployed and pensioners, and would encourage the continuation of what remains a urgent debate in the present situation (a debate which had somehow been temporarily 'muted' because of the disastrous course followed by the NPA): how to build a mass political organisation that can stand for the millions and not for the millionaires.

However, any new initiative in this direction will have to draw the lessons of the experience of the NPA. What the working class needs is not an electoral machine, but a democratic and fighting instrument to help build its own struggles. An instrument which stands uncompromisingly on the side of the workers and the oppressed, challenges the inertia of the trade union bureaucracy, and develops a programme which links the struggles of the working class with a real political strategy to end the dictatorship of the 1%.

The NPA and Poutou's campaign

Today there is no substantial support for left organisations like Lutte Ouvrière or the NPA, previously the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR). They poll around 1% combined, instead of nearly 10% in 2002 and over 5% in 2007. This reflects the inability of these parties to build on their past electoral successes or to address new layers of workers and young people. The NPA has had no noticeable profile during the last period, and refuses to propose a real anti-capitalist strategy, based on the struggle against sackings, calling for nationalisation under workers' control of the key sectors of the economy, and arguing for a socialist society. The withdrawal of Olivier Besancenot as the NPA presidential candidate was an indication of the NPA leadership's refusal to take advantage of the very favourable political situation.

The candidate of the NPA, Philippe Poutou, has a good profile as a

representative of working-class struggles and aspirations. He is an industrial worker, a trade unionist in the Ford car factory in Bordeaux where they have succeeded in defeating a redundancy plan. His candidature could have been an expression of workers' aspirations to finish with this system, although not sufficiently offensive against capitalism. However, the lack of a real party behind him, the fact that his candidature is not known on a mass-scale and the absence of any serious perspective for developing the NPA as an independent political instrument for the working class and the youth will necessarily limit Poutou's appeal. (For a more in-depth analysis of the NPA, see our previous article [here](#)).

Danger of the FN

Disgusted at the disastrous results of the pro-capitalist policies of the establishment parties, another section of the working and middle classes will vote for the far-right candidate Marine Le Pen of the FN, who has attempted to play down the neo-fascist links of her father, expelling some neo-fascist elements from the party. Marine Le Pen has had some electoral success, especially in the de-industrialised North, by presenting herself as the 'candidate of the workers', denouncing the political elite (the 'UMPS' as she calls it) and the rotten 'mafia-style system', and, above all, blaming immigrants for the crisis through an enormous racist campaign, targeting Muslims in particular.

Some sections of workers, young people and the poor, especially those who do not feel they are represented (people from the poor areas of the cities, second and third generation migrant families, etc.) will not go to the polls at all. The level of abstentions, which grows at each election, will probably be high in the first round, though the volatile situation and mood which exists, as well as a certain pressure to go for a 'useful vote' to kick Sarkozy or Le Pen out of the second round, can temper this among some layers (notably among those still influenced by the spectre of what happened in 2002, when Jean-Marie Le Pen eliminated Jospin, the PS candidate, and entered the second round). However, at this stage, the FN is not seen as strongly as in 2002 as a way of rejecting government policy and is unlikely to repeat that outcome.

Important but isolated struggles

Although the electoral campaign is now making the headlines and dominates the political situation, workers' struggles have not stopped. Indeed, another face of the crisis is the struggles which are taking place inside the industrial workplaces against closures and sackings and in the public services against cuts. Battles in a lot of companies (like Peugeot and Lejaby) have been in the media headlines for two months and local struggles are developing. The non-replacement of one out of every two civil servants who leaves their job is having a huge effect on public services, especially in the healthcare sector and in education. Since the

announcement in February of the next primary education budgets, parents and teachers have been struggling against cuts in the nursery and primary schools. In some cities, organised action is continuing to save classes and decent public education for children. Sometimes, a whole village or city is involved. It is the same with some hospital cuts or closures of clinics. Strike actions, including one-hour strikes, have been developing in Renault Cleon for two weeks and in other industrial workplaces such as at the LME steel plant near Valenciennes, in Northern France. Postal workers are also engaged in several places in a real wave of struggles, some very long, of more than 50 days, in the Paris region.

Despite all this, there is a crucial lack of any linking of the struggles for a serious fightback on a national scale. In the emblematic Petroplus refinery in Petit Couronne (near Rouen), workers have organised their own struggle since the end of December 2011 with the involvement of the CGT union's group of the local département and important support from the local population. All the main presidential candidates have visited the workers. But the main leader of the CGT, Bernard Thibault, came only on 10 February – near the end of the battle – to argue basically to “put pressure on the politicians”. While the situation of Petroplus workers is very similar to many across the country, the CGT leadership has never called for a real day of national strikes against sackings, cuts and the austerity agenda.

More generally, there has been no call from the union leaders to struggle together, nor a call for a day of national demonstrations. Nevertheless, huge potential exists. On 29 February, the ‘European Day against austerity plans’, there were tens of thousands on the streets despite no call to strike. There is real potential for a mass response from the French working class and youth. But for the moment, it cannot find a collective expression.

We do not know what the election results will be, but what we know for certain is that the working class and youth in France have not lowered their heads. Struggles are continuing and at this stage, the crisis is an accelerator for the class struggle and for political radicalisation. The elections will be used by layers of the working class as an opportunity to reduce attacks on their lives and living standards. But for substantial change and to stop the attacks on living standards, jobs and public services, a real struggle in the streets and workplaces will have to be conducted. As more and more will draw this conclusion in the coming period, the audience to hear our socialist programme will grow, along with the chance to test it in the concrete development of the struggles which are coming.

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Latin America: Facing the World Water Forum, We Look Forward and Maintain Hope

Marcela Olivera 20 March 2012

The media tells us that 8 million people die every year from illnesses related to water; that more than a billion people lack access to potable water; and that more than 2.4 billion do not have access to sanitation.

These grave numbers, revised upward every three years, are cited by the World Water Council as the reason for convening their tri-annual World Water Forum. While the Water Forum, billed with a strong corporate flavor as an “international multi-stakeholder platform,” has a different character than the annual Conferences of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the results are largely the same: a lot of talking, perhaps even a lot of good intentions, but little action, and universal frustration.

So it is that the Sixth World Water Forum opens today (March 12-17) in Marseille, France. At \$1000 for participants from wealthy nations, and about \$450 for participants from the ‘under-developed countries,’ the cost of attending makes the forum inaccessible to those who come from the countries of the Global South.

And so it is that every three years those of us who believe this Forum to be illegitimate gather together to denounce it. And every three years, over the course of many months, organizations and movements from around the World come together to hold the Alternative World Water Forum. We have done so previously, in Kyoto in 2003, in Mexico City in 2006, and in Istanbul in 2009. Now, in 2012, in Marseilles, the last details for this year’s convening are being worked out.

The challenges facing our social movements are enormous. The greatest of these challenges is the construction of viable alternatives to the dominant economy and to the regime of natural resource management that is based on extraction, exploitation, and extreme energy.

The questions are clear, the answers diverse and complex. For example, who should convene these fora? If the World Water Council has no legitimate right to push decisions regarding global water issues, does the United Nations? We are struggling to put water in public hands – but is it truly public when the State controls it? Or when it is in the hands of us, the people? How can we create conditions where State-managed water systems coexist with systems developed and managed by the community?

How can we get beyond the demagoguery that dominates the discourse of human rights and the Human Right to Water? In the cases of Bolivia and Ecuador, how can we advance the defense of Mother Earth and her natural Rights when the practical demands of running a country within a global economy are in direct contradiction to ecological concerns?

Wherever we are headed, the world continues turning, and it will not stop in Marseille. Throughout the Americas, discontent is on the rise in the face of governments left, right and center, red, green and pink. We are witnesses, not to a series of isolated uprisings, but to a global movement against the unwarranted ambition of the corporate agenda, and in defense of the Commons.

In Chile, the population of Aysén has risen up and put state authorities in checkmate, because the government of Sebastian Piñera remembers them only when it comes time to launch a hydroelectric project.

In Ecuador, March 8, International Women's Day, marked the launch of the National March for Life and the Dignity of the People. The march, convened by the National Confederation of Indigenous Nations of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONAIE) and other sectors, seeks to unmask the neoliberal policies of the Correa administration and the ongoing criminalization of the indigenous peoples' movement. The march, which began in the province of Zamora and will end in Quito on World Water Day, March 22, is also in defense of the Constitution of Montecristi and the approval of the revolutionary agrarian law and the popular water law.

Not long ago in Peru, a similar March for Water ended with the alignment of new social sectors following the approval by the government of Ollanta Humala of mining projects in Cajamarca, in the face of widespread resistance and discontent.

In Bolivia, the peoples of the Indigenous Territory and National Park Isiboro Secure (TIPNIS) are preparing their ninth march against the Villa Tunari-San Ignacio de Moxos highway that the Morales government continues to promote as part of the interoceanic corridor to unite Brazil to Chile.

In the United States, the Occupy movement has been evicted from the plazas, but has expanded to the neighborhoods and other public spaces in the form of workshops, gatherings, and assemblies that may easily come to be more of a threat to the authorities, and the authoritarians, than the simple occupation of public spaces.

Hours before the beginning of the World Water Forum in Marseille, reflecting on what is happening in our countries, I feel a kind of anger that it is an affair like this – a gathering of corporate elites – that brings us

together, again. Every three years we unite to delegitimize and denounce this profit-oriented trade fair that is built on our backs by the corporations that make up the World Water Forum. It shouldn't be this way.

But, I maintain hope: the day will come when we will gather together not to respond to the destructive agenda of the corporate elites, but because we see the way forward, because we have a clear, common agenda; because we are called by solidarity to do so. We will gather together because we will have learned not only from our defeats, but from our victories.

At the end of the day, we will join together because we desire to do so, as brothers and sisters on this planet we call Earth, and because it is our legitimate right.

www.zcommunications.org

Marcela Olivera is a Bolivian water rights activist, based in Cochabamba, Bolivia. Currently she is a Visiting Global Associate of the Center for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University.

Help that hurts

An interview with Tim Schwartz about Haiti

Justin Podur and Tim Schwartz 19 March 2012

Tim Schwartz is an anthropologist with extensive experience in the foreign aid sector in Haiti. He is the author of the book, *Travesty in Haiti*, and of an upcoming book studying the nature and problems of the ways nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate in Haiti. He answered my questions over email in February and March 2012.

Justin Podur (JP): One of the themes of *Travesty in Haiti* is that the international 'help' that is going to Haiti isn't really helping. The starkest example for me was the food program, in which food was delivered only when it wasn't needed. Can you explain that a little bit, how you came to find out about it, and what happened when you tried to tell people about it? And is it still the case today?

Timothy Schwartz (TS): Back in the mid 90s I was doing my Master's and then PhD research in the heart of CARE's rural activity zone. CARE was USAID's biggest food distributor in Haiti. I wasn't really studying food aid, but I couldn't help but notice it. It was huge. And it was being distributed wantonly. Not just by the US. The Germans, the French, the Northern Europeans, they were all there. For me, living with peasants and fishfolk at the time, it was not at all clear that they even needed food aid. When it did come in, it was often a bizarre and poorly targeted endeavor

that arguably did more to crash prices than feed those who were really hungry.

For example in 1991 and 1992 the area was suffering a severe drought. One and a half years after the drought started CARE decided that the region was on the brink of a massive famine. So they got the attention of USAID and they began bringing in the food. They brought in a lot of it. For the first four months or so they were feeding some 200,000 people. Then they decided that wasn't enough and they upped the figure to some 800,000 recipients, and not just in the drought area. They were feeding people all the way to Gonaives, an entirely different climatic zone but in CARE's activity area. To make sure the people were really getting fed they actually cooked the food. They set up kitchens and fed people on the spot, or at least they thought they were feeding all those people on the spot. There so a lot of corruption. But no matter what, CARE and USAID did were doing a great thing. I don't think anyone would argue that. There was a famine looming and this was also during the international economic embargo against the military junta.

Now here's the punchline: The drought ended six months after the feeding started. But that didn't stop CARE and USAID from continuing the program for 2 years. And if you don't believe that is hard on the economy note that CARE evaluated the nutritional status of children in the region when they started the program. They wanted to be able to demonstrate that when the feeding effort was over they had improved the nutritional status of children in the region. But when they checked two years later they found that 20% more children were malnourished than when they started. That's a statistic they didn't send out in their reports to donors.

In 1997, they were doing it all over again. I was doing a survey for the Germans and French. A team of US congressmen flew into the Village where I was. To see for themselves they came in a helicopter -- literally blowing the roofs off of three houses. Was the Northwest was in the throes of a severe drought? They decided that yes, it was dry up there and people needed help to avert a famine. And so they authorized the World Food Program to send in emergency food.

And so they did. Twelve months later, after the drought was over and in the middle of the a bumper crop.

A couple of years later, in 1999, they did the exact same thing.

And that's just three of many examples. When I actually sat down and charted food aid arrivals and crisis and drought I got a better fit going in the opposite direction. Instead of finding more drought, more aid, I got more rain, more aid.

So anyway, I started collecting data and everyone was very good about allowing me access to food distribution data for my dissertation. I got data from CARE, from German and French food distribution organizations and Haitian peasants, from NGO reports. I also interviewed or discussed food relief with literally every aid worker out there. No one I talked to could sustain an argument that food aid was not disrupting the market and hurting domestic production. The only people who defended it were people in positions to make money on it. Like the drug dealer who tells you how cocaine is simply a free market phenomenon: they might be right but it's no secret why they feel so strongly about it.

In any case, that's what got me so wound up about aid. How could we be doing something so obviously destructive, so clearly working against what we were hoping to accomplish, everyone saw it, and yet we went right on doing it.

Let me correct that, we go right on doing it, because it is far worse now than it was back then. And it's worse despite a huge chorus of loud voices condemning it, including Oxfam, Clinton, the Haitian Government. No one seems capable of stopping it and replacing it with a system of purchasing food from locals.

And just for the record, it's by no means me who saw this first. Development workers and educated Haitian nationals have long known that food aid can lower prices for local farm produce, bring production down, and introduce different food preferences. Many of these points were made in an excellent book by De Wind and Kinley (1988) called *Aiding Migration: The Impact of Development Assistance*. In 1997, Laura Richardson of Grassroots International circulated a petition making many of these points. She was invited to host a meeting with donors and big NGOs involved in food distribution. They concluded, even though everyone knew what she was saying was true, that there was no substance to her complaints - because she didn't have any hard data. And here's something that might shock you. Former director of USAID in Haiti. a guy named Harlan Hobgood. He was USAID Haiti director in 1980- 83, something like that. He recently wrote a review of my book. He says that he was telling the State Department and Congress back then that what they were doing with food was wrong, that it was not helping Haiti. And by the way, it is currently happening on a scale far greater than ever before. And there appears to be no slowing it down. I was hired last year by Fintrac, and organization that works in food aid and that had contracts with USAID to promote production in Haiti. I've written several USAID funded reports in recent years where I got an opportunity to highlight the contradictions in food aid in Haiti and the foregone opportunities to focus on production. For example, in Africa, in countries where the US does not

have preferential access to the markets, it is heavily funding the production of cassava flour and cassava products. This could be done in Haiti but it isn't. Anyway, the same USAID "Food for Peace" officer who was in when I did research in the late 1990s came back after the earthquake and one thing she did very early on is forbid people from hiring me. When the people trying to hire me asked why, she said that I had written "scathing critiques of food aid"--which is, by the way, why they hired me. When I asked other people I know inside USAID why, one of them said "three words: Build Food Empire."

JP: You went to Haiti after the earthquake, and came up with an idea to use local taxis for transport, which you wrote about somewhat self-deprecatingly in your chapter in Paul Farmer's *Haiti After the Earthquake*. But a structural problem made it impossible for your idea to be used, a structural problem that is illustrative. Can you talk a bit about that problem?

TS: The structural problem you're referring to is how the rescue workers, NGOs and USAID, CIDA and all the militaries that had come to help are not adaptive on the ground. They follow procedures, so money has to be channeled in certain ways. They could not include local Haitians, or were at least restricted in how they went about it.

Interestingly in that respect, one thing that I didn't mention in that article is that there is/was this system for doing that. They have to go through a hiring process. In the midst of the taxi debacle, I kept running into these Haitian translators in the process of being hired. Different NGOs were hiring dozens of them. Most were these high school and college aged young males who had taken an English course or two.

Not to stray too far from the subject, but that's another structural problem. Haitians have this rigid division of labor such that someone with a little education tends not to be flexible. What I mean is that your typical college person doesn't know how to drive a motorcycle, won't lift anything because they are above that. They also won't wash the dishes or sweep the house. These are all culturally specific things, logical in the context of Haiti but alien to most people from developed countries. So in an emergency situation like the post earthquake, for every translator you would then need a motorcycle taxi and then to lift people you might need to hire yet another guy. All that can be overcome, but the NGO worker who needs the translator isn't going to know or figure that one out in the middle of a disaster when they've just arrived in Haiti for the first time. And again, in the case of the taxis doesn't matter because they were not even equipped or disposed to hire them.

So all of this points to what I was really after in that article and that's the

problem of the NGOs not working with locals. Call it “structural” if you want to. Not a bad term for it. The NGOs, rescue workers, military, are not ‘structured’ to work with the local population. They’re outsiders. The locals know what and where the problems are, who’s suffering, and how to best deal with it. They also know their way around. The incredibly absurd thing about the taxi experience and my involvement is that it began because people kept asking me to find things for them or lead them somewhere. I’m a foreigner too. I hardly knew Leogane. I had to ask the taxi drivers. This problem I’m describing permeated every aspect of the rescue phase and really permeates every aspect of aid in Haiti, past and present. That’s what kinda makes the story about the Taxis useful. It’s a very neat example of how and why aid fails, or at best is absurdly wasteful and inefficient.

JP: You have been involved with Haiti for a long time, through different administrations, coups, and now with MINUSTAH. The issues of international aid, charities, orphanages, and missions persist regardless of the political changes - but maybe there have been some differences? How would you characterize things in the 1990s compared to today? Would you say there were different phases? Have there been any changes, for good or ill, to the situations you described in *Travesty*?

TS: Really, I haven’t been as deeply involved in aid as some think. There are tens of thousands of people much more deeply involved than me, people with long and impressive cvs. I know people who do more consultancies in a year than I do in five years. They make big bucks. Some of them are damn good at what they do. But what happens to most is that they get so involved in aid that they can no longer see the system. They complain about the failures and shortcomings but they’ve become absorbed by it, despite their critique they begin to believe in it.

I’m not knocking those people and I’m not saying the system is evil. Those are other issues. What I mean is this: Whenever I have a job with an NGO, I usually wind up spending a lot time with staff, with directors, agronomists, social workers. And when you are talking to those people all the time, they complain and they tell you all about all the different failures, but they almost always are telling you how they are part of fixing it, how everything is changing now, it’s all going to be alright. I think one of the qualities that NGOs wind up selecting for is people who are optimistic and can put a positive spin on miserable failure. After all, that’s the people who the administrators and donors back in the States or Germany or wherever are going to be encouraged by. Everyone in the NGO chain is getting paid to take bad news and somehow make it good. If you’re not doing that, well then I think it’s just the nature of the system/beast that you’re not going to be around long.

Where I have an advantage is that I'm not really an aid worker. I'm an academic who works in the field of aid. I'm not a paid academic, but that's what I care about, research and writing. And because of tendency to look for untruths and contradictions and to include them in my work and share them, that's what makes me different. I'm still fresh and I haven't gone away. The other side is that this pattern means that I don't work much. I keep getting seen as a threat and even blacklisted. Most recently by USAID staff. Even though organizations have tried to hire me in the past year USAID, and even though I have never been accused of doing anything out of line and by all accounts USAID staff respects my work, they keep refusing to approve my employment (they fund much of the consultant work and hence have to approve of consultants). Which is tough, by the way, because I do basically live in the field. I don't have a University position or a job in Washington think tank. When I go home it's often to a household of people who qualify as aid recipients. When one of my kids I support gets sick their mother goes to the public hospital or the local NGO clinic. I have very close relationships with people who I might run into waiting in any given World Food Program line or who have their child in a mission school. I can't explain to you exactly why I live like this, why I don't just try and get a steady job. Whatever the reason, it can be tough.

But getting back to the main point, the hidden advantage for the academic part of me is that I have not gotten sucked into the vortex, so to speak. I'm still more outside the aid system than inside and so see aid more from the perspective of beneficiaries than the people delivering it, the ones who have to make it sound as successful as possible so that they can keep their jobs, so that they can keep the machine running, keep those cogs turning.

As for the changes in aid since I did my research in the 1990s and early 2000s: It's the same problems, same processes, same projects, same good parts, same problems, same massive failures, and it's all a lot bigger. It was already swelling before Gudu-Gudu (what Haitians call the earthquake), but since then it's turned it into something mammoth. The NGOs quite literally took Haiti over for a while and arguably they're running the country now. I'm not saying that's necessarily a bad thing. Not saying it's good either. But it's easy to make the case. The most illustrative point is the role of Bill Clinton; he was already was the de facto leader of the US NGO world by virtue of the Clinton Foundation. With regard to Haiti, even before gudu-gudu the UN had made him Special Envoy to Haiti, essentially giving the country to him as a type of project. And since the earthquake, he has played that role to such a degree that he co-chaired the IHRC (Interim Haitian Reconstruction Committee) with the Haitian prime minister under Preval; then when formation of the Martelly administration began wavering he stepped in with a member of his own staff as PM candidate. No one could say no. If parliament had

tried to reject Clinton's candidate they would have been putting the entire 10 billion aid package at stake.

Haiti is a ward of the international community in almost every respect: from UN stabilization forces, to the school lunches to the government budget. And NGOs are sitting at every decision making table. US food aid is feeding, or supposed or be feeding, more than half of all Haitian children. There is a lot of hype to the contrary, that we are going to change the American Plan, that we are going to promote peasant production, that Haiti has a strong new government. It's all very hard to believe. The New American Plan reads just like the old one--sweatshops, food aid.... The only exception is peasant agriculture and they've done more in the past two years to destroy that than ever before. Same old game, more intense.

JP: Can you give some examples about where aid money goes and where it ends up?

TS: First off, the money for rescue and recovery had gone almost entirely to NGOs and UN agencies. The rescuers cost an average of US\$2.5 million for each of the 132 people they rescued. We know what they did with the money and why they needed it. They paid salaries and overtime, and danger pay, and they paid for jet transport and for the some 620 tons of equipment they brought with them, including the air conditioners for their tents. So we know why the emergency rescuers cost so much. The question then is, 'what'd the NGOs and UN agencies do with the money we gave them.' Anyone who tries to do the research will find themselves bogged down in a quagmire of reports, prevarications, and refusals to provide information. The NGOs and UN agencies are structured and regulated in such a way that they simply will not provide specifics. Try to get the information yourself. They will not tell you. Some will respond the way that World Vision originally responded to me, saying that, 'sorry....our donors do not give us money to waste answering questions and doing research.' Those that do respond will only give laundry lists of bottled water and sanitation and people treated.

There are a few reasons for this. a) There is no incentive to be accountable and efficient and keep costs down, b) in many cases they don't even know what they've done, c) they can't tell us that they have failed, donors don't want to hear that and the guys back at HQ ain't going to pass that message on, d) they don't have to tell us when they failed or screwed up. All those points come back to the last and most important point: accountability. They don't have to tell us. There is no one person or no one thing that forces the NGOs and UN agencies to give us good accounting for their expenditures.

But we really don't need them to tell us anything, not if we are only

interested in a general idea of where the money went. All you have to do is perform the basic math. Journalists are fond of saying that there are 10,000 NGOs in Haiti. Well there aren't (there might be as many as 2,000). But let's be conservative and say there were 10,000 aid workers in Haiti after the quake. Now figure that everyone one of them is making \$200 per day. Some less, some a lot more. But if we take \$200 as an average that's 730 million per year. Per diem is at least another average of 100 per day (some get a lot more); that's another 365 million. A vehicle and driver cost \$150 per day, so let's say that for every two foreign aid workers there is one vehicle. That's another 750,000 per day; 274 million per year. So now we are at 1.369 billion per year and we have not even begun to talk about all the educated nationals who are working for aid agencies, the secretaries, administrators, and then the security guards and cooks and cleaners. Nor have we mentioned the inflated rents (~\$3,000 per apartment; \$6,000 to 10,000 for an office), hotel rooms (\$100 per night and up), air line flights (those to the DR tripled in cost after the quake, going from US\$150 per round trip to US\$500), then all the equipment for offices, the trucks.... Nor have we said anything about the 20% to 50% of the money that went back to the home office to cover the considerable administrative expenses there. So if we're spending at least 1.3 billion per year or more on administration and there was 2.7 billion in charity spent over a period of 2 years. Where'd it go? This is rough accounting but it's a good approximation and it's enough to say with confidence--and without the aid agencies giving us the information that they won't give--that most of did not and does not get to the poor Haitians for whom we intended it. The same process is duplicated to a much great extreme in the national and international agencies that received money from governments. Without getting into all the details, a UN consultant gets a per diem of US\$284 per day. That' before salary. Again no one has had the energy or disposition to get into the actual expenditures on the poor, but that's another type of shame.

As an example, look at water. Every one of the big NGOs made a huge deal about getting water to the "survivors," as they called virtually everyone in Port-au-Prince and the outlying areas around the city. Just look at their list of items given to the camps. Water, water, water. If it's not the principal expense in the first year after the earthquake it's surely one of them. Now look at the costs of water and where it was coming from. After the earthquake NGOs were importing bottled water from the states and Europe, flying it in. But there was plenty right here in Haiti. Many local water companies had to close up and wait for the aid agencies to finish spending their money so that they could begin to sell water again. The NGOs also started purchasing water from Haitian distributors at 300% of cost. I'm talking about the tankers of water. It was the same water available before the quake. Nothing had changed there. The rivers still ran. The springs didn't disappear. Most water lines were intact. In fact

most tanked water in Port-au-Prince comes from the same place, right next to the US embassy, stone's throw from the airport. And the number of people had not increased; indeed it had significantly decreased because not around to drink water or bath in it and wash dishes and clothes with it were the people who were killed and the some 500,000 who left Port-au-Prince, or the 37,000 elite--all big water consumers--who went to the US. And even today, if an NGO orders a truck of water there is a 20% sur charge beyond what a private citizen pays to fill his or her cistern. That's common knowledge. And the NGOs just accept that, one example of how the NGOs don't make any effort to keep costs down and how Haitian businesses and individuals react by gauging them. Mind you, I'm not against giving water to people who are thirsty, but the waste and mismanagement is appalling. And no one is even checking; i am not aware of a single published market analysis of the water situation. Did the NGOs waste 10s and even 100s of millions of dollars on water? Does anyone want to know? Does it matter? Should anyone care? Most people just assume that it was necessary and in the best interest of the poor.

Here's another important point to understand with regard to what happened to the money. Many activists, since the beginning of the recovery, have complained bitterly about the NGOs and UN agencies not spending money. There is a problem here. One of the things I did not mention above is that the UN and NGOs were and still are largely incapable of effectively spending the amount of money that came in at anywhere near the rate that many donors and activists hoped they would. That's not their fault. Well, perhaps they should be better prepared. But the point is that they did not and do not have the administrative systems in place to do it efficiently and effectively and the pressure to force them to do so is part of the problem. That's one of the reasons for all the water and why they were perfectly happy to pay 300% of what it should have cost and to this day don't fight back against paying an informal 20% surcharge. Water is easy; easy to buy and easy to distribute. It shows that they are doing something. Legitimately inflates their expenses. And once you've given it out you don't have to explain because it's gone, people drank it or bathed with it. And who's going to question giving out water (apparently no one). But the money donated by goodhearted citizens of the world and Haitian Diaspora would have been better put in foundations and conserved until the NGOs, Haitian Government, and UN agencies had the wherewithal to make it effective and to account for it. That's one of the greatest shames of the recovery effort. The NGO and UN directors should never have succumbed to the pressure to spend. They should have admitted and even insisted on their limitations—as many did early on—then stuck by their guns and made sure that the money was effectively spent. If not, leave it in some kind of escrow accounts...or why could it not have been managed in some type of foundation.

JP: Who would you say is principally responsible for this situation? Is it the donor governments? The agencies? Or the NGOs that use the funds?

TS: An anecdote: Shortly before the earthquake I was sitting in the Petionville Club with a group of NGO and USAID big shots. It was kind of a special moment for me. I've always been an outsider, more likely to be found in the kitchen with the cooks than at the main table. Suddenly, because of the last book I wrote, I'm inside, sitting there in the most elite club in Haiti with all these aid experts. I find myself in a kind of argument with a woman who works for Save the Children. It was completely unexpected. I'm trying to be one of the guys, so to speak, so I'm blabbing on about a program for children and how it's based on misinformation. It turns out that the woman I'm talking to ran the program. But, instead of continuing to defend the program she says something that completely threw me for a loop, she says, 'it's not our fault. It's the donors fault. They keep giving money without verifying what's really going on. Of course people are going to keep coming up with stories... they create the opportunity... they create the problem.'" At some point she finishes saying that, 'donors are paying to feel good and so they get what they paid for.' The point is disturbing but rather profound. She was saying that that NGOs give a service by taking money from donors and assuring them that it is well spent; the service is that the donor feels good.

So, one might extend the argument, to hell with whether the aid really helps some needy Haitian, the real service is paid for and delivered, the person paid for a good feeling and NGO gave it to them The NGO reciprocated with a lot of heartwarming stories about little Manuchka in school, or some Market woman who can borrow money to trade (she borrows it, by the way, at about 3 to 4 times the rate that we would pay for a loan).

The experts on this issue of accountability—or lack thereof-- consistently report that the reason is because people in the charity 'business' insist that they are above accountability, it's a moral endeavor. In one sense I can't help but observe, 'what a wonderful place for con artists and thieves.' All they have to do is ask for the money, say it's for a hungry child and shazam, they're covered, safe, no one will ever come after them. And they've given the donor that good feeling they were paying for. I have to confess, though, most people I've ever met in the aid business are good folks, sincere, honest. I would argue--and have elsewhere--that it's the system that corrupts. But ok, cutting to the big agencies, the bottom line is that even if you want to make them accountable, try to get the information you need to do that. Good luck.

JP: At the end of *Travesty*, you propose a mechanism to try to bring some transparency and accountability to the work that NGOs are doing in Haiti.

Has there been any progress on this front? Would you propose any changes to that mechanism a couple of years later?

TS: when Travesty began to get read and people reacted, some asked me, 'so what do we do?' Saying 'pack up and go home' isn't a sufficient answer. And while I sometimes think that might be best, it ain't going to happen. So if we're going to have aid, we should at least try to make it good aid, effective aid. And the first step in doing that is obvious:: count the projects, document what they're spending, a quick measure fo what they're getting done, a rapid systematic survey of beneficiary opinions and make it public, let the NGO directors, the donors, beneficiaries and anyone else have access to it and comment online. Same with all the NGO reports, all of them. Get them on a single Amazon type web site where people can read, review, comment and rate them. Let's make development a transparent, participatory process where all the stakeholders know what's going on and they all have a voice. And that's the Donor Guide. Why everyone isn't all for such a painfully obvious mechansim and why they haven't done it a long time ago is a disturbing question and should raise some strong suspicions about the committment of many of the big NGOs. If they are sincere, they should see such a project as a service and not a threat.

By the way, it's not some radical idea I had while putsing around in the Haitian outback. It came out of encouragement from Paul Farmer. In 2009, the Special Envoy's Office wanted to do something about actually figuring out just how many NGOs are out there. And there was a lot of talk about accountability. Clinton, Farmer, the Haitian PM, everyone was talking about accountability in the NGO sector. And so it just seemed like a natural move. And surveys are what I do, that's my speciality. So I wrote Paul in late summer of 2009 and offered to help come up with a plan and to go out there and actually count the projects. He encouraged me to come up with a proposal and even gave me a liason person in the Special Envoy's Office at the UN in New York . We set to work. There was a lot of hope. And then in November of that year, about the time that I was finishing the proposal , the Haitian Prime Minister, Mme Pierre-Louis, got deposed. That really shook everything up. In the end it was decided not to include my proposal in recommendations to Clinton or the State Department. The decision was that the Haitian Government had to do that (my reaction is that if they could they wouldn't need the NGOS). So for the time being the hope was dashed. But for me it wasn't over. I had already started to drum up support. I had USAID guys interested. I had visited with Jean Robert Estime, , a former minister and also son of Dursormais Estime, a popular former president. Jean Robert is current Haitian Chief of Party for Chemonics--Washington's biggest for profit consultancy in the country-- and he was very encouraging. Then came the earthquake and accountability was a bigger issue than ever.

There was a lot of money on the table for it too. USAID had something like 40 million specifically for monitoring and evaluation. And naturally, a lot of people came out of the woodwork to create more NGOs that would make the other NGOs accountable. There are still half a dozen of them. Not a single one really does much. They ask NGOs for reports and they criticize and there have been some qualitative studies. But I can't point to a single concrete product. Qualitative summaries of some camp or a couple activities is about it. And I am not even aware of a single concrete proposal to change that and do systematic and comprehensive evaluations. Nothing but the Donor Guide.

They just aren't doing anything with teeth and it's rather shocking that no one is even proposing it. One reason is that it's just too much work for most people who are interested in the NGO field. Some of the more serious actors I've approached shake their head and say it's too big. And there would be no fudging. You either get the information or you don't. You succeed or fail. So anyway, I never stopped trying. I know it can be done. I've done similar things. I've been on the ground locating and evaluating projects. Haitians who live out there know it can be done.

And there are people like Stephan Grandvaux and Brad Knollenburg, college students who pushed me and volunteered their time to help refine the project, they've been a tremendous inspiration and kept it alive. So yes, I'm still trying. I've put the project in front of Cheryl Mills at the State Department and in front of the directors at USAID. And Paul Farmer still assures me that we have his support. In the meantime I've become an M&E expert, that's what I do for work. So I have my fingers on the state of the art mechanisms, I understand USAID indicators and how they evaluate their own projects--they have a good system and they know what needs to be done, now if someone could convince them to support doing it for everyone. There is also some hope that George Washington University might be stepping up the plate. There's a guy there named, Bob Maguire, he's an old Haiti guy, a charismatic Wizard of Oz type who unbeknownst to most has pulled strings behind some of the most successful development and organizational initiatives in Haiti. He's encouraging and has kept the hope alive. So we'll see. But until now it's another structural dilemma. No one seems willing to take the plunge and fund it.

JP: Do you think that the aid industry does more harm than good, on balance?

TS: That's a big question that deserves a big answer. I won't speak about other countries. What I really know is Haiti. It's a small country and you can get a handle on what is happening there. So regarding Haiti, if I had to say yes or no, I would say yes. But you have to consider politics and everything else that is going on at the same time. None of them are

isolated processes. But to get to the most important point, we can't cut off the aid because, however we got here, Haiti now depends on it. The trick is to fix the aid, to steer it into line with the best interests of building a solid and integrated Haitian State that reinforces Haitian productive enterprises and social institutions. As Bob Maguire would say, help Haiti build from the bottom up. "Bottom up development." We need to stop trying to remake Haiti from the top down using designs pushed by overseas special interests; instead we need to focus on what's good for the Haitian people and their economy, bottom up.

I don't have space to really elaborate on this point but let me give you one example. One of the biggest expenditures in the wake of the earthquake was rubble clean up. We all knew that. With the money made available we could have orchestrated a cleanup that involved the some 3 million unemployed Haitian men --and women as well. We could have simply bought rubble at disposal sites and let the Haitian poor bring the rubble in with wheel barrows and their own little trucks and horse carts. The international community paid an average of US\$40 per cubic meter for rubble. If it was just wheel barrows doing the clean up then at 6 cubic feet in a standard wheel barrow and 10 million cubic meters of total rubble, that would have been 40 million wheel barrows of rubble. So If 1 million men pushed one wheel barrow per day to the dump site, cleanup would have taken about 40 days; and it would have put US\$400 million directly into the hands of the Haitian poor. It is also worth pointing out that those poor would have made US\$9 per day in the process, that's twice what the UN was paying participants in their cash for work programs (US and UN cash for work programs never amounted to more than a small fraction of the rubble removal. For example, in he first year USAID invested 17 million in cash for work versus some 100 million in rubble removal. Moreover, much of the cash for work activities were frivolous such as cleaning the streets and picking up trash).

This is a simplification of the issue but in practice it would have been even more dynamic. An economy would have emerged around the sale of rubble. It would have included small and large local trucks, people carrying buckets on their head, men would have been retrieving far more than one wheel barrow per day and the money for the rubble would have been pumped straight into the bottom of the Haitian economy creating a massive economic stimulus. Instead, the money went into the pockets of foreign corporations that specialize in disaster cleanup, such as DRC and AshBritt and to Haitian millionaire entrepreneurs such as Gilbert Bigio who partnered with those organizations. It also went to the for profit consultant agencies DAI and Chemonics and to the NGO CHF that handled the administration of the rubble cleanup. They took two years to clean up. They're still cleaning up. And a massive scramble for contracts occurred such that the going rate if you could just land the contract was

200 payoff per truck. That me say that again: I was approached on two occasions and offered 200 per day per truck if i could facilitate obtaining a contract. That's me. I'm not even inside on trucking and rubble cleanup. Imagine what people were really making. On top of all that was an administrative mountain of bureaucratic spaghetti that cost hundreds of millions more. But if we had depended on the people we have come to help, if we had simply paid Haitians to clean up their own rubble, all of that would have been unnecessary as the rubble would only have to be weighed and purchased at the dump site. Instead, the bulk of the Haitian urban population sat there, unemployed or engaged in petty economic activities and watched US and Canadian and Haitian Elite-owned-dump trucks gathered up and brought in the rubble. As Haitians on the street were saying at the time, 'rubble could have been gold.'

JP: I heard you are working on another book. Can you give us a sneak preview?

TS: Yes, I'm working on another book. This one is a cross between Travesty and an academic book I wrote, (Sex, Family and Fertility in Haiti). It's part anecdotal in that it chronologically follows my experiences after the earthquake. When the quake hit I was in the neighboring DR with a Foreign Service friend of mine and another pal who is retired ex special forces. They were terrific people to be with in this situation because they are both accustomed to being in powerful administrative positions and in the midst of disasters and wars all over the globe. They gave me fantastic insight and they gave me confidence. They also confirmed for me that no, I'm not over-reacting with my exasperation at how dysfunction aid is in Haiti; it is indeed a chaotic mess; the earthquake brought it all out in stark and horrifying relief.

The three of us were in Haiti before sunrise the next morning. Because I was with an embassy official I got an inside look at what was going on at the Embassy, with the State Dept and in USAID. At the same time I was on the ground working as a driver, guide and translator for rescue workers. It was a lousy experience but gave me a lot of energy to write and do research. From the second week on I worked as a journalist. The second and third month I was doing consultancies for food monetization and evaluations of the economic impact of the earthquake. I had also been working in Port-au-Prince on USAID funded research for some four months leading up to the earthquake. So I was in the mix like I've never been before. Not only on the ground but with guys inside. I was able to do a lot of research on my own as well. For me, as a researcher focusing mostly on Haiti and accustomed to to being on the street or in the countryside with the poor looking up at the system and trying to figure out what the hell is going on, it was a terrific opportunity to document and try to undertand the system.

And as the recovery effort unfolded I was able to follow it both in the press as and from the inside. Beginning 9 months after the earthquake, I spent some 6 months working with USAID. I was in contact with all the top consultants, literally living with some of them. These are oldtimers, 30 year USAID retirees, former mission directors, At the same time, because of Travesty and the attention it was getting, I had a lot of journalists buying me dinner and drinks. I had people like Sean Penn contacting me. Sean introduced me to Martelly, the current president. Yet, through most of this, I'm still a semi-broke anthropologist on a motorcycle with no legal papers, slipping across the border in the mountains or riding the bus back and forth to the DR, sitting in the midst of poor Haitians and living with them part time as well. So I had a broad perspective. And then with the research I was doing, the data I was collecting, it's tough to be objective about ones one work but I think it's fair to say that it's unique and it's holistic.

What I was able to see is that the Haiti being sold in the press and to donors is not reality. Not even close. In almost every count the earthquake was inflated by a factor of about 6 to 10 times what it was. It's the same for orphans, rubble, fatalities, restaveks, rapes, IDPs.... you name it. It's not that Haiti is not poor and that people don't need help. It's that they are not experiencing most NGOs tell us. And part of the reason that NGOs are getting it wrong is because they aren't adapted to helping Haitians address poverty so much as they are adapted to getting donations to meet their own payrolls and expenses. And so you get the inflation and exaggeration and yes, some outright lies. And so that's what the books about. I try to show just how far things have gotten out of hand.

The punchline is that most people working in the system know that something is seriously wrong. But no one wants to hear the real numbers. And if you try to give them the real numbers then you get what I got: bounced out of the system, no work, scorned, loathed, ostracized.

Maybe I'm overstating the reaction. I've gotten some flattering encouragement from some quarters. But it has also made me increasingly an object of concern and suspicion from those in official positions and in the NGOs. USAID Haiti refuses to approve any employment for me, an order that according to the agency that hires consultants for USAID came directly from the State Department in Washington. This is the kiss of death for a consultant in Haiti. In the past year I've been hired or been in the process of signing a contract on four occasions but was then refused, ostensibly because USAID refused to sign off. There's other issues as well. My email has been hacked repeatedly. I've even had important messages deleted. Important phone calls mysteriously cut off or unable to connect at critical moments. In print I've been called a "vampire," "a

criminal”, “vehemently opposed to aid.”

At times I feel like I’m living in an emperor- has- no- clothes fable. The NGOs and the UN and USG and GOH and the EU, all these very important institutions, the most important on earth, they are mass producing misinformation about Haiti. And if you criticize them, you reveal the untruths, they attack you like a germ.

I’m sure it’s going to get much worse, but I have absolutely no doubt that I’m on the right track. I think I have something important to say now. Something similar to Travesty but much more profound. I have a lot of data and I’ve tracked the contradictions. We shouldn’t be second guessing the truth and aid’s gotta be made effective. That’s the message. And I really believe that when I get this book done and if people read it, it’s going to have a powerful impact.

So that’s the theme: Why the radical exaggeration? Why does no one care about the truth? I weave Haitian history in and a description of class structure and adaptation within Haiti, including anecdotes and vignettes to tell the story.

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Spain: Workers Gear Up For General Strike

Danny Byrne 16 March 2012

Less than 100 days since the formation of the PP (People’s Party) government, which was to bring “stability” to crisis-ridden Spain, we see the country convulsed in an intense period of protests and mobilisations. On Sunday 11 March, up to 1.5 million marched in 60 cities, with unions claiming attendances of 500,000 in Madrid and 450,000 in Barcelona. In smaller towns and cities, tens of thousands took the streets. In the region of Andalucia alone, over 220,000 are said to have turned out. These marches followed a massive day of protest on 19 February which was similar numbers take to the streets, and the spontaneous explosion of solidarity with the Valencian spring, which saw tens of thousands protest around the country. And far from representing the culmination of the process, these mobilisations represent only the build up to a general strike on 29 March.

The focal point in this upturn in struggle is the recently announced labour reform, which represents an historic attack on the gains of the Spanish working class, without precedents in the three decades since the fall of the

Franco regime. This reform, which massively cheapens and facilitates sackings and seriously erodes the collective bargaining rights of workers, is predicted to usher in 630,000 job losses in 2012. At a time when over 5 million people are unemployed already, this has provoked massive disgust and outrage. It has crystallised the anger at the austerity offensive, which has become more brutal and accelerated since the PP's victory. And this response comes even before the announcement of the bulk of their anti-worker measures which will come in the budget at the end of March.

Anti-union campaign reflects bosses' fear of general strike

Since the announcement of the strike, a concerted anti-union campaign has been launched, spearheaded by PP leaders and their cronies in the pro-capitalist press. The general strike has been labelled a "strike against Spain" with an appeal to "patriotism" (i.e. the acceptance of decades of misery and mass unemployment to pay for the debts and "solve" the crisis of the international and Spanish market system). Duran Lleida, leader of the governing Catalan CiU party (which backed up the PP in voting through the labour reform bill in parliament) even called for the strengthening of anti-union legislation to further impede the right to strike. This has been supplemented with a media and government offensive to undermine the impact of the general strike, and the mobilising power of the trade union movement. These demonstrations are a fitting initial answer to this campaign, as will be the general strike which is sure to be of massive proportions. In reality, this campaign reflects weakness more than strength, and a fear of the entry of the organised working class into battle. In the context of such a rabid anti-union campaign, a correct approach on behalf of the anti-capitalist left and social movements, to clearly distinguish the necessary opposition to the right-wing leadership from opposition to the trade union movement generally, is of special importance.

General strike is a first victory in the struggle from below for combative trade unionism

The leaders of the main Spanish trade unions, the CCOO and the UGT, far from responding to the announcement of these attacks with a determined resolve to lead the working class into a battle to win, were pushed from below into calling the general strike. Even when the Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy, told his counterparts at an EU summit that the labour reform would "cost him a general strike", weeks passed before the union leaders were prepared to even contemplate it! It was the pressure from below, especially that exercised by the massive demonstrations on 19 February, after which even the capitalist press was forced to comment on the extent to which there was a clamour from below for a general strike. This was then reinforced by the students' revolt and the determined demand for serious action being transmitted from below through the unions' structures. It was just a few days after ruling out any general strike

action until after May, that the top bureaucrats found themselves without any other option but to announce a strike for 29 March.

The experience of the general strike in September 2010, in which over 10 million workers downed tools, only to have the union leaders signing a sell-out pact agreeing to the increase of the retirement age, among other things, has also had an impact on the consciousness of broad sections of workers and trade unionists. The next step must consist in further developing the struggle from below, to ensure that '29-M' is the beginning of a serious struggle, and is not simply a symbolic strike but part of a strategy to win.

Members of Socialismo Revolucionario (CWI in Spain) participated in Sunday's mass demonstrations, emphasising the need for a sustained programme of action, democratically discussed and decided upon by workplace and community assemblies and strike committees and open to members of all unions (and none). The naming of a date for a 48 hour strike to follow 29-M, with the threat of further strikes of even longer duration if necessary, could be the basis to begin a movement capable of facing down the government's cuts and counter-reforms. The left organisations, social movements and trade union rank and file could organise from below to fight for such a programme linked to a political alternative to the austerity consensus. This could point the way forward to the only viable road out of the current quagmire – the socialist transformation of society through public democratic ownership and control of the economy, on a national and international scale.

[The following is a translation of statement by Socialismo Revolucionario (CWI in Spain) following the announcement of the general strike on 29 March]

The government's labour reform is the biggest attack on the conquests of the working class in terms of workers' rights since the Franco era. It cheapens sackings at a time when over 5 million are unemployed and over half of young people are out of work. It further facilitates collective sackings, and for those still in work worsens the nightmare of precarious jobs.

But this reform only represents the beginning. It is part of an agenda of misery, of the destruction of the welfare state, which the capitalists are very conscious of, both in Spain and internationally. Rajoy (Prime Minister), Rubalcaba (PSOE leader), Merkel and Sarkozy, along with the capitalist media say that this is the only way possible, that the debt must be paid and the markets must be pacified. They have built a consensus around these policies and this approach.

But we know that it is lies. The austerity of Zapatero and now of Rajoy has

not in any way succeeded in improving the situation. The debt continues to climb and the markets continue to demand more 'sacrifices'. Like the Aztecs, they demand more and more blood from society, to please their "gods" - the markets, bosses and big business. It is becoming clearer and clearer to more and more working people that there is no alternative but to struggle for a different path.

General strike as the first step to kick off a sustained struggle

The general strike on 29-M will be an important first step. It will show the power of the working class through the paralysis of the economy, and the massive demonstrations. This strike has only been possible due to the pressure from the mass of workers, especially in the base of the major trade unions, CC.OO and UGT, which forced their 'leaders' into action. These leaders tried all they could to put off a strike, and only a week or so ago, ruled out a general strike until after May, unsurprisingly attempting to walk the line of least resistance and keep 'social peace' intact. This general strike is thus a first victory for the workers and fighting trade unionists, a result of their struggles, and of the energy and shining example of the youth and students in the Valencian Spring. But, unfortunately, this first victory will not be enough. We must continue to organise from below, to make sure that that the union leaders do not follow the strike with a sell-out pact, as was the case following the general strike of 29 September 2010.

This strike must be built for by workers, the unemployed and young people, with the formation of assemblies in the workplaces and communities and in schools and universities. Strike committees, open to members of all unions and non-unionised workers, should be established to debate the strategy for the struggle and the way forward after 29M. What we know for sure is that to be able to halt the offensive of the government and the system, one strike will not be enough. We have seen the heroic resistance of the Greek working class, with 18 individual general strikes. Without a sustained plan of struggle, with an escalating series of strikes, we will be incapable of stopping the government from passing its anti-worker measures. It is necessary to name the date for a general strike of 48 hours to follow 29M, with the threat of more strikes, of an even longer duration should they be necessary, to smash this reform. Linked to this is the need to transform the trade union movement into a democratic fighting instrument of struggle.

The international crisis of capitalism also poses the need for coordinated international struggle. The need for a general strike is posed in a whole number of countries, with one taking place in Portugal on 22 March. But, unfortunately, there is no strategy or plan to link these mobilisations together. The next general strikes in the Iberian Peninsula, and beyond in the 'peripheral' countries of Europe, should be coordinated and simultaneous.

We must also arm ourselves with political alternatives, which DO exist. In

this respect, the left now has an historic responsibility, to demand and popularise genuine alternative policies to the crisis and austerity. These include a rejection of the payment of the debt, which is not ours but that of bankers and speculators, and the nationalisation of the banks and strategic sectors of the economy under democratic workers' control. This would allow for the implementation of an offensive policy of massive public investment in jobs, production and public services. Based on such policies we could fight for a genuinely democratic system which gives participation to the mass of working people, as an alternative to the dictatorship of the markets and capital. Only on this basis can the movements of workers and youth advance towards the transformation of society and the economy to resolve the fundamental problems facing the majority of people.

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Amazon's Assault on Intellectual Freedom

Bryce Milligan 15 March 2012

There is an undeclared war going on in the United States that threatens the lynchpins of American intellectual freedom. In a statement worthy of Cassandra, Noah Davis wrote in Business Insider last October, "Amazon is coming for the book publishing industry. And not just the e-book world, either." When titans battle, it is tempting to think that there will be no local impact. In this case, that's dead wrong. Amazon's recent actions have already cut the sales of the small press I run by 40 percent. Jeff Bezos could not care less.

One recent battle in Amazon's larger war has pitted it against a diverse group of writers, small publishers, university presses, and independent distributors. It is a classic David-and-Goliath encounter. As in that story, however, this is more than just pitting the powerful against the powerless. In this case, the underdogs have the ideas, and ideas are always where the ultimate power lies.

Wings Press (San Antonio, Texas) is one of the several hundred independent publishers and university presses distributed by the Independent Publishers Group (IPG), the second largest book distributor in the country, but still only a medium-sized dolphin in a sea of killer whales. In late February, IPG's contract with Amazon.com was due to be renegotiated. Terms that had been generally accepted across the industry were suddenly not good enough for Amazon, which demanded discounts and practices that IPG -- and all of its client publishers -- could only have

accepted at a loss. Yes, that does mean what it sounds like: To do business with Amazon would mean reducing the profit margin to the point of often losing money on every book or ebook sold.

IPG refused to accept the draconian terms and sought to negotiate further. In what can only be seen as a move to punish IPG for its desire to remain relevant and healthy, Amazon refused to negotiate and pulled the plug on all the Kindle ebooks distributed by IPG, marking them as "unavailable."

Not a big deal? Imagine that Walmart controls everything you eat, and Walmart decides to stop selling fish because it thinks that fishermen are making too much profit. Amazon is the Walmart of online bookselling. The dispute between Amazon and IPG will affect every literate person in America. It is a matter that goes to the heart of what librarians have termed "intellectual freedom." In other words, the resolution of this dispute, one way or the other, will affect every individual American's access to certain books. It will affect your ability to choose what you read.

Restrictions on access to literature generally have more politically motivated origins. The banning of certain Native American and Mexican American authors and books in Arizona, for example, is purely political. Attempts in the past to ban literature based on its "moral content" were largely political in nature. This dispute is purely capitalistic, and is much more difficult to fight.

A single practical example. Wings Press had offered up one of its Kindle titles, *Vienna Triangle* by California novelist Brenda Webster, for the Amazon daily deal -- a limited time offer of 99 cents per download. The book zoomed to the top ten of one of Amazon's several bestseller lists. While it was still listed as a bestseller, Amazon suddenly marked the title as "unavailable." The trail of loss increases in impact as it descends the food chain: Amazon doesn't notice the loss at all. IPG sees it as one of its 5,000 Kindle titles that vanished. Wings Press sees it as one of its 100 Kindle titles that vanished. The author sees it as the loss of her book, period.

Lest one think that eliminating a single ebook novel is a loss of little consequence, Wings Press also publishes the works of John Howard Griffin, including *Black Like Me*, one of the most important works of the civil rights movement and widely considered an American classic. Amazon's refusal to sell the ebook of *Black Like Me* should be of serious concern to every American.

Ebook sales have been a highly addictive drug to many smaller publishers. For one thing, there are no "returns." Traditionally, profit margins for publishers are so low because books that remain on shelves too long can

be returned for credit -- too often in unsalable condition. No one returns an ebook. Further, ebook sales allowed smaller presses to get a taste of the kind of money that online impulse buying can produce. Already ebook sales were underwriting the publication of paper-and-ink books at Wings Press.

It has been increasingly obvious to independent publishers for the last two years that Amazon intends to put all independents out of business -- publishers, distributors, and bookstores. Under the guise of providing greater access, Amazon seemingly wants to kill off the distributors, then kill off the independent publishers and bookstores, and become the only link between the reader and the author.

The attack on distributors like IPG and on some larger independent presses is only part of the plan. Amazon has also been going after the ultimate source of literature, the authors.

Having created numerous (seven or more) imprints of its own, Amazon has begun courting authors directly by offering exorbitant royalties if the authors will publish directly with Amazon. Among the financial upper echelon of authors, Amazon is paying huge advances. Among rank-and-file authors, not so. Here they are offering what amounts to glorified self-publication. The effect is to lure authors away from the editors who would have helped them perfect their work, away from the publishers and designers and publicists and booksellers who have dedicated their lives to building the careers of authors, while themselves making a living from the books they love. Even the lowly book reviewer has been replaced by semi-anonymous reader-reviewers. All these are the people who sustain literary culture.

For Amazon to rip ebook sales away from independent publishers now seems a classic bait-and-switch tactic guaranteed to kill small presses by the hundreds. Ah, but predatory business practices are so very American these days. Amazon could have been a bright and shining star, lighting the way to increased literacy and improved access to alternative literatures. Alas, it looks more likely to be a large and deadly asteroid. We, the literary dinosaurs, are watching closely to see if this is a near miss or the beginning of extinction. Fortunately, this generation of dinosaurs is a little better equipped than the last one to take measures to avoid such a fate.

One can choose to buy ebooks from BN.com or from almost any independent bookstore rather than Amazon. One can buy directly from IPG. A free app will allow one to read those books on a Kindle. The resistance has already begun, and it starts with choice.

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Bryce Milligan is the publisher/editor of Wings Press. He is an award-winning poet and author of books for children and young adults.

March 200,000 march across South Africa

South Africa One-day general strike shows workers' willingness to fight back

Democratic Socialist Movement (CWI in South Africa) Reporters 14
March 2012

When South Africa's largest and most militant trade union federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu), organised a one-day general strike on March 7, the first such action in over ten years, after avoiding the question for months and calling off several previously announced strikes, it was embraced by the working class as a long-awaited rush of fresh air. Despite what can, at best, be described as half-hearted mobilisation by the trade union leaders, there was a big turn-out for the marches in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, and marches were also held in 29 other cities and towns. With a total of 200,000 people on the streets across the country, this is said to have been the largest protest since the early 1980s' anti-apartheid mass movement.

The biggest march, in Johannesburg, drew about 100,000 workers. Around 20 000 marched in Cape Town and another 20,000 in Durban. Many industries, in particular mining, metal and other manufacturing industries and retail stores, were severely constrained.

Workers took the opportunity to express their anger against the super-exploitative practice of labour broking (the outsourcing of employment to manpower companies) and against the effective privatisation of the free-ways through an 'e-tolling' system which is to be

introduced in Gauteng province next month (these were Cosatu's two main demands). But marchers also displayed a more generalised anger at the relentless, creeping attacks on workers' standard of living, and at the shameless indulgence of the 'politically connected' in corrupt self-enrichment. South Africa is the officially most unequal country on the planet, with one half of the population receiving 92% of the national income while the other half gets 8%.

Pecarious conditions

A very large part of the SA workforce – up to 30% – are employed by labour brokers or under similarly precarious conditions; typically working for as little as a third of the wages of permanently employed workers, without any job security, pay progression, benefits or organisational rights, which is enriching an army of parasitic middle-men. In SA, as in the rest of the world, labour broking is a tool to divide the working class, already ravaged by a 40% unemployment rate, and to intensify its exploitation. The Zuma ANC-government promised, in its 2009 election campaign, that labour broking would be banned. Proposed amendments to the labour laws which would 'regulate' the labour broking industry to the point that it would be paralyzed – a 'ban' in all but name – were announced by government, last year (outlawing temporary employment for more than 3 months and different pay for similar work, defining the company contracting the labour broker as 'the employer', etc). While government, under pressure from horrified employers, attempts to bury the amendments, which appears to be regarded as some form of embarrassing 'mis-draft', in silence and endless procedure, they have also been rejected by the Cosatu leadership which will accept nothing but an explicit 'ban'. As negotiations drag on, the employer side has already made inroads with extending the time allowed for temporary contracts to six months. In the view of the Democratic Socialist Movement (the CWI in SA), Cosatu's position amounts to radical posturing and actually assists the bosses in their objective of having the 'regulation' proposals withdrawn altogether. Instead we call for a campaign for the adoption, implementation and enforcement of the amendments relating to labour broking - an effective ban, on paper - and to use it as a platform to fight for a real blow against labour broking. For no matter how clearly a ban is spelled out, the fact is that most of the gains that are already inscribed in the labour laws are not being enforced. Workers are desperate for an effective way to counter the neo-liberal onslaught they face in the form of labour broking and many have bought into Cosatu's stance.

The introduction of a new road-toll system (for now in Gauteng, but if it goes through there it is likely to be followed in other provinces), which will mean dramatically increased costs of living, not only for motorists but drive up prices generally, is an attack on the working class in the same spirit as the encroachment of labour broking. Anger is widespread against

this including amongst the middle class.

Despite the Cosatu leadership...

The outstanding question of a general strike has been hanging as shadow over the struggles of recent years and became increasingly impossible to ignore. The Cosatu leadership shied away from it, despite the obvious stepping up of the massive public sector strike in 2010, and again as the logical conclusion of the strike wave of 2011. When the strike eventually took place, after two still born efforts, the union leaders' approach was strikingly hesitant. There was practically no public mobilisation or campaigning, with not a single poster or leaflet appearing in Johannesburg, and leaflets distributed only late on the afternoon before the strike in Durban. Outside of what appears to have been a patchy mobilisation within Cosatu's affiliates, campaigning was limited to the media and in the newspapers, and even most of this was done at the last minute. The Cosatu leadership, for all its love of radical phrases, even appeared shy to state that this was a general strike, speaking instead of 'national marches'. Only the day before the march did the leaders clearly communicate the message, through the media, that this was a general strike notice protecting every employee in the country, regardless of union affiliation. As a result, despite the demonstration turnout, the threatened shut-down of the economy was far from complete. The Johannesburg march was joined by people from the street for whom the sight of the march was the first they heard of the strike.

Wetted the thirst of workers

The large turn-out, despite this half-heartedness on part of the leadership, shows the willingness and ability of the SA working class to fight. At the same time, the leadership tried to gain maximal militancy credit from the action. Cosatu general secretary Zwelinzima Vavi, during his speech in Johannesburg, called the strike "a warning shot" and promised follow-up action, including blockading the freeways, to massive cheers. Cosatu's President S'dumo Dlamini, speaking in Durban, said a second strike could be held in August. The strike has certainly wetted the thirst of workers and youth, who are itching to take action. The Cosatu leadership, which is riddled with divisions that appear to be deepening rapidly – on the surface, relating most directly to the looming leadership battles in the ruling African National Congress (ANC), its political partner – was also joined on the strike action by the ANC Youth League president Julius Malema, who was last week expelled from the ANC by its disciplinary committee. The presence of Malema, who is campaigning against the re-election of South Africa's President Jacob Zuma, as head of the ANC at the ANC's national conference, which will be held in December this year, at the march in Johannesburg, was welcomed by many of the marchers. In Limpopo, Malema's home province, strikers reportedly refused to be addressed by ANC figures associated with Malema.

The right-posturing-as-left demagogue Malema's attempt to join the Cosatu leadership in riding the working class tiger adds some complication to the consciousness of the working class, but none that does not stand to be clarified in the course of the struggles, which will no doubt be unleashed in SA over the next few years.

Further big class struggles will see the organised working class rejecting the policies of class collaborationism and the rank and file campaigning for democratic control of their unions and for the formation of a mass party of the working class. Such a party can unite all the fighting strands of the working class - in communities, workplaces and social movements - and struggle with independent class policies for a government of workers and poor people.

The DSM participated in marches in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, with a [pamphlet](#), which was well-received.
www.socialistworld.net

What They Won't Say About Kony 2012

Bill Crane 13 March 2012

"KONY 2012," a social media campaign by the charity group Invisible Children that caught fire last week, has brought the wars of central Africa into the media spotlight.

A video produced by Invisible Children that got some 71 million views in less than a week focuses on Joseph Kony, leader of the Ugandan rebel group Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The 30-minute video claims that Kony is "the most dangerous man in the world."

Invisible Children says it hopes the video will "raise support for his arrest and set a precedent for international justice." The campaign, which jumped from Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to the front page of newspapers across the U.S., asks supporters to make Kony "famous" by posting flyers with his image. This, the video suggests, will convince the U.S. government to step up support for the Ugandan military in its quest to "stop Kony"--to kill him or to bring him to trial at the International Criminal Court.

It's certainly understandable that a campaign against child soldiers and sex trafficking would gain widespread attention. But the Kony 2012 campaign

is leaving out a lot of facts that every opponent of violence and injustice needs to know.

Not only does the video dangerously oversimplify the history of Kony and the LRA in Uganda, but it bolsters the position of U.S. imperialism on this question--particularly in its support for the repressive Ugandan government. And this comes at a time when the U.S. military is intervening more aggressively in Africa, including basing troops on the continent.

In October, the Obama administration announced it was sending 100 soldiers to Uganda to act as military "advisers" to Ugandan and African Union forces fighting the LRA. "I have authorized a small number of combat-equipped U.S. forces to deploy to central Africa to provide assistance to regional forces that are working toward the removal of Joseph Kony from the battlefield," Obama wrote in a letter to Congress.

But the administration isn't motivated to extend military help to the Ugandan government out of altruism. U.S. involvement comes in the context of what SocialistWorker.org contributor Lee Wengraf called "a new African land grab"--with Saudi Arabia, Japan, China, India and South Korea, as well as agribusiness and private equity firms from Europe and the U.S., buying up large tracts in a competition for farmland and biofuel sources.

THE INVISIBLE Children video says little about Joseph Kony and his history besides the allegation that he has enslaved more than 30,000 children, using the boys as soldiers and the girls as sex slaves. This, we're told, justifies stopping him by all means--including U.S. military involvement.

Certainly no one who cares about justice will shed any tears if and when Kony is brought to justice. The leader of an army that seeks "a government based on the Ten Commandments" and a man who claims supernatural powers, Kony led a 20-year insurgency--one that did, in fact, use child soldiers--against the Ugandan state.

But stopping at this distorts the character of the conflict.

The LRA is one in a series of insurgencies by the Acholi people, dating back to the rise to power of Yoweri Museveni, who has held the office of Uganda's presidency for a quarter century now. The Acholi, based in the north of the country, have been waging war in one form or another against the central government, based among southern ethnicities.

Museveni's government has carried out a savage campaign of

counterinsurgency, with the Ugandan military matching the LRA atrocity for atrocity. In the mid-1990s, the government imposed a policy of forced displacement against the Acholi. Camps for the internally displaced in the north have some of the highest mortality rates in the world, with more than 1,000 people dying each week.

The counterinsurgency campaign failed to defeat Kony. However, the LRA stopped operating in Uganda in 2006, a fact that the Kony 2012 video fails to note. Information about the situation is scanty, but there is reason to doubt that Kony--if he is, in fact, still alive--commands more than a few hundred soldiers somewhere in either the Central African Republic or the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

As Ugandan journalist Angelo Opi-Aya Azama wrote, the area has much greater problems, including the HIV epidemic and the spread of other deadly diseases.

Nevertheless, Kony 2012 focuses on one warlord and asks that viewers support the continued presence of U.S. military advisers in Uganda to capture him. In the video, Invisible Children claims to have been central in convincing the U.S. government to send advisers last October--though this obscures the fact that Obama's move was an escalation of an ongoing intervention.

In fact, U.S. forces participated in a disastrous operation in 2008 that failed to capture Kony in his base in Congo--but which succeeded in provoking the LRA to launch a ferocious counteroffensive. The rebels abducted an estimated 700 people and killed almost 1,000.

The Invisible Children video likewise ignores the brutality of the Ugandan military. On the contrary, it is portrayed as "the only force" capable of stopping Kony.

The military's campaign against the LRA has been corrupt, brutal and deadly. In the hunt for Kony, the regime's forces have been accused of looting the Central African Republic and forcing women into prostitution.

The Kony 2012 campaign will not only reinforce this brutality by giving it a "humanitarian" justification, but it serves to strengthen an authoritarian state that last made global headlines for its attempts to pass a law to punish homosexuality with death.

Even from a strictly humanitarian point of view, it's hard to see why U.S. intervention deserves support. First of all, if the U.S. military were to find Kony, we should ask how many of the LRA's child soldiers--in whose name Invisible Children claims to speak--were killed in the attempt to

bring him in.

We might also question the commitment of the U.S. government to ending the use of child soldiers--when it funds the armies of four countries that continue to use them, including Yemen and Congo.

But beyond these questions, it's important to remember that U.S. military interventions never have and never will be carried out for humanitarian motivations. U.S. military involvement in Uganda isn't about concern for ordinary people, but Washington's desire to strengthen its imperial foothold in Africa. The Pentagon's Africa Command is aiming to expand its presence in the region--and in Uganda, where new oil and natural gas reserves have been discovered.

Moreover, like the NATO intervention in Libya, involvement in Uganda can help to rehabilitate the idea of "humanitarian intervention"--which suffered a bruising after the 2003 war in Iraq. This increases the ability of the U.S. to sell more wars around the world.

FOR ANYONE who watched the Invisible Children video, the deceptions in the call for intervention weren't the only troubling aspects.

Despite Invisible Children's claim to speak on behalf of Kony's child soldiers, only one such soldier appears in the video. The only other Ugandans interviewed are politicians--representatives of a U.S.-aligned government that has repressed the Acholi people. In fact, the camera spends more time on the video's white director and his child, and the white activists working with Invisible Children.

According to the video, this is "a crucial time in history where what we do or don't do right now will affect every generation to come." But the "we" in that passage is clearly Westerners, not Ugandans.

This approach--appealing to people in the U.S. to settle accounts with Joseph Kony on behalf of the people of Uganda--has a long and ugly history. It goes by the term "white man's burden"--the racist argument made famous by British poet Rudyard Kipling that it is the duty of Western countries to be a "civilizing" influence in undeveloped parts of the world.

Kipling's poem, first published in 1899, was invoked in support of the U.S. government's brutal domination of the Philippines, and echoes of it have been heard ever since to justify the crimes of European and U.S. imperialism.

The Kony 2012 campaign embraces the idea that the people of Uganda

must be "saved" from themselves by the benevolent West. This is the ideology that justified almost a century of colonialism in Uganda and the rest of Africa, creating the very conditions that produced the likes of Joseph Kony and Yoweri Museveni.

Naturally, ordinary people in the U.S. who see the Kony 2012 video will want to do something to alleviate the suffering that they see portrayed in the film. But if nothing else, a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan--justified in both instances with the language of humanitarian intervention--should teach us that the U.S. war machine can never be used to stop violence and end suffering.

The presence of Western governments in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa--whether directly in the form of troops, or indirectly in the form of political and military support for pliant regimes--does nothing to help ordinary Africans.

The Kony 2012 video gives false answers to a terrible crisis. Ultimately, the best way to help the people of Uganda is to challenge both U.S. military intervention in the region--and the neoliberal economic policies that have impoverished the continent.

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Diamonds are Zimbabwe's worst friend

Will world prices collapse as Mugabe's generals loot Marange?

Khadija Sharife 13 March 2012

The news from oppressed Africa may be dominated by the self-serving You Tube video by Jacob Russell, 'Kony 2012', seen by 80 million viewers, aiming to raise consciousness about children involuntarily soldiering for the Lords Resistance Army in oil-rich northern Uganda. But in contrast to American saviors, there are plenty of local activists needing solidarity in their struggle against tyrants.

One of these is an institution, the Centre for Research and Development in Mutare, Zimbabwe, whose offices were mysteriously burgled last week. Mutare is the closest city to the \$800 billion Marange fields, described as the largest diamond find in history.

Even before Kimberly Process (KP) certification, Zimbabwe became the world's seventh largest producer, and the KP deal apparently occurred

because Zimbabwe's Ministry of Mines threatened that world diamond markets would be flooded if KP-certification were not provided.

In any case, Zimbabwe's main diamond trading partners, India and China (via Dubai and Israel), hold no regard for the KP, and therefore cannot be held hostage by threats of peer exclusion. Already, 30 percent of the diamonds handled in India's key cut and polish hub, Surat, are imported from Zimbabwe.

Africa generates over 65 percent of the world's rough stones. Until recently, a handful of companies including DeBeers (35 percent market share by value) and Russia's Alrosa (25 percent market share) benefited from near monopolistic control, with sales dominated by the US market thanks to the deeply entrenched impact of the De Beers 'Diamonds are forever' advertising campaign.

Until the 1990s, DeBeers had set the inviolable rule of the diamond industry: one buyer (Central Selling Organisation) to absorb – and vault – the bulk of surplus to prevent diamonds from losing the scarcity value, artificially created via slow release onto the market.

Andrei Polyakov, spokesperson for Russia's Alrosa – which remains 90 percent state-owned – confirmed, "If you don't support the price, a diamond becomes a mere piece of carbon."

The diamond merchants now face a serious crisis: losing the battle to keep stones in the Zimbabwe soil by locking down concessions. At one point, De Beers held over 45 Exclusive Prospecting Orders, and despite discovering Marange early in the game, De Beers failed to exploit the resources.

Zero exploitation

Unlike Botswana and Namibia, the generals close to Robert Mugabe who control Zimbabwe's military refuse to play ball by controlling the supply. Intimidated by the "environment of uncertainty regarding the status and future of the concession," De Beers opted out in 2006, when its prospecting license expired, even though DeBeers knew that at Marange, the yield was more than 1000 carats per hundred tonnes, nearly ten times higher than another large field, Rio Tinto's concession in Zimbabwe's Midland province.

According to Keiron Hodgson, a Charles Stanley Securities analyst of the diamond sector, "Zimbabwe really does have the potential to upset the applecart. Zimbabwean officials anticipate that diamond production could generate between \$1 billion and \$2 billion per annum to an economy that has a GDP of around \$7.5 billion so I would understand the urgency to

produce diamonds from Zimbabwe, but I don't think they're going to go out and produce as many as they can because they are quite price aware.”

Many others, however, fear a price collapse from an increasingly desperate Zanu(PF) ruling party which needs the revenues to fight the coming national election in Zimbabwe, and which would probably have no hesitation to loot Marange as quickly as possible in the event of a loss of state power to the Movement for Democratic Change.

The US government was previously considered the most vociferous opposition to the export of Zimbabwe's 'conflict' stones, so considered because several hundred peasants were murdered by army troops in a 2007 massacre at Marange. But ever-unreliable and self-interested Washington State Department officials apparently caved to Mugabe's wishes for KP certification, provided that African states support their bid for KP chair in 2012.

Who couped the KP?

Two years ago, Farai Maguwu, head of the Centre for Research and Development and an incoming doctoral student at the UKZN Centre for Civil Society, was arrested in Mutare by Mugabe's government for allegedly endangering 'national security' by possessing information about the military's violation of human rights at Marange.

Maguwu's arrest appeared to be contrived: he met with the KP-appointed monitor Abbey Chikane, brother of former SA Presidency director-general Frank, who had tipped off Zimbabwean State intelligence officials in spite of claiming that the meeting was confidential. Maguwu believed, and stated publicly, that he had been 'set up' by Chikane.

Chikane argued that he received from Maguwu state security documents drafted by the army, while Maguwu rebuts that Chikane was fishing for said documents at the meeting.

According to Human Rights Watch, which gave Maguwu its highest award for rights advocacy in Africa, "He was imprisoned for more than a month and denied medical care to punish him. The authorities then illegally transferred him to various police cells with deplorable conditions even though he suffered from a serious health condition. Maguwu was released in early July and only finally cleared of all charges in October."

As for Chikane, the KP did not publicly reprimand him, nor did he resign. Complained Ian Smillie, known as one of the world's leading conflict diamond experts and a key architect of the KP, "We don't know where all the diamonds went that were approved by Abbey Chikane. Chikane was a mistake on several levels... He has extensive personal business interests

in the Southern African diamond industry that should have disqualified him from the outset.”

Is the KP fatally corrupted?

This leads to a bigger question: given Chikane’s chicanery and Washington’s grab of the KP, both at the expense of Zimbabweans being persecuted by Mugabe’s regime, should civil society chuck out the KP as a useful tool in monitoring multinational corporate activity in blood diamond zones?

After all, though some good may be claimed from KP activities in West Africa, the definition of conflict diamonds has excluded some of the world’s primary culprits: anti-democratic, corrupt and authoritarian ‘rent-seeking’ regimes, such as Namibia and Angola, who not only ‘self-regulate’ what constitutes KP-certified diamonds, but also act as partners to mining houses, therefore directly benefitting from diamond revenues.

Last week, Magawu was finally allowed to visit the Marange mines. As he then reported, “They have brought in state of the art equipment to intensify mining. I was deeply concerned with the level of mining taking place given that the money is not being accounted for. But we take this as a stepping stone, (hoping for) greater scrutiny by civil society. A meeting I held with (Finance Minister) Tendai Biti recently revealed that he had not yet received any information on the diamond auctions that were conducted in December and January respectively. If diamond revenue can’t reach the treasury then we may be sitting on a time bomb.”

Khadija Sharife is a researcher at the UKZN Centre for Civil Society.

Speculating on Hunger

Jean Ziegler 12 March 2012

How to control global food commodity trading

Financial speculators invested in food futures even before the great crash of 2008, driving up food prices to dangerous levels. This can and must be stopped.

The asphalt road was straight and monotonous. Baobab trees passed one after the other, and the earth was yellow and dusty, despite the early hour. The air in the old black Peugeot was stifling. I was travelling north, towards Senegal’s big plantations, with Adama Faye, an agronomist and

overseas development adviser to the Swiss embassy, and his driver Ibrahima Sar. We wanted to assess the impact of financial speculation on food, and we had the latest statistics from the African Development Bank. But Faye knew that a different kind of evidence was waiting for us. In the village of Louga, 100km from Saint-Louis, the car stopped abruptly. “Come and see my little sister,” Faye said. “She doesn’t need your statistics to explain what’s going on.”

There were a few stalls at the side of the road, a meagre market: mounds of cow peas and cassava, a few chickens clucking in cages, peanuts, wrinkled tomatoes, potatoes, and Spanish oranges and clementines. No mangoes, although Senegal is famous for them. Behind a stall, a young woman in a yellow kaftan and headscarf chatted with her neighbours. She was Faye’s sister Aisha. She was keen to answer questions, and got angry as she talked. Before long a noisy crowd of children, young people and old women had gathered around us.

A 50kg sack of imported rice had gone up to 14,000 CFA francs (\$27) (1), so the soup for the evening meal had become more watery, with only a few grains floating at the top. Women were now buying rice from the grocers by the cupful. In the last few years a small bottle of gas had gone up from 1,300 to 1,600 CFA francs, a kilo of carrots from 175 to 245 and a loaf of bread from 140 to 175, while a tray of 30 eggs had risen in a year from 1,600 to 2,500. It was the same story for fish. Aisha scolded her neighbours for being too timid in their accounts: “Tell the toubab [white man] what you pay for a kilo of rice! Tell him! Don’t be afraid. Prices are rising almost every day.”

That is how high finance slowly starves people, while they remain ignorant of the mechanisms of speculation.

You consume more than you sell

The trade in agricultural products is different from any other: it is a market where you consume more than you sell. Economist Olivier Pastré estimates that “the international trade in cereals represents barely more than 10% of production, taking into account all crops (7% for rice). The slightest rise or fall in global production could upset the whole market”. As demand has grown, supply (production) has proved not only fragmented, but extremely susceptible to the weather, drought, fires and floods.

That is why, at the beginning of the 20th century in Chicago, derivatives were invented. Their value is “derived” from the price of another “underlying” asset, such as stocks, bonds and other financial instruments. They were originally meant to allow farmers in the Midwest of the US to sell their crops at a fixed price prior to harvest, hence the term “futures contract”. If the stock price fell at the time of harvest, the farmer was

protected; if the price rose, investors made a profit.

But in the 1990s these assets came to be used for speculative rather than prudential purposes. Heiner Flassbeck, chief economist at the UN conference on trade and development (Unctad), established that between 2003 and 2008, speculation in raw materials using index funds (2) rose by 2,300% (3). At the end of this period the sudden rise in the price of basic foods provoked food riots in 37 countries. Television showed images of Haitian women in the slums of Cité-Soleil making pancakes out of mud to feed their children. Urban unrest, looting and protests bringing hundreds of thousands of people out on the streets in Cairo, Dakar, Mumbai, Port-au-Prince and Tunis, demanding bread to survive, dominated front pages.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) 2008 price index averaged 24% above the 2007 figure, and 57% higher than in 2006. The manufacture of bio-ethanol in the US — boosted by annual subsidies of \$6bn to producers of “green gold” — considerably reduced the US supply of maize to the world market. Since maize is important as animal feed, scarcity, at a time when demand for meat was rising, also contributed to rising prices from 2006 on. “The other main food cereal, rice, followed more or less the same trend,” said economist Philippe Chalmin, “with prices in Bangkok rising from \$250 to more than \$1,000 a ton”. The world suddenly realised that in the 21st century, tens of millions of people were dying of hunger. But little was said or done.

Alarm in the US Senate

Speculation in food has increased following the financial crisis: turning their backs on the mess they had created, speculators — particularly hedge funds — moved into agricultural markets. To them, all the planet’s resources are fair game for speculation, including basic foods such as rice, maize and wheat, which together make up 75% of global food consumption (50% for rice). According to the FAO’s 2011 report, only 2% of futures contracts for raw materials end with the actual delivery of the product. The other 98% are traded by speculators before their expiry date.

The phenomenon reached such proportions that the US Senate became concerned, and in July 2009 denounced “excessive speculation” in wheat, criticising the fact that some traders held as many as 53,000 wheat futures contracts at any one time. The Senate also complained that six index funds were currently authorised to hold 130,000 contracts on wheat at a time, 20 times more than the authorised limit for standard financial operators (4).

The US Senate is not alone in its alarm. In January 2011 another institution described the rise in raw material prices, particularly of food, as

one of the five biggest threats to the wellbeing of nations, on a par with cyber warfare and terrorists with weapons of mass destruction. That institution was the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos.

The criticism is surprising given this exclusive group's method of recruitment. The WEF's founder, Swiss economist Klaus Schwab, has not left membership of his 1,000-member club to chance. Only the heads of companies with a turnover of over \$1bn are invited to join. Members pay a \$10,000 fee, which gives them access to all meetings. They include many speculators.

The opening speeches in Davos in 2011 clearly outlined the problem. Delegates strongly condemned "irresponsible speculators" who, seeking only profit, destroyed food markets and increased global hunger. The issue was discussed at seminars, conferences, cocktail parties and private meetings in hotels. It seems odd that global hunger finds its most attentive audience in the fondue restaurants, bars and bistros of Davos.

Flassbeck came up with a radical solution to defeat the speculators, and protect agricultural raw materials from their repeated attacks: removing food from their grasp. He proposes that the UN give Unctad worldwide control over setting stock prices for agricultural raw materials. Only producers, traders and users of these materials would be able to intervene on the futures markets. Anyone who traded wheat, rice, or oil, would have to deliver the goods. It would also be advisable to impose a high minimum level of self-finance on traders. Anyone who did not make use of a traded good would be excluded from the stock exchange.

If the "Flassbeck method" were implemented, it would remove speculation from the basics of survival, and hinder the financialisation of food markets. A coalition of research and non-governmental organisations vigorously supports Flassbeck and Unctad's proposal. But governments lack the will to implement it.

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Capitalism's New Money Addicts

Jack Rasmus 7 March 2012

Growing sectors of Capital are becoming addicts—dependant on virtually free money from central banks, from Europe to the USA to Japan. That means, in particular, banks, financial intermediaries, stock market and commodities institutional speculators, and even a growing segment of

non-bank corporations.

Since 2008 the US central bank, the Federal Reserve, has pumped more than \$9 trillion into the banking and financial system to prevent it from collapsing. It has done this at great cost, however. The trillions of dollars of liquidity injections from the Fed have not eliminated the original problem that that liquidity was supposed to resolve: i.e. removal of the bad assets on financial balance sheets. Those bad assets still remain for most part, especially for institutions like Citigroup and Bank of America that - were it not for phony bank stress tests and suspension of normal accounting rules since 2009 - would be technically bankrupt today. The Fed has not 'removed' those bad assets, which have only in part been written off as losses; the Fed has merely mirrored them by adding them to its own balance sheet. In so doing, it has bought some time. But that is all. It has not resulted in sustained recovery of the US economy in any real sense.

For the past three years since February 2009, the Obama administration and supporters have argued that the Fed's \$9 trillion bailouts would generate recovery for the rest of the U.S. economy. But in this objective, it has clearly failed. Except for stock and bond markets, large company corporate profits, CEOs pay and bankers' bonuses, and the wealthiest 10% households, nearly all economic indicators today still remain below their level when the recession began. And some indicators—especially jobs, housing, and local governments' finances—are significantly below pre-recession levels.

The Fed's virtually zero interest loans to banks, and its more than \$2.7 trillion in direct purchases of bonds from the private financial sector using printed money (called 'Quantitative Easing' or QE), has not revived the economy. What that massive injection of liquidity to banks and investors has accomplished is a hand-stuffing of the capitalist goose with free money. That liquidity has financed stock and commodity market booms, that in turn have provoked inflation which reduces the real incomes of a 100 million US working and middle class households. That process, moreover, has occurred on three separate occasions in the US since 2008.

There have been three stock and commodity market booms since 2008. Remember gas prices hitting nearly \$5 in the spring of 2008, then again in the spring of 2011, and now once more this spring 2012? Stock market and commodity price boomlets accompanied the massive liquidity injections during each of those same periods. Both stock market and commodities booms, and the resultant inflation, were immediately 'fed' by the Federal Reserve's QE policies: The 2008 event was highly correlated with the Fed's bailout of Bear Stearns and rescue auctions of the shadow banks in 2008. The 2010 stock-commodity boom was

similarly set off by the Fed's QE1 \$1.75 trillion direct bond purchases and zero interest loans to banks in 2009. When the QE1 bond buying stopped in late spring 2010, the stock and commodity markets immediately collapsed. When the Fed announced another \$600 billion QE2 in the fall 2010, the stock-commodity booms took off again in late 2010 and into the spring of 2011. When that QE2 buying binge finished in late spring 2011, the stock-commodity markets quickly fell back once again. Banks and investors once more demanded another round of Fed bond buying and free money. That led to the Fed's 'operation twist' bond buying in late 2011, as well as demands for even more generous QE3 money injection since late last year. With that, the stock market surged again from late 2011 continuing today into 2012. Highly correlated with all the QE1, 2 and 3 and free money have been three corresponding bouts of stock and commodity - especially oil - price expansion and speculation. In other words, there's an almost perfect correlation between Fed monetary bailouts, QE, and zero loan policies 'coming and going' and corresponding stock and commodity speculation 'stop-go' since 2008 to the present.

Here's how it works: The Fed pumps no cost money into the banks. The banks then loan it at 5%-10% to speculators like hedge funds, private equity firms, 'dark pool' stock buying consortia, and other institutional and wealthy individual speculators. The latter then funnel the money into large block stock purchases, into commodity futures, speculate with credit default swaps on Euro sovereign bonds in Greece, Spain, etc., further exacerbating those crises, or into currency speculation (one favorite: the Brazilian currency, the Real), Hong Kong and Chinese property, etc. Where the Fed money doesn't go, however, is into loans to small and medium businesses in the US for which it was originally purportedly intended or to aid the recovery of the collapsed housing and commercial property markets in the U.S.

After three years, 2009-12, it appears the U.S. financial system is becoming increasingly addicted to this Free Money from the Fed, increasingly (QE) money printed by the Fed instead of traditional Treasury bond open market operations.

But when the Fed stops, the stock and commodity markets flop.

The fundamental question therefore: if the Fed ever permanently ceases providing free money, can the stock, commodity, and even bond markets function on their own any more without that prop of multi-trillions of dollars? And there's a converse to all this, of even greater importance: what happens when the Fed tries to retrieve those trillions of free money by cutting off the free money and raising interest rates? If it takes the recent massive liquidity injection just to keep the Capitalist financial

system barely functioning, what happens should the Fed try to retrieve that liquidity? The Capitalist system may be 'super sensitive' to attempts to slow an economy, as well as 'super insensitive' to attempts to stimulate an economy. What that means is that it takes an ever-increasing massive liquidity injection to keep the system from collapsing in a recession phase, but that it will take very little Fed shift from free money and raising interest rates to choke off a nascent recovery of the economy in an early expansion phase. Stated differently in economists' parlance, this means the financial system today may have now become 'liquidity and interest rate inelastic' in efforts to stimulate recovery, but conversely 'liquidity and interest rate elastic' given attempts to slow a recovery.

This addiction is not limited to the US financial system. It appears to be spreading as well to the non-banking sector. Large corporations increasingly do not appear eager today to invest their massive earnings and cash now on hand, estimated at more than \$2.5 trillion, nor even to distribute most of it to their shareholders. They prefer to hoard it. The super-cheap Fed money means they either borrow it, through their financial subsidiary if they have one, directly from the Fed, or borrow from banks at today's super low interest rates. Or they issue cheap corporate bonds, take on more debt, and use the borrowed funds to buy back their company stock and pay dividends to their shareholders. In other words, they borrow money at the super low rates and pay themselves the unearned capital gains 'profits'. They don't have to 'make' profits; they just transfer the free money from the Fed to their shareholders.

Among smaller and medium sized businesses, the main 'play' is to issue a mountain of high risk, 'junk bond' debt on their companies' assets. Often, they issue new junk bonds to roll over and payoff old junk bonds, compounding the debt on their balance sheets. Junk bond issuance hit record levels in 2010 and now again in 2012. But the junk bond booms are made possible by the Fed's free money. Much of this junk bond debt is set to come due in 2013-14. But should interest rates rise, small-medium business defaults will almost certainly escalate to record levels for those non-financial companies now addicted, it appears, to junk bond debt.

Another way to look at the addiction to free or super low cost money is that it is being made available because banks, speculators, and even non-bank companies are increasingly unable to generate profits from traditional normal business activities. So the central bank in a crisis must spoon-feed them the money to prevent their collapse. Capitalist companies are less interested today in making money by making things than in turning speculative profits, based on Fed free money availability and by borrowing in lieu of real profits creation. Of course, there are exceptions—in emerging markets infrastructure investment, making cars and iPads in China, and so forth. But I'm talking here about a growing

trend and growing apparent dependency—that is, an addiction.

And the phenomenon increasingly is not limited to the US economy today. We now see this same development and trend occurring in the Eurozone with the European Central Bank, ECB.

Late last year, as the Eurozone economy and financial system began approaching a crisis stage with Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy, etc. and, beneath the surface, the private banking systems throughout Europe. To prevent a run on the Euro private banking system, the European Central Bank, ECB, embarked upon a strategy almost exactly like the U.S. Federal Reserve's. Last week alone, the ECB pumped 530 billion euros, or \$777 billion, into the banks at 1% interest. That follows a previous 489 billion euros injected late last year, i.e. another \$700 billion. (Which followed another \$500 billion in 2010). That's a total of more than \$1.5 trillion in just six months of virtually free money pumped into the euro banking system, no doubt in anticipation of bank failures occurring in the wake of the Greek and other European bond crises. That massive recent ECB injection has temporarily stabilized the banking system in the Eurozone, much as this writer predicted last December would happen. However, 'temporary' is the operative term here. It is not likely another such liquidity injection will occur prior to a string of bank collapses taking place first, given growing opposition by the Germans to the ECB 'printing money' like the Federal Reserve. Meanwhile, the Greek debt crisis will almost certainly erupt once again before year end 2012. And Spain and Portugal and other Euro periphery economies are not far behind. The point is: massive liquidity injections by central banks may temporarily stabilize a banking crisis, but not permanently. Furthermore, they do not result in economic recovery—and in ways actually serve to constrain that same general economic recovery by precipitating inflation and reducing consumption. Here's how massive liquidity injections, 'free money', restrain recovery:

The massive liquidity injections now commencing in Europe, just as they have been in the US since 2009, have not to date resulted in the European economies avoiding recession. Nor will the Fed's 'free money' prevent the coming of another recession in the US by 2013. Today's European recession train has left the station and Europe is now well on its way toward a generalized downturn. It's only a question of how deep and how long. That rapid Euro slowdown has already begun impacting the rest of the global economy, as exports to Europe from China, India, and Japan are now falling, in turn slowing growth in China, India, and the rest of the global economy. The European recession will also mean fewer US exports and a further slowdown of the U.S. economy as U.S. manufacturing pulls back, which is already underway. Contrary to business pundits and the Obama administration, there is no way manufacturing can lead the US

economy to a sustained recovery this year, next, or ever!

The joint Federal Reserve and ECB massive injection of free money into the global economy will continue to set off stock and commodity price inflation worldwide. For the rest of us non-professional investors that translates into more inflation, which is already happening, as commodity prices like gasoline and food escalate in both Europe and the U.S. In the U.S. gasoline prices alone in some places rose by 40 cents a gallon in a matter of just two weeks last month. And that's well before the spring take-off in gasoline prices kicks in. That inflation means a further fall in household income, already declining for the past three years, less consumption in turn, more household credit card spending to try to make up for it, and especially severe stress on retiree fixed income households. It will also mean the recent passage of the extension of the payroll tax cuts will be largely absorbed by the oil companies—just as half of the same payroll tax cut in 2011 was absorbed by rising gas prices. The overall consequences for the US economy in turn later this year could prove negative.

To sum up, a real question remains whether the global capitalist system today, in particular in the northern tier of Europe, North America, and Japan—can function any longer as it once had. It may have become so addicted to, and so dependent upon, free central bank money, that it is questionable whether it can wean itself off that 'fire hose' injection of free money. Europe looks much like the US now in that regard, and both look very much like their predecessor capitalist invalid, Japan.

Like true addicts, attempts at some point to return to pre-crisis arrangements may result in such severe 'withdrawal symptoms' that the US and Euro economies may rapidly contract at the first attempt to shake the addiction. Going 'cold turkey' could result in a more severe economic contraction and recession than even that experienced during the 2007-09 initial downturn. Some form of 'monetary methadone medical' injection may have to continue. The patient may prove permanently in need of assistance—paid for by the rest of the economy. That means us. It also means more or less permanent 'austerity' blood transfusions. But blood transfusions cannot go on indefinitely. As some point the donors will shout, 'I'm not going to die' to save them and will tear off the hyperdermic needle.

However, before that occurs, in the interim the Eurozone's current massive money injection by the ECB to the euro banks, and the U.S. Federal Reserve's continuing liquidity injection to US banks, will no doubt continue. Continuing as well will be repeated stop-go cycles of stock market and commodity bubbles that stifle economic recovery, gasoline and food price inflation, further pressure on real incomes,

hesitant consumption spending, and weak, unsustainable economic recovery.

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Jack Rasmus is the author of the forthcoming, April 2012 book, OBAMA'S ECONOMY: RECOVERY FOR THE FEW, Palgrave-Macmillan (US) and Pluto books, (UK). His website is www.kykloproductions.com and his blog, jackrasmus.com.

The other India rises in massive general strike

Lal Khan 6 March 2012

After being coerced for decades in communal frenzy, sectarian violence, regional conflicts, caste prejudices, religious bigotry, nationalist chauvinism, regional antagonisms, democratic deception and cricket hysteria by the ruling classes and their harlot media, the Indian proletariat is awakening to the new epoch that is dawning across the planet. The 24-hour general strike that took place on 28th February is a turning point in the social and political evolution of present day India.

Shining India, new superpower, the largest, buoyant economy with its tantalising growth rates, were all the new clichés that have defined India of the twenty-first century. The twenty-seven storey palatial residence built by Mukesh Ambani, with several helipads and swimming pools, including the most modern gadgets exuded blatant and hedonic luxury in the midst of the grubby and dreadful shanty towns of Bombay.

It is a country where more than 250,000 farmers burdened by unbearable debt and usury have committed suicide using the pesticides they were supposed to use to boost their crop yields. The acquisition of a Jaguar manufacturing plant by Ramesh Tata was another feather in the cap of Indian success, while more than a billion starved on an income of 50 cents a day in this largest "democracy" on earth.

While the imperialist monopolies sucked blood from the mother India, the Indian corporate bosses ventured from Europe to the Gulf States to boost their profits. In their voracious lust, these large scale bunyas stashed away \$500billion of corruption money in Swiss banks while every year more than thirty thousand children continue to die due to malnutrition in this cradle of early human civilisation.

With record economic growth of the last two decades the income inequality has doubled, ranking the country as last amongst the so-called “emerging” economies. The price hikes, restructuring of labour, privatisations and deregulation of the economy, wage freezes and other “neoliberal” policies made the lives of even those in work overwrought. At the same time, the large swathes of suburban and rural populations continued to slide into the abyss of harrowing poverty and deprivation.

Corruption scandals involving the reactionary politicians and the hue and cry over petty non-issues went on unabated. The movement around a neo-fascist demagogue, Anna Hazare, was mainly sponsored by sections of corporate capital to malign their financial and political adversaries, but above all to divert and vent steam from the seething revolt in society beneath this smog of the burgeoning chaos.

The fact is that the greed infested Indian media has been playing a pernicious role in its crusade to observe a criminal silence over the real issues afflicting the teeming millions, while constantly whipping up religious and nationalist chauvinism. However, in the wake of the general strike call issued by eleven major trade union federations, the media machines came into full sway and a torrent of negative propaganda was unleashed against the strike.

The political sceptics and cynics of the left found a much needed succour in this media campaign. The “independent” world media joined in the chorus about the “failure” of the strike. The fact is that although the strike did not bring India to a total standstill, it was one of the most significant movements of the Indian proletariat on real issues, cutting across the prejudices and divisions imposed upon the masses to detract, distort and dent their class unity.

Gurudas Dasgupta, general secretary of the All India Trade Unions Congress (AITUC), a Communist Party affiliated trade union federation, described the general strike in the following words on the eve of 28February, “This is a historic occasion. For the first time all the big trade unions have come together to protest the anti-labour policies of the government.”

According to some trade union officials almost a hundred million workers joined the strike calling for a national minimum wage, permanent jobs for 50 million contract workers, immediate decrease in the cost of living and an end to the policy of privatisation. According to AFP, transport, banking, postal services and most of the public sector came to a halt. Bombay, the commercial hub of India, experienced the largest strike in its recent history.

Such was the pressure of the workers from below that most trade union leaders and federations had to heed the strike call to sustain a semblance of credibility amongst the workers who are seething with revulsion against their reformist and compromising policies. Even the trade union federation affiliated to the ruling Congress party, INTUC had to join the strike. Its president G. Sanjeeva Reddy, had this to say: "Our most important demand is the abolition of contract labour and a check on the uncontrolled increase in prices." In some cities even the Bharitya Janata Party (BJP) affiliated unions had to participate. Apart from the ruling Congress and its coalition partners, the mainstream opposition parties like the BJP vehemently opposed the strike.

Unfortunately, the leadership of the Communist Parties has totally surrendered to capitalism. These left leaders have completely abandoned the idea of the socialist transformation of society. They have even abandoned the disastrous two stage theory of revolution, moving even further back and have now embarked upon the one stage mantra, not towards socialism, but adopting bourgeois democracy as the final goal. Their enthusiasm for direct foreign investment and their dancing to the tunes of corporate vultures led to their humiliating defeat in West Bengal and elsewhere.

However, in spite of this treacherous role of its traditional leadership, the Indian proletariat is making a comeback on the stage of history. There has been ferment in the ranks of the Communist parties with sections of the youth developing illusions in the Maoist insurgency. But the tactics of guerrilla struggle cannot defeat the monstrous bourgeois state. Adventurism and opportunism are in fact two sides of the same coin, the capitulation of the leadership of the Maoists to the right-wing West Bengal government of Mamta Bannerjee has exposed their ideological bankruptcy and disgusted the youth moving towards them.

In 65 years the Indian ruling classes, with more billionaires than Japan now, has utterly failed to complete any of the tasks of the national democratic revolution. Its historical failure is too glaring to ignore. There is no way forward for the Indian masses under capitalism. Economic growth has already begun to slow down and the social conditions of the masses are destined to deteriorate further.

The leadership of the Communist parties will have to accept that the character of the Indian revolution can only be socialist and it will spread across the whole region leading to the Socialist Federation of South Asia. If they fail to understand this, the youth and the new wave of the struggles of the mighty Indian proletariat will push these leaders to one side and chisel out a new Marxist revolutionary leadership to meet to the challenges posed by history. The latest general strike indicates that the

“other India” of the oppressed and exploited workers, the youth and the peasants, is rising once again.

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Quebec: Students take “indefinite” strike action

Tens of thousands in battle against tuition fees rise

Cedric Gerome, (CWI Quebec) 5 March 2012

A powerful students’ struggle is sweeping over Quebec. Over 65,000 university and "CEGEPS" (public post-secondary education colleges) students are currently engaged in an indefinite general strike all over the province. At the core of the dispute is the biggest neo-liberal attack on education since 1990, with a dramatic increase in student fees of 1625\$, scheduled over five years. This represents a rise of around 75% of student costs to access to post-secondary education.

University costs in Quebec are already above the average of the OECD countries. Currently, 65% of students in Quebec finish their studies with an average debt of \$14,000. The new measures, if passed, will hit young people from working class and middle class families even harder. It will force many of them away from access to post-secondary education and leave many others with the ‘choice’ of getting massively indebted and working during their studies.

The right wing provincial government of Jean Charest says that even after the increases, Quebec university students will still be paying less than the Canadian average for a higher education. This is a cynical attempt at ‘divide-and-rule’ policies aimed at pitching Canadians against the struggle of Quebec students.

What the Establishment politicians do not explain by using this comparison, is the fast-developing social segregation taking place in the Canadian education system. This is to such an extent that, according to official figures, the number of Canadian students contracting a debt of up to \$50,000 has risen by an incredible 1,475% in the last four years! According to CBCNews, “Thirty years ago, tuition fees accounted for less than a seventh of university operating revenue. Now, it’s more than a third, as governments increasingly download the cost to the students and their parents”. This is the ‘model’ they want to import in Quebec.

Furthermore, comparatively low tuition fees in Quebec are a direct result of important student strikes (in 1996 and 2005) that have partially

succeeding in cutting across the attempts of the successive governments of rolling back the idea of an accessible education, for all. This clearly highlights the decisive character of mass struggle to impose retreats on neo-liberal attacks, in the education field, as elsewhere. And this is the kind of mass, prolonged fight that tens of thousands of Quebec students are currently engaged in. They understand, very well, that their battle is part of the general struggle for their future, which is increasingly undermined by the 'logic' of the market economic system.

No money to finance education?

To justify the increase in tuition fees, the government of Jean Charest and its supporters keep repeating that there is not enough money to finance education. The students should pay their "fair share" to balance the budget as a whole, the government argues. Yet the same government says nothing about university rectors earning wages above \$300,000 a year, does nothing about the \$2.5 billion annually lost in tax evasion by the rich and big corporations, gives record amounts of public subsidies to vulture private companies making enormous profits and sells off, at a discount, Quebec's mineral resources.

There clearly is no lack of money in Quebec. The main problem is that capitalist politicians have decided to impoverish students and the workers, instead of hitting the pockets and bank accounts of the super-rich elite, who do not pay their "fair share" and enrich themselves at the expense of the rest of society.

Escalating movement

Two weeks after the start of the 'hostilities', following a call by the 'Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante' (CLASSE), an umbrella organisation, gathering several student associations, the strike continues to spread, involving mass street protests, sit-ins, occupations and picketing across the province. This sometimes includes innovative actions, such as 'underground' protests or the blockade by hundreds of the Montreal Stock Exchange, for several hours, on 16 February.

After a first wave of students voted for the strike in mid-February, new layers have joined in. Several other student associations and unions are about to vote in favour of taking strike action in the coming days and weeks, meaning that tens of thousands more could add to, even double, the ranks of strikers in the near future.

This is already one of the biggest students' strikes in Quebec's recent history. A victorious outcome to such a movement would not fail to leave a profound mark, not only on every student who participates in the movement, but on the Quebec working population, which suffers cuts and

a bosses' offensive on wages, jobs and conditions.

Indeed, the students are not the only ones affected by the neo-liberal policies of the Charest government. In addition to the rising tuition costs, the introduction of a healthcare tax, the increases of electricity rates and other measures are part of this cuts-spending and tax-increase programme. The students are not the only ones to fight back. Important industrial battles have taken place in recent months, such as at the Rio Tinto Alcan aluminum factory and the ArcelorMittal metal plant near Montreal. For the student movement to be successful, the struggle needs to be spread, especially to the organised working class.

In the context of the austerity policies being carried out, the students' movement forcing the government to retreat could serve as a spark for broader layers to move into action, not only in Quebec but across Canada.

Some initiatives have been undertaken to link up the student strike with other community and working class campaigns. This is among the proposals that Alternative Socialiste, the CWI section in Quebec, is advocating in the student's movement. Alternative Socialiste calls for the students' struggle to appeal for active support beyond the students, to build a united mass movement against the rise of tuition fees and all cuts and in opposition to the unpopular reforms of the Charest and Harper federal government.

Union leaders fall short

However, at this stage, these sorts of initiatives are not advocated by the leaders of the trade union bureaucracies whose support for the student movement has remained at the level of pure rhetoric. The Fédération provinciale du travail du Québec, the biggest union federation in the province, which organises over 600,000 workers and 44% of the unionised workforce in Quebec, expressed its solidarity with the students but, at the same time, its leaders argue for a rapid way out of the disputes. They argue that the students' strike needs to be resolved "on the negotiating table with dialogue between all parties". The union leaders have refused, so far, to engage in anything concrete to help build overwhelming support for the students' struggle.

When it comes to the main students' unions leaders, they fall short in providing a programme of action for success for the strike. In part, this is because they fear losing control over their own membership and aim to keep the strike within 'safe channels', limiting it to a single issue. This is only laying the basis for a poor negotiated deal with the government. This is what happened in 2005, which saw the last generalised student movement in Quebec, when student union leaders' encouraged students to accept concessions instead of using the strength of the movement and an

appeal to the organised working class for solidarity action, to go further and to achieve a complete victory.

There can be no 'deal' in the current dispute which sees anything less than a complete withdrawal of the tuition fees increase. A negotiated attack on students' rights is still an attack on students' rights. The Education Minister has made clear that he is determined, at all costs, to pass the measure and states it is part of the budget decision that cannot be modified. A similar determination to win should be the general stance on the students' side.

Polls already indicate that the support and sympathy for the student strike is mounting, despite the propaganda of the mass media, the attempts at criminalising the movement, and the police repression against students, using baton, pepper spray and making mass arrests.

These polls indicate the potential for a broader movement in opposition to fees and cuts, which needs to be urgently built. For example, a call should be done by student and workers unions alike, as well as by all community campaigns, to join the students in their national demonstration taking place on the 22 March, in Montreal and to hold strike actions on the same day, to build a united show of strength against the austerity policies of the government.

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Put Equality First

Vanessa Baird 3 March 2012

'You can't evict an idea,' read a sign posted in the window of 21-29 Sun Street, in the City of London.

The grey concrete office block, owned by the Swiss bank UBS, had been invaded and turned into a 'Bank of Ideas' by members of London's Occupy movement.

Inside, instead of screens and monitors showing the ups and downs of the markets, walls were decorated with Banksy-style graffiti art. Where there might have been a boardroom table, ping pong was being played.

Upstairs, small children were squealing. Offices once used by senior staff on six-figure salaries were now providing shelter for homeless families.

In a large room, people were gathering for a conference with the title 'Beyond Capitalism'.

Apart from the crisis in capitalism – 'utterly bankrupt at every level' as one participant put it – a recurrent theme was 'inequality'.

Me too

Fast-forward a couple of weeks to a very different gathering, at the Swiss ski resort of Davos. This is where around 2,500 of the world's political and business leaders were meeting for the World Economic Forum.

The conference this year was modestly entitled 'The Great Transformation'. Here too equality made an appearance. At the \$40,000-a-head event some expressed dismay at the 'vulgarity' of bankers' outsize bonuses. Some business leaders even claimed that it was 'unsustainable' not to tackle growing inequality.

This is new. The entrenched neoliberal view has always been that inequality does not matter; the free market will make life better for everyone. Equality thinking hinders enterprise.

Why the change of tack?

One reason could be found not far from the conference centre, in a car park where a small group of Occupiers had set up a camp of igloos and yurts, a climate-adapted version of any of the 800 or so protest camps, large and small, that have popped up around the world in recent months.

Though at first disparaged as naïve and directionless, the Occupy movement struck a chord with the public and got the corporate and political élites rattled.

Leaders have had to amend their rhetoric. Barack Obama and Britain's David Cameron have recently called for 'responsible capitalism' and an economy that is 'more fair'. Australia's Julia Gillard says the country can 'build a rich, fair economy'. Even US Republican hopeful Mitt Romney (a finance millionaire who pays income tax at 13 per cent) admits he is 'worried about the 99 per cent'.

The discovery of equality is not all down to the Occupy movement. Books like *The Spirit Level* have provided convincing academic evidence that more equal societies do better in every way.¹ Even at the IMF, says Nobel-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, senior people are talking about equality now.

So the high-priests of capitalism are changing their tune. What about their performance?

Unstable...

It really did seem, for a moment in 2008, like the political and business élites had accepted that urgent action was needed to rein in the excesses of the finance sector. The banks had driven the global finance system over the edge of a cliff, and were held in suspension only by the public purse strings.

Four years later, what has been achieved?
Not a lot.

Let's hear what those people at Davos have to say about the current state of things. The reporting rules protect their anonymity in the sessions, so they are able to speak more candidly.

'Every conceivable debt is at record levels,' said one panellist. 'I just don't see how it is tenable to say that we can grow our way out of it.'

In one session a straw poll was held in which the question was asked: 'Is the financial system safer now?' Of the 140 people packed into the room, just 10 agreed. About half of them worried that it had become even worse, reported the BBC's Tim Weber.²

The world is awash with debt, and we still don't really know how much of it is 'toxic'. Trading in derivatives – partly blamed for the last crisis – is going through the roof. And while traditional banking is scaling back its lending – especially to small and medium-sized business – the riskier and less regulated 'shadow banking' in the form of hedge funds, money markets and private equity, is back at its pre-crisis peak.

...and unequal

If the world is more unstable, it's also more unequal. The gap between rich and poor in Western economies is at its widest in 30 years, says the OECD. The gap is also growing in India, China and other parts of the Global South.

One of the unintended consequences of US quantitative easing was to flood the world with money, which caused a sharp rise in the price of food, pushing the world's poorest billion people deeper into poverty.

The super-rich, by contrast, only saw a slight dip in their fortunes. In 2009, at the height of the crisis, average Wall Street bonuses were back close to the highest in history. In 2010 Forbes magazine counted a record 1,200 billionaires in the world – up 28 per cent on 2007

In Greece the suicide rate has gone up by 40 per cent in one year

And it's not just bankers. Corporate profits in the US rose by 57 per cent

in the 18 months up to the beginning of 2010. Businesses took advantage of the slump to freeze pay, cut hours and shed labour. Salary payments fell by \$122 billion over the same period.⁴

Living standards have dropped for most people in the US, Britain and the rest of Europe. Real incomes in Britain have been stagnant since 2005. In countries like Greece and Ireland they have plummeted. Homelessness is soaring. Between a quarter and a half of young people in southern Europe and North Africa cannot find jobs.

Austerity measures aimed at reducing national budget deficits have cut into public services and stymied chances of recovery. Women have been disproportionately affected, both in job losses and in their role as carers for other family members. Even Canada's welfare system is in the firing line. In Greece the suicide rate has gone up by 40 per cent in one year – prior to that the country had the lowest rate in Europe.⁵

Legendary billionaire Warren Buffet says: 'There's class warfare, all right, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war – and we're winning.'

Inequality at the root

A couple of years ago Nobel economist Paul Krugman noticed that just before the 2007 credit crunch the disparity in income in the US was greater than at any time since just before the Wall Street Crash in 1928. 'Coincidence or causation?' he asked.⁶

In a new book, British economist Stewart Lansley places the issue of inequality squarely at the root of the crisis, and provides a plethora of facts and figures to back his case.⁴

In the US in the 1960s, the gap between the pay of top executives in average companies and that of all workers was 42 to 1. By 2007 it had risen to 344 to 1. The trend is similar almost everywhere else.

But the model of economic growth and development being pursued required high levels of consumption – by everyone, including the low-paid. How to reconcile the two? Credit. Cheap, easy, plentiful credit. Have what you want now and pay later. Debt made the underpaid feel less poor than they were and sedated unrest.

At the same time governments were eager to promote the dream of home ownership. They encouraged banks to create huge amounts of mortgage debt. Even the tricky issue of selling mortgages to people who could not afford them was surmountable by using complex financial instruments.

Inequality, of almost every kind, lay at the heart of the US sub-prime

mortgage bubble that finally burst in 2007. Fortunes had been made by international banks and brokers who had exploited the ‘untapped market’ of low-income people. The loans they had taken out had high rates of return for the lenders.

In the end it was the low-income people who were left homeless, penniless and with a blighted credit record. For ordinary folk there was no bank bailout, no quick solution. Just enduring hardship. In a single month, July 2010, a record 93,000 US homes were repossessed.

An economy based on debt not only deepens inequality. It also has a way of killing freedom and democracy – both at a personal level and at a national level.

Reform – timid and slow

Well-intended initiatives to introduce safeguards, like the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform Act in the US and the Vicker’s recommendations in Britain, have been weakened by intensive lobbying from the finance sector and delay in implementation. The British plan to separate retail and investment banking is not slated to happen until 2019. That’s about the time it took for the Americans to decide to put a man on the moon and to actually do it. A similar timescale applies to international agreements – under Basel III – to tighten up rules on how much capital banks need to hold.

At the time of writing, only Nicholas Sarkozy seems to be keen to move on a financial transactions (aka Tobin) tax that most EU countries agree would be a way of raising revenue, slowing down the riskiest trading and reducing market volatility. But even he is putting it off until after the French presidential election. The tax is unequivocally resisted by David Cameron, proudly defending the City of London’s status as a hub for derivatives trading and the world’s biggest tax haven.

Who owns this dog?

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez recently announced that he would consider nationalizing any bank that refused to finance agricultural projects promoted by his government. The country’s banks are required by law to provide at least 10 per cent for such public schemes.

It raises the question: why can’t other leaders get tough with banks that are clearly failing in their duty to lend productively? Why can’t leaders like Obama and Cameron bring the spoilt and badly behaved rotweiler of banking to heel?

The answer is simple: they don’t own the dog; the dog owns them.

The ownership is partly ideological. Successive governments in Britain and the US have been captured by the idea that a large untrammelled

finance sector is the key to success.

But there is another, more grubby, reason for their timidity.

The finance lobby is the richest and most powerful in the world. In the US it is the largest source of campaign contributions; since 2006 it has given more than \$1.2 billion to the two main parties. In the election cycle leading to Obama's victory, bankers gave most money to the Democrats.

The top individual recipients for 2011-12, so far, are Mitt Romney (\$7.8 million) and Barack Obama (\$4 million).⁷ Watch out.

In Britain the ruling Conservative Party got 50 per cent of its funds from the finance sector in the election year of 2010.⁸ And we know that the 'zombie' Royal Bank of Scotland (80 per cent owned by the state) spent \$4 million of British taxpayers' money lobbying in Washington to water down banking reforms aimed at making the system safer.⁹

Imagination and ideas

Writer and activist Susan George dubs the people who run the world 'the Davos class'.

'They run our major institutions, know exactly what they want, and are well organized. But they have weaknesses too. For they are wedded to an ideology that isn't working and they have virtually no ideas or imagination to resolve this.'¹⁰

Fortunately, this cannot be said for the plethora of groups and individuals who are working on alternatives. There is no single magic bullet, but no shortage of ideas. We lay out some of these in *Getting there: a roadmap* elsewhere in Issue 450.

Many are plain common sense. For example, end casino banking and get banks to do their job: linking people who want to borrow with those who want to lend. Some, like radical Australian economist Steve Keen, argue for the nationalization of banks; Susan George prefers to talk of 'socialization' to bring them under citizen control. Regulate speculative activities and outlaw dangerous financial instruments that harm the wider economy.

Others want to reform the money system itself. 'The creation of money is too important to leave in the hands of bankers or politicians,' argues Ben Dyson from the campaign group Positive Money. They want a transparent, independent, accountable body to have that power. (Some 97 per cent of the money in the British economy is currently created by private banks through generating debt; only three per cent is issued by the state.)

Another bit of common sense: don't pay debts that aren't yours. It's something that citizens in Iceland have grasped – in two referendums they have refused to pay international debts incurred by banks and bankers. But then Iceland has let its failing banks go bust, sought money from the IMF and expanded its social safety net. The economy is now recovering. It is possible to put citizens before banks.

The Republic of Ireland took the opposite route, underwriting the debts of Anglo Irish and INBS in a hasty move that will have cost Irish citizens \$60 billion and countless hardship by 2031.

Now a coalition of Irish trade unionists and NGOs has launched the 'Anglo: Not Our Debt' campaign calling for the suspension of further payments of 'this unjust debt'.

In another Irish initiative people are squatting buildings repossessed by banks that received public bailouts. Something similar is happening in the US.

A fair economy is impossible without a fair tax system and so tax justice activists around the world are exposing corporate tax dodgers, campaigning to close tax havens and the loopholes that enable rich individuals and companies to escape paying their dues.

Finally, if the politicians' concern for equality is to be believed, they will need to redirect money away from propping up the finance system and towards major programmes of education and job creation on a scale unseen since the 1930s. Many could be green jobs (see Is the Green New Deal a dead duck?, elsewhere in Issue 450) which would help countries transition to a low-carbon economy. For a fair economy has to include a more careful and equal use of the world's resources; an imperative of sustainability as opposed to profit-driven growth. It also requires recognition that the natural environment is a public good, not just an opportunity for private enterprise.

Equality in action

On the steps of St Paul's Cathedral a dozen people are sitting in a circle. A man called Bear lays out a large piece of paper on which he has drawn diagrams.

He is trying to improve the system of participatory democracy operating in the Occupy camp to keep it egalitarian but safeguard it from abuse by people who want to sabotage the process.

It looks complicated. They will debate for the next couple of hours, then take whatever they agree back to the General Assembly, a daily meeting open to all. Decisions are taken not by vote but by consensus, using hand

signals.

This horizontal, inclusive politics is typical of the leaderless movements that have sprung up around the world – including Tahrir Square. And the élites that ignore or ridicule them do so at their peril.

Paul Mason, BBC Newsnight economics editor and author of *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere*, says:

'People have had enough of, and given up on, a world run by the rich for the rich.'

In some cases even the rich have had enough, as campers at Occupy in the City of London have discovered in their conversations with city traders and bankers who drop by.

A Wall Street occupier recalls these words from a police officer arresting protesters on Brooklyn Bridge: 'I want you guys to know, I totally know where you are coming from. My family was fucked over by foreclosures and predatory loans and the banking industry being twisted, but I can't be with you guys because of the badge.'¹¹

How much longer before people like him come over... to their own side?
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Throwing Out the Free Market Playbook

An Interview with Naomi Klein

Naomi Klein & The Solutions Journal 1 March 2012

Perhaps one of the most well-known voices for the Left, Canadian Naomi Klein is an activist and author of several nonfiction works critical of consumerism and corporate activity, including the best sellers *No Logo* (2000) and *Shock Doctrine* (2007).

In your cover story for the Nation last year, you say that modern environmentalism successfully advances many of the causes dear to the political Left, including redistribution of wealth, higher and more progressive taxes, and greater government intervention and regulation. Please explain.

The piece came out of my interest and my shock at the fact that belief in climate change in the United States has plummeted. If you really drill into

the polling data, what you see is that the drop in belief in climate change is really concentrated on the right of the political spectrum. It's been an extraordinary and unusual shift in belief in a short time. In 2007, 71 percent of Americans believed in climate change and in 2009 only 51 percent believed—and now we're at 41 percent. So I started researching the denial movement and going to conferences and reading the books, and what's clear is that, on the right, climate change is seen as a threat to the Right's worldview, and to the neoliberal economic worldview. It's seen as a Marxist plot. They accuse climate scientists of being watermelons—green on the outside and red on the inside.

It seems exaggerated, but your piece was about how the Right is in fact correct.

I don't think climate change necessitates a social revolution. This idea is coming from the right-wing think tanks and not scientific organizations. They're ideological organizations. Their core reason for being is to defend what they call free-market ideology. They feel that any government intervention leads us to serfdom and brings about a socialist world, so that's what they have to fight off: a socialist world. Increase the power of the private sector and decrease the public sphere is their ideology.

You can set up carbon markets, consumer markets, and just pretend, but if you want to get serious about climate change, really serious, in line with the science, and you want to meet targets like 80 percent emissions cuts by midcentury in the developed world, then you need to be intervening strongly in the economy, and you can't do it all with carbon markets and offsetting. You have to really seriously regulate corporations and invest in the public sector. And we need to build public transport systems and light rail and affordable housing along transit lines to lower emissions. The market is not going to step up to this challenge. We must do more: rebuild levees and bridges and the public sphere, because we saw in Katrina what happens when weak infrastructure clashes with heavy weather—it's catastrophe. These climate deniers aren't crazy—their worldview is under threat. If you take climate change seriously, you do have to throw out the free-market playbook.

What is the political philosophy that underscores those who accept climate change versus those who deny it?

The Yale cultural cognition project has looked at cultural worldview and climate change, and what's clear is that ideology is the main factor in whether we believe in climate change. If you have an egalitarian and communitarian worldview, and you tend toward a belief system of pooling resources and helping the less advantaged, then you believe in climate change. And the stronger your belief system tends toward a hierarchical or

individual worldview, the greater the chances are that you deny climate change and the stronger your denial will be. The reason is clear: it's because people protect their worldviews. We all do this. We develop intellectual antibodies. Climate change confirms what people on the left already believe. But the Left must take this confirmation responsibly. It means that if you are on the left of the spectrum, you need to guard against exaggeration and your own tendency to unquestioningly accept the data because it confirms your worldview.

Members of the Left have been resistant to acknowledging that this worldview is behind their support of climate action, while the Right confronts it head on. Why this hesitancy among liberals?

There are a few factors at work. Climate change is not a big issue for the Left. The big left issues in the United States are inequality, the banks, corporate malfeasance, unemployment, foreclosures. I don't think climate change has ever been a broad-based issue for the Left. Part of this is the legacy of siloing off issues, which is part of the NGO era of activism. Climate change has been claimed by the big green groups and they're to the left. But they're also foundation funded. A lot of them have gone down the road of partnerships with corporations, which has made them less critical. The discourse around climate change has also become extremely technical and specialized. A lot of people don't feel qualified and feel like they don't have to talk about it. They're so locked into a logic of market-based solutions—that the big green groups got behind cap and trade, carbon markets, and consumer responses instead of structural ones—so they're not going to talk about how free trade has sent emissions soaring or about crumbling public infrastructure or the ideology that would rationalize major new investments in infrastructure. Others can fight those battles, they say. During good economic times, that may have seemed viable; but as soon as you have an economic crisis, the environment gets thrown under the bus, and there is a failure to make the connection between the economy and the climate crisis—both have roots in putting profits before people.

You write in your article, “After years of recycling, carbon offsetting, and light-bulb changing, it is obvious that individual action will never be an adequate response to the climate crisis.” How do we get the collective action necessary? Is the Occupy movement a step in the right direction?

The Occupy movement has been a game changer, and it has opened up space for us to put more radical solutions on the table. I think the political discourse in the United States is centered around what we tell ourselves the American public can handle. The experience of seeing these groups of young people put radical ideas on the table, and seeing the country get

excited by it, has been a wake up call for a lot of people who feel they support those solutions—and for those who have said, “That’s all we can do.” It has challenged the sense of what is possible. I know a lot of environmentalists have been really excited by that. I’m on the board of 350.org, and they’ll be doing more and more work on the structural barriers to climate action. The issue is why? Why do we keep losing? Who is in our way? We’re talking about challenging corporate personhood and financing of elections—and this is huge for environmental groups to be moving out of their boxes. I think all of the green organizations who take corporate money are terrified about this. For them, Occupy Wall Street has been a game changer.

What comes after communism and capitalism? What’s your vision of the way forward?

It’s largely about changing the mix in a mixed economy. Maybe one day we’ll have a perfect “ism” that’s post-communism and -capitalism. But if we look at the countries that have done the most to seriously meet the climate challenge, they’re social democracies like Scandinavia and the Netherlands. They’re countries with a strong social sphere. They’re mixed economies. Markets are a big part, but not the only part, of their economies. Can we meet our climate targets in a system that requires exponential growth to continue? Furthermore, where is the imperative of growth coming from? What part of our economy is demanding growth year after year?

If you’re a locally based business, you don’t need continual growth year after year. What requires that growth is the particular brand of corporate capitalism—shareholders who aren’t involved in the business itself. That part of our economy has to shrink, and that’s terrifying people who are deeply invested in it. We have a mixed economy, but it’s one in which large corporations are controlled by outside investors, and we won’t change that mix until that influence is reduced.

Is that possible?

It is if we look at certain choke points like corporate personhood and financing, and it makes sense for us to zero in on aspects of our system that give corporations massive influence. Another is media concentration. If you had publicly financed elections, you’d have to require public networks to give airtime to candidates. So the fact that networks charge so much is why presidential elections cost more than a billion dollars, which means you have to go to the 1 percent to finance the elections. These issues are all linked with the idea that corporations have the same free-speech rights as people, so there would also be more restrictions on corporate speech.

Entrepreneur and writer Peter Barnes has argued that what's missing is adequate incorporation of the "commons sector" in the economy—public goods like natural and social capital. "Capitalism 3.0" he calls it, which we'd achieve not by privatizing these goods but by creating new institutions such as public-asset trusts.

What's your opinion of this approach?

I definitely think it's clear that the road we've been on—turning to the private sector to run our essential services—has proven disastrous. In many cases, the reason why it was so easy to make arguments in favor of privatization was because public institutions were so cut off and unresponsive and the public didn't feel a sense of ownership. The idea that a private corporation has valued you as a customer was a persuasive argument. Now it turns out both models have failed. So this idea that there is a third way—neither private nor state-run public—is out there.

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Tunisia: New upsurge of struggle

"No more fear, the power is in the hands of the people" - Tens of thousands demand the fall of the government

CWI reporters 29 February 2012

On Saturday 25 February, thousands of people took to the streets of central Tunis in what represents one of the biggest showings of strength by the revolutionary masses for months. This followed physical raids against the UGTT trade union federation which took place in different parts of the country on previous days (more info in article here). These well-coordinated attacks, aimed at trying to destroy the capacity of resistance of the trade union against the reactionary agenda of the new pro-capitalist Ennahda-led regime, have acted as a trigger to push people onto the streets to defend their rights and their revolution.

A defiant response against the government

The protest started at noon in Mohamed Ali square, where the headquarters of the UGTT stands. Hundreds rapidly became thousands and, as the square had become too small for the increasing number of demonstrators, the march moved towards Bourguiba Avenue in a human flood, composed of workers, trade unionists, UGTT sympathisers, left groups, young people, human rights campaigners etc. Women, concerned about the growing threats on their rights and freedoms, were present in

important numbers.

“The people want the fall of the regime”, “Demonstrations and confrontations until the government falls”, “Citizens wake up, the government is messing with you!”, “Ennahda get out!”, “Jobs, freedom, national dignity”, “Long live the UGTT”, “Don’t touch our UGTT”, “The UGTT is the real force in the country”, “No more fear, the power is in the hands of the people”, “Faithful, faithful to the blood of the martyrs”. These were among the slogans shouted by the marchers, in a militant and defiant response to the government, highly suspected of being behind the acts of provocation and vandalism against UGTT offices. At the forefront of the demo were the municipal workers, who have been involved in a national strike since last Monday.

The anger of the protesters was also directed against the holding in Tunis of the Conference of the “Friends of Syria”. This initiative, sponsored by imperialist powers and Gulf sheikhdoms, is aimed at planning the post-Assad period along the lines of this gang of criminal regimes’ interests. The growing influence of the Qatari and US regimes in Tunisian politics was also denounced by demonstrators.

“A mood of 14 January”

Reports in the mainstream media talk of what appears as quite a small number of protesters on Saturday’s protest, of around 3,000 to 5,000. However, a simple look at pictures and videos taken during the demo, showing an Avenue overcrowded with people, carrying UGTT banners, red and Tunisian flags, and portraits of Farhat Hached - the founder of the UGTT, murdered in 1952 by a pro-colonial armed group linked to the French secret services, and whose tomb had been vandalised just two days before Saturday’s demonstration - is sufficient to negate such ridiculous claims.

As one supporter of the CWI present in the march commented, there was “a mood of 14 January”, in reference to the date of the gigantic demo on the same Avenue in 2011, which preceded by a few hours the departure of the dictator Ben Ali. The UGTT, which speaks of “tens of thousands of demonstrators”, has undoubtedly got it more right than some of the pro-establishment media whose role in denigrating workers’ action no longer needs to be explained.

Savage police repression

The end of the demo was marked by police brutality against peaceful demonstrators, as well as against a number of journalists and passers by. When the march approached the building of the infamous Interior Ministry, chanting the now familiar slogan, “dégage!” (“Get out!”), the police became increasingly nervous. Around 3pm, after part of the demo

had dispersed, tear gas, insults and beatings were unleashed into the crowd, soon following a well-known pattern, with gangs of police looking around and using indiscriminate violence, arbitrarily injuring and arresting people in and around the Avenue and the nearby streets during subsequent hours.

One eyewitness blog account spoke of “Images of a war in downtown Tunis... a large group of police officers, some of them masked, and armed with batons, are shooting tear gas. An unbelievable ferocity. Injured people, women, and children are rushed to the hospital of Charles Nicole... A suffocating atmosphere. Until now, clashes continue, and the torturers are freely and illegally repressing a peaceful, and authorised protest in this post-revolutionary Tunisia”.

Twelve journalists were beaten up in the process, in an obvious attempt to prevent them from reporting on police abuse. Acts of police violence against journalists have been on the increase in the recent period. The SNJT (National Union of Tunisian Journalists) has declared that “these actions are repetitive episodes of a strategy of intimidation against journalists, which aims to control the media, similar to what the deposed regime used to do”.

This illustrates once again the continuous threat of the police State’s omnipotent brutality, but also the vulnerability of demonstrations if they are not properly stewarded. Police repression and provocations, aimed at building a climate of fear to discourage people to attend street protests, has been a consistent feature of virtually all demonstrations of an important size that have taken place in central Tunis during the past year.

Lessons need to be drawn from that, in order to avoid this police strategy becoming a serious factor in the de-mobilisation of broader layers, and to stop police provocation from causing serious clashes. The trade unions have an important responsibility in making sure that the demonstrations they organise are stewarded and protected adequately, with disciplined stewarding teams all the way through, armed with batons if necessary, to defend the march and make sure that any move by the marchers is made in the most collective manner possible. This should avoid defenseless and vulnerable individuals or small group of people being targeted by heavily armed police, or being pushed into counter-productive rioting-type reactions.

Union leaders should name a date for a 24-hour general strike

Saturday’s demo, despite its success, has only shown a glimpse of what the organised workers’ movement is capable of. Though the demo was big, it remained only a small indication of what the hundreds of thousands-strong UGTT can mobilise, in the streets as well as in the

workplaces. While giving a strong signal, Saturday's demo will not be sufficient, as such, to sweep away the counter-revolutionary threats which hang over the living forces of the revolution, the working class, the revolutionary youth and their organisations.

That is why this fight should not be left here, as it is clear the government and its followers will do everything to take back the upper hand, and try again to weaken the role of the UGTT. There is no serious 'negotiation' or dialogue that can be expected from a government which is practicing a scorched-earth policy, aimed at muzzling the working class, undermining the trade union and sending its thugs and the police against those who want to keep the revolution and its objectives alive.

Already, on a private radio station, the Prime Minister, Jebali, called the participants in the march of Saturday "residues of the dissolved RCD" (the ex-ruling party), and has accused 'businessmen' of having funded the transport of protesters to the capital to protest against the government.

This statement is a conscious attempt at trying to soil the combative legacy of the powerful workers' union, as well as its resistance against the diktats of the new regime. It is also a profound insult to the hundreds of thousands of genuine union activists who played a crucial role in the revolutionary movement. These activists heroic role was played despite the treacherous role of the pro-Ben Ali UGTT bureaucrats who used to lead the union (some of whom had the nerve to show up on Saturday's demonstration), and who were instrumental in undermining the struggle of the rank-and-file UGTT workers they were supposed to represent.

The election, at the last Congress, of a new leadership of the UGTT, which is perceived as more militant, has been followed by a certain rise in industrial disputes in many areas. This has convinced the ruling class to engage in more determined attempts to subdue the union.

The present leadership of the UGTT should not allow the momentum to slip from its hands, but should on the contrary step up its campaign to build a mass, grass-roots movement capable of challenging the present pro-imperialist government and its neo-liberal policies. The popular slogan in the demo "Demonstrations and confrontations until the government falls" reflects the will of many to fight along these uncompromising lines, and the potential for such a fight being taken up by important layers of left, union and worker activists.

The UGTT should deploy all its efforts to mobilise its full power; which can only be done by addressing not only the immediate issues of the recent attacks against its offices, but by linking that with the broader political and social issues which form the basis for the frustrations of

millions, whose revolution has not led to the fundamental change they expected. The role of the organised left in this process is crucial, for example in encouraging the UGTT to name without further delay the date for a 24-hour general strike. Mass assemblies and meetings in all workplaces and working class and poor communities in every corner of the country, could play a key role in the preparation of such a strike and allow for a genuine contribution from below to the struggle and its strategy. Such a comprehensive and combative program of action could arouse huge enthusiasm among the masses, and give them the confidence this is a battle worth to be fought for.

No to the attacks on the UGTT and democratic rights! No to police brutality!

No to the hijacking of the revolution! No to a new dictatorship!

Renew the struggle for an end to the rule of the bosses and their political representatives. Build a mass movement for the fall of this government, and to build a government based on genuine representatives of the poor masses, the youth and the working class!

For the movement to adopt a programme of nationalisation under democratic workers' control, of all major private businesses and planning to meet the still urgent needs of the majority of the population.

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Putin's Puppet Show

Boris Kagarlitsky 29 February 2012

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and his team deserve some credit for doing their utmost to conduct a Western-style election campaign. They are even attempting to convey a message to the public and to explain the candidate's views on the issues. With the regularity of a well-tuned machine, his campaign headquarters churns out literary texts discussing the economy and social policy. But his calls for discussion of the issues go unheeded.

Meanwhile, Putin's opponents are incapable of giving a substantive response, and the public, unaccustomed to being addressed by the authorities, either fails to react to the publications or simply does not take them seriously.

Russia now has an extraordinary political system in which all of the elements are present, but nothing works. There are courts, but few believe they are impartial. Russia has a parliament, but its lawmakers are little more than Kremlin puppets. Even United Russia, ostensibly the party of power, actually carries no authority and is not even a true political party. Its governing bodies do not make decisions, its leaders do not determine policy, its lawmakers serve no function and its ideology is devoid of ideas. For the one who does hold power, such an organization is more of a burden than a support. It is no wonder that Putin has distanced himself from that party and acted as if he has no connection to it.

Russia does have separate elements of a civil society, but their activity reflects not so much the real social interests and needs of the country as they do the agendas of their sponsors.

In the authorities' mad rush toward democracy following the December protests in Moscow, Putin proposed creating agencies in workplaces that would represent employees — as is done in Germany. German order has always been a dream of Russian officials, and the *Mitbestimmung*, a co-determination system in which workers have a hand in managing large companies, is definitely the most progressive form of social partnership in modern industry.

The problem is that this system works only when the labor unions are real, and Putin proposes filling this role with the official Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia — another marionette that is not independent or composed of real labor unions. They are essentially departments of factory administrations responsible for dealing with social issues. In short, they represent the interests of owners and managers, not workers.

The government needs the public's support, but instead of engaging it in a dialogue, the authorities turn to the puppets under its control. It is incapable of taking any other approach, and most importantly, it has stripped the political landscape so completely that nothing and nobody is left to use as an effective resource for its efforts. The authorities pressure thousands of state employees to turn out for pro-government rallies on the streets in the middle of winter. Meanwhile, in Barnaul, police investigate possible violations of a "protest" consisting of stuffed animals holding anti-government signs that were placed on the streets because the human protesters did not want to freeze in the icy weather.

Watching the desperate attempts of the prime minister and president to reform the puppet theater they themselves created, one almost begins to feel sorry for them. They need a rest — and they should pick a nice warm place as far as possible from us.

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Boris Kagarlitsky is the director of the Institute of Globalization Studies.

State failure, market failure and civil society failure

After last week's COP17 autopsy, SA's environmental justice movement also left fingerprints on the corpse

Patrick Bond 28 February 2012

Critics of power abuse often dwell exclusively on state failure and market failure.

A good example is the way a lead editorialist in the Sunday Times grappled with the next round of crony-capitalist tenderpreneurship two days ago: 'Did the Finance Minister, Pravin Gordhan, really think that a decision to spend R300 billion over the next 17 years on nuclear power stations did not merit a mention in his budget speech?'

Unearthing that figure, buried deep in the detailed budget document, the editorialist reminded Gordhan of 'the decade-long fiasco that resulted from greed, fraud, corruption and cover-ups surrounding the R45-billion arms deal.'

Another unpleasant reminder will come when former Finance Minister Trevor Manuel's dereliction of duty is again raised by both Zuma's arms-deal commission (if they do even a half-baked job) and by those reviewing his fitness for a possible run, in coming weeks, at the World Bank presidency. In June the incumbent, Robert Zoellick, will be replaced after serial disasters in both government and finance stretching back a quarter century.

Former Member of Parliament Andrew Feinstein revealed that Manuel knew of bribes solicited by the late Defense Minister Joe Modise. Feinstein testified (without challenge) that in late 2000, Manuel surreptitiously advised him over lunch, 'It's possible there was some shit in the deal. But if there was, no one will ever uncover it. They're not that stupid. Just let it lie.'

Apparently adopting a similar attitude, Gordhan is facilitating not only nuclear madness but also hundreds of billions of rands worth of Eskom's coal-fired power plants, more coal exports, further water-degradation of Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces, and roads commercialization

(thanks to Gauteng residents' revolt against e-tolling).

How does this square with our hosting the COP17 climate summit, here in Gordhan's home town?

Earlier this month, Yale and Colombia university researchers rated South Africa fifth worst 'environmental performer' amongst the 132 countries studied; the three categories in which we did worst were forest loss, sulfur dioxide emissions and carbon emissions.

This is mainly thanks to Pretoria finance, energy and mining officials, Johannesburg Eskom bosses, and the Melbourne and London mining and metals houses. They support vast electricity wastage for smelting (resulting in the world's highest kWh/job rate in this capital-intensive sector), leaving our greenhouse gas emissions from energy twenty times higher than even the USA's, measured per unit of economic output per person.

Such eco-financial insanity continues because the crony capitalist Minerals-Energy Complex remains intact: tragically, the most powerful force in forging apartheid's migrant labour system was strengthened not weakened after 1994, even though the mining sector added nothing to the country's GDP growth during the 2002-08 minerals boom. One reason was corporate capital flight, which in 2007 – at the boom's peak – reached an awe-inspiring 20 percent of SA GDP, according to Wits University economists.

To that waste and resource outflow must be added banal corruption, such as the Chancellor House (an African National Congress fundraising arm) and Hitachi R40 billion deal for Eskom boilers which will apparently not be delivered on time, hence risking another round of load-shedding. In 2009, Public Protector Lawrence Mushwana found that Eskom chairperson Valli Moosa 'acted improperly' because he awarded that price-busting contract in blatant conflict of interest, while he sat on the ANC's finance committee.

That fact doesn't bother the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's carbon trading desk, which has just rewarded Moosa with membership on the 'High-Level Panel on the Clean Development Mechanism Policy Dialogue.' The panel will, in a September report, almost certainly attempt to justify the privatization of the air in spite of repeated episodes of emissions market fraud and corruption, benefiting only those involved in financial profiteering from greenhouse gas pollution.

For good measure, Moosa also chairs the World Wide Fund (WWF) for

Nature's South Africa chapter, which promotes the carbon trading gimmick.

Indeed, state and market failure were joined by civil society failure at the COP17. This was on display last week when 100 chastened climate activists gathered in a desultory central Durban hotel to provide each other with an autopsy of the climate summit – specifically, how the climate justice movement failed to demand accountability from the '1%' negotiating elites inside the convention centre who were, to put it scientifically, plotting genocide and ecocide.

The harshest auto-critique was from Professor Ashwin Desai. He attacked the 'big name spectacle NGOs' Greenpeace and WWF, which 'dominated the content and temperature of the march' of thousands last December 3. 'Local grassroots organizations were reduced to spectators, and were allowed only the occasional cameo appearance with most often a single line; 'Amandla!''

The route to the Convention Centre 'delivered the Minister of International Relations, and COP17 president Maita Nkoana-Mashabane to the masses gathered below. She used the opportunity to say how important civil society was and promised to study a memorandum. She was gracious and generous. I could see the NGO's on the truck preening themselves in the glow of this recognition and probably increased funding.'

But Desai would be the first to confess how few Durban communities made the effort to more decisively link climate to other burning concerns, including high electricity prices due to coal-fired powerplant construction, severe storms (one causing at least eight deaths on November 27), and the petro-chemical industry's regular explosions, such as last October 10's Engen refinery fire that left 100 kids from Settlers Primary School in Merebank hospitalised.

For Desai, who assisted with mobilizing in Wentworth and Merebank, 'There's a litmus test. In 2001 there was a huge march here, with some 10 000 people in the streets, a completely different march: militant, scathing of the local ruling class, with swear words on its placards. The Durban Declaration was a visceral indictment of our ruling class as an agent of global capital and its economic policies which were deepening inequality and increasing poverty.'

The result at COP17 left him depressed: 'Civil society as meticulously controlled spectacle, reducing people to choreographed cheerleaders, acting as an accomplice to power.'

Activists who supported the 'C17' committee of civil society had all manner of good (and a few bad) excuses for the weak showing last December, including erratic funders. Some huge NGOs, including WWF and Greenpeace, apparently contributed only staff time and no other resources. These and others, including faith communities at Diakonia and some trade unions, held competing events to the C17's People's Space at locations across town, even though they served on the C17 committee.

Though many praised the C17 for hard work, its meager impact at COP17 – reflected best in negotiators' abject failure to cut emissions – doesn't auger well for civil society unity in future campaigns to save the climate and economy from the Minerals-Energy Complex and finance ministers.

A sober accounting of the climate summit must also offer an autopsy of civil society counterpower at this juncture, and a diagnosis for reviving the corpse – or for rejecting contradiction-ridden unity of such breadth.

Patrick Bond directs the UKZN Centre for Civil Society, where public seminars will be held tomorrow and next week on mobilizing for socio-environmental and political justice.

Britain Is Being Rebuilt In Aid Of Corporate Power

George Monbiot 28 February 2012

They used to do it subtly; they don't bother any more. Last week a column in the Telegraph argued that businesses should get the vote. Though they pay tax, Damian Reece maintained, they have "no say in the running of local or national government". To remedy this cruel circumscription, he suggested that elections in the UK should follow the example set by the City of London Corporation. This is the nation's last rotten borough, in which ballots in 21 of its 25 wards are controlled by companies, whose bosses appoint the voters. I expect to see Mr Reece pursue this noble cause by throwing himself under the Queen's horse.

Contrast this call for an extension of the franchise with a piece in the same paper last year, advocating an income qualification for voters. Only those who pay at least £100 a year in income tax, argued Ian Cowie, another senior editor at the Telegraph, should be allowed to vote. Blaming the credit crisis on the unemployed (who, as we know, lie in bed all day devising credit default swaps and collateralised debt obligations), Cowie averred that "it's time to restore the link between paying something into society and voting on decisions about how it is run". This qualification, he

was good enough to inform us, could exclude "the majority of voters in some metropolitan areas today". The proposal was repeated by Benedict Brogan, the Telegraph's deputy editor.

No representation without taxation: wasn't that Alan B'stard's slogan in the satirical series *The New Statesman*? Votes for business, none for the poor: this would formalise the corporate assault on democracy that has been gathering pace for the past 30 years.

This column is a plea for distrust. Distrust is the resource on which democracy relies. Distrust inspires the scrutiny and accountability without which representation becomes a lie. Distrust is all that stands between us and bamboozlement by people who, like Reece, Cowie and Brogan, channel the instincts of the billionaire owners of newspapers and broadcasters.

Last week David Cameron argued that those who say business "isn't really to be trusted" do so as a result of "snobbery". Business, in fact, is "the most powerful force for social progress the world has ever known". Not democracy, education, science, justice or public health: business. You need only consider the exemplary social progress in Zaire under Mobutu, Chile under Pinochet, or the Philippines under Marcos – who opened their countries to the kind of corporate free-for-all that Cameron's backers dream of – to grasp the universal truth of this statement.

He gave some examples to support his contention that regulation can be replaced by trust. The public health responsibility deal, which transfers responsibility for reducing obesity and alcoholism to fast-food outlets, drinks firms and supermarkets, reaches, Cameron claimed, the parts "which the state just can't".

Under the deal, Subway and Costa are "putting calorie information up front when people are buying". The state couldn't possibly legislate for that, could it? Far better to leave it to the companies, who can decide for themselves whether they inform people that a larduccino coffee with suet sprinkles contains no more calories than the average Olympic sprinter burns in a month. He forgot to mention the much longer list of companies that have failed to display this information.

Another substitute for regulation, he suggested, is a programme called Every Business Commits. Through its website I found the government's list of "case studies of responsible business practice". Here I learned that British American Tobacco is promoting public health by educating and counselling its workers about HIV. The drinks giant Diageo is improving its waste water treatment process. Bombardier Aerospace is enhancing the environmental performance of its factories, in which it manufactures, er, private jets. RWE npower, which runs some of Britain's biggest coal and

gas power stations, teaches children how to "to think about their responsibilities in reducing climate change".

All these are worthy causes, but they are either peripheral to the main social harms these companies cause or look to my distrustful eye like window dressing. Nor do I see how they differ from the "moral offsetting" that Cameron says happened in the past but doesn't today. But this tokenism, in the prime minister's view, should inspire us to trust companies to the extent that some of the regulations affecting their core business can be removed.

We are living through remarkable times. The government, supported by the corporate press, is engaged in a naked attempt to rebuild the life of this country around the demands of business. Extending the project begun by Tony Blair, Cameron is creating an economy in which much of the private sector depends on state contracts, and in which the government's core responsibility is to provide them. If this requires the destruction of effective public healthcare and reliable state education, it is of no concern to an economic class that uses neither.

The corporations gaining ever greater powers will be subject to less democratic oversight and restraint, in the form of regulation. Despite the obvious lesson of the credit crunch – that self-regulation is an invitation to disaster – Cameron wants to extend the principle to every corner of the economy. Trust them, he says: what can possibly go wrong?

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The budget of the ruling class for the ruling class

Shawn Hattingh 25 February 2012

Once again much media fanfare has broken out in aftermath of the South African state's budget speech. The business media in particular have fallen all over themselves to highlight how the state will be spending billions of Rands on infrastructure and the development of 'Special Economic Zones', supposedly to create employment and help the poor to find a job. Much too has been made of the state spending over 50% of the budget on social services. Most of the messages, whether from the state or mainstream media or even SACP politicians, therefore have been about how the budget is intended to help the poor and drive job creation. Like a missionary of old, we are told, the Minister of Finance, Pravin Gordhan, has given hope to the dispossessed and has extended a hand to the most marginal sections of society through the budget. Of course, Gordhan, the media, the state, ANC and SACP politicians are lying through their teeth when they declare that the budget was developed for the benefit of the poor and workers. Like missionaries of old, the state, the politicians and media are trying to create illusions to blind the people to reality.

Do states really exist to help the poor?

States, including the post-apartheid state, have never undertaken actions that are purely aimed at assisting workers and the poor; unless they have been forced to through class struggle. As such, people including the SACP, make a fundamental mistake when they believe that the state is either a neutral entity or that its actions – including the South African state's budget – are intended to further the interests of the working class. When one examines the historical role of all states, it becomes evident that they are not entities that are controlled by or for the benefit of all; they are rather a central pillar of ruling class power (the ruling class being comprised of state managers and capitalists). As a consequence, they are structured purposefully in a hierarchical manner in order to carry out their main function of protecting and furthering the interests of the ruling classes. They are, therefore, a defender of the class system and a centralised body that necessarily concentrates power in the hands of the elite. This is so even under a Parliamentary system like South Africa: an elite few – including Pravin Gordhan - make decisions, instruct others what to do, and enforce those instructions through the state

Indeed, the anarchist Peter Kropotkin long ago pointed out that the state is the ultimate protector of the privileges of the ruling class. Through its executive, legislative, judiciary and policing arms the state always protects minority ownership of property (whether private or state-owned), and tries to squash any threat posed to the continuing exploitation and oppression of the working class. All states everywhere have also always intervened in the economy in favour of the ruling class. As noted by Kropotkin:

“the state has always interfered in the economic life in favour of the capitalist exploiter. It has always granted protection in robbery, given aid and support for further enrichment. And it could not be otherwise. To do so was one of the functions – the chief mission – of the state.”

The budget is an intervention for the ruling class

The South African state's 2012 budget, far from being pro-poor, provides some insight into how states intervene in the economy and society for the benefit of the rich and powerful. While the South African state and media claim that the proposed infrastructure development outlined in the 2012 budget is about creating employment opportunities; nothing could be further from the truth. The infrastructure projects discussed in the budget, which involve the state spending R 3.2 trillion over the next few years, are mainly aimed at building or upgrading power stations, ports, and railway networks. Private companies will be contracted to deliver this. Once completed, giant corporations that are involved in the export industry will

be the beneficiaries. By having access to more efficient roads, railways, ports, and cheap electricity their profits will be increased. On the whole, therefore, the infrastructure development is aimed at making the South African capitalist economy more efficient; to the benefit of multinational corporations that are exporting raw materials and finished goods. Pravin Gordhan in parts of his budget speech even made this explicit when he said, “improvements are being made to economic infrastructure such as ports, roads and electricity generation to cater for the needs of business”.

The main goal, therefore, is not to provide infrastructure for the working class; but rather infrastructure to aid capitalist corporations increase their profits. The much touted job creation that is to supposedly accompany these infrastructure projects, therefore, should not be foolishly seen as the primary objective of the state’s plans. The companies that stand to benefit from the infrastructure projects will also be seeking to maximise profits. To do so, they will try and employ as few workers as possible, pay workers as little as possible, and work them as hard as possible. This means employing people will also not be the main goal of these private companies. They will, in fact, want to employ as few people as possible to extract as much profit as possible. This means the state plan’s when it comes to infrastructure, were not really aimed first and foremost at benefiting a mass of workers or the unemployed, but the corporations building the infrastructure and those that are going to use it.

The bias of the budget towards the ruling class can also be seen in the plans to create “Special Economic Zones”. “Special Economic Zones” are a euphemism for export processing zones (EPZs). Across the world, EPZs have been advantageous to corporations. Corporations that invest in them have received huge tax breaks and have been exempted from labour laws. Naturally, this has had a detrimental effect on the workers in these EPZs. By design they have no legal rights, they usually can’t form trade unions and can be fired at will. The South African state’s 2012 budget too reveals how favorable local “Special Economic Zones” will be to investors. For instance, the 2012 budget stated that “tax relief is under consideration for businesses that invest in these zones, including a reduction in the corporate income tax rate”.

Tax relief for large corporations has been a major theme of the South African state’s policies since the ANC got into power. In 1994 the tax rate for corporations in South Africa was 48%. This has since been lowered by the state to 28%; thereby ensuring greater profitability for corporations. The 2012 budget not only offers promised tax relief to potential investors in the Special Economic Zones, but also eliminates secondary taxes on corporations and replaces it with a withholding tax. In addition, pension funds, which in the context of South Africa are giant companies that are involved in speculation, will also be exempt from tax on the dividends

they receive. While investors are promised potential tax breaks if they invest in projects like the Special Economic Zones, Value Added Tax (VAT) has remained unchanged at 14%. This is not an accident as VAT is mainly a tax directed at workers and the unemployed.

The state also revealed in the 2012 budget that it believed further electricity tariff hikes were needed: this on the back of massive price increases over the last few years. Considering that most large corporations have long term deals with the state, whereby they receive electricity at stable and extremely low prices, the rises in electricity prices will be mainly directed at the working class. Parts of the budget too make it explicit why the state wants higher electricity prices. Gordhan said higher prices were needed so that ESKOM, which has been expanding its capacity for the benefit of its corporate clients, can repay its debts. Gordhan, when discussing the electricity sector more broadly, also noted that 'independent power producers' had been successfully tendered to provide 1 200 mw of electricity in the country. This in essence was a revelation that electricity in South Africa had been further privatised. No doubt the state's push for price hikes was also about furthering the profits of these corporate 'independent power producers'.

The manner in which states intervene in the economy for the benefit of corporations is also evident in the plans announced for the financial sector in the 2012 budget. It was outlined in the budget that "cross-border investments in and out of South Africa" would soon be simplified. Meaning, the state will be making it far simpler for corporate investors to transfer money in and out of South Africa; for their benefit. Linked to this, such measures would also make it easier for South African-linked corporations to invest in other African countries. In fact, the 2012 budget commits the state to help both private and state-owned South African-linked companies expand further into Africa. The reason why South African-linked companies like investing in African countries is because labour is extremely cheap, environmental laws are lax, and the local states tend to cover up or even assist investors in carrying out abuses on communities and workers. The South African state is, therefore, not only willing to facilitate the exploitation of workers in this country; but across Africa. Such actions are the actions of an imperialist!

It is clear many of the provisions in the 2012 budget are aimed at assisting corporations and are riddled with neo-liberalism. As such, the South African state's budget has been developed by a section of the ruling class for the ruling class.

But what about the welfare provided by the state?

Most main stream media outlets of course don't see that the budget is really in the interests of the rich and powerful or they are reluctant to

admit it. Rather, as stated, much has been made of the fact that the 2012 budget allocated over 50%, of the R 1 trillion that the state plans to spend, to social services. This includes providing resources for housing, child grants, pensions, healthcare and education. Many people believe that in doing so the state has good intentions. Certainly, it is better to live in a state that provides some welfare than one that provides none; but the reasons why a state provides welfare should not be overlooked.

The fact is that capitalism creates the need for welfare. In exploiting and oppressing people, capitalism will always generate and maintain a situation whereby some people have very little. Linked to this, the fact that a minority of people under capitalism have a monopoly over the means of production, through property rights that the state enforces, leads to a majority of people being dispossessed. Capitalism as a system also needs a section of the population that is poor and that is willing to sell their labour cheaply. As Errico Malatesta argued:

“property allows its owners to live from the work of others and therefore depends on the existence of a class of the disinherited and dispossessed forced to sell their labour to the property owners for a wage below its real value.”

Unemployment too is part and parcel of capitalism. Due to the fact that capitalists want to maximise profits, they attempt to hire as few people as possible to bring down costs. They also mechanise production to ensure fewer workers are required and profits can be increased. The Russian anarchist, Alexander Berkman highlighted this:

“Capitalism is not interested in the welfare of the people. Capitalism, as I have shown before, is interested only in profits. By employing less people and working them long hours larger profits can be made than by giving work to more people at shorter hours...the harder and more 'efficiently' you work and the longer hours you stay at it, the better for your employer and the greater his profits. You can therefore see that capitalism is not interested in employing all those who want and are able to work. On the contrary: a minimum of 'hands' and a maximum of effort is the principle and the profit of the capitalist system.”

Because capitalism is aimed at maximizing profit, production itself under capitalism is also skewed towards producing products for those who have money. Thus, luxury products are produced for the rich, who have money; while the basics needed by the working class such as housing, public

hospitals and public transport are, in fact, under-produced. The reason for this is that providing products directly for the working class tends not to be that profitable, as this class has few resources. Therefore, under capitalism there is a relative over-supply of luxury items for the few; and a under-supply of basic necessities for the majority.

All of this means that capitalism generates the need for welfare by denying a majority ownership over the means of production, by exploiting workers, by creating unemployment, and by skewing production in favour of the desires of the rich. The state in order to maintain class rule and a semblance of stability has to intervene to alleviate some of these problems that capitalism generates. If it did not, it would become evident to the working class how unfair the rule of the elite really was; and the possibility of revolution would be opened up. Thus, states provide some welfare to try and maintain the status quo – defined by the ruling class exploiting the working class. States too don't want society to completely disintegrate, as the ruling class would then be deprived of its source of exploitation and wealth. As such, welfare is a painkiller that is aimed at trying to get the working class to accept class rule, capitalism and the state system. The welfare provision in the South African state's budget too is a painkiller, designed to try and ensure that working class does not question exploitation, oppression, and growing inequality.

Linked to the above, states always try to make propaganda mileage out of the fact that they provide welfare. When states deliver welfare they claim to be acting as the servants of the poor and workers; while in reality they facilitate their exploitation and oppression. It is this duplicity that led Malatesta to argue that the state: "cannot maintain itself for long without hiding its true nature behind a pretence of general usefulness; it cannot impose respect for the lives of the privileged people if it does not appear to demand respect for human life, it cannot impose acceptance of the privileges of the few if it does not pretend to be the guardian of the rights of all". Via its policies, including the 2012 budget, the South African state is attacking workers and the poor; whilst handing out some welfare so that it can claim to be their defender. As such, one of the central goals of welfare in South Africa is stop people from identifying the state for what it is: an instrument of exploitation and oppression that furthers the interests of the ruling class. In terms of this hypocrisy the South African state is no different to any other state and, as such, it is well versed in art of politics: lying and deceiving.

The fact is, however, that the South African state hands out the bare minimum when it comes to social services and welfare. In the 2012 budget, child grants were set at an abysmal R 280 a month; while pensions were set at just over R 1 100. This is well below the real poverty line in South Africa. Likewise, although the budget for education and healthcare

looks large; when it is broken down to the level of how much will be spent on each student or patient, it is a pittance. Hence, South Africa's state run hospitals and schools remain drastically under resourced. In some schools the pupil to teacher ratio is well over 50:1; while in many hospitals patients sometimes have to sleep on the floor, bring their own bedding or provide their own food. The 2012 budget won't alter this.

The aim, therefore, of the South African state appears to be to hand out just enough to stop people from fundamentally questioning the imbalances and inequalities that define the country. The black working class continues to be heavily oppressed and exploited, with the vast majority of township residents living in abject poverty, but the state tries to pretend that it serves this section of the population by highlighting the social services it provides; when in reality this programme is extremely limited. Linked to this, the gap between classes is also growing. Thus inequality between the elite – including both black and white – and the working class – including both black and white – has continued to increase. In fact, South Africa is statistically the most unequal society on earth and it is no accident that the current levels of welfare spending have not, and will not, dent this.

To make matters worse, much of the money spent on social services by the state is siphoned off by state managers and private contractors and consultants. The growing privatisation of social services and welfare in South Africa has also opened the door to further corruption. This is evident, for example, when one examines 'public' housing. The state tends to outsource the building of 'public' housing to private companies. To maximise profits, these companies use the cheapest possible material and they build each unit in the fastest possible time. The result is that tiny houses are built, which often collapse after a few years. Because the welfare system in South Africa and globally operates within the confines of capitalism, it is mostly the private service providers that benefit. They milk the system by attempting to extract as much as money as possible. State planners and policy makers also receive large salaries, and kickbacks for tenders. In the Western Cape, for example, the Premier's Department – which produces nothing tangible – has a budget which is a full third of the size of the Province's housing budget. Thus, the ruling class disproportionately reap the benefits of the welfare industry, whether through high salaries, contracts or kickbacks.

Conclusion

The reality is that the working class in South Africa directly contributes most of the resources that make up the budget through paying VAT. Added to this, workers produce all the wealth in society. This means even the taxes of corporations that go towards the state's budget are derived via extracting surplus value from workers. Without workers, machines could not be built or run; services could not be delivered; and profits could not

be extracted by bosses. In the light of this, the working class should be furious that their wealth is being taken from them, not only at the point of production but through state taxes, and it is being used via the budget to once again benefit the ruling class.

It is also in the light of the fact that the working class produces all of the wealth in society, that workers and the poor should not see welfare provisions in the 2012 budget as a favour, a gift or charity; but a right. Indeed, workers and the poor should be mobilising to demand greater welfare and better services from the state. They should be demanding that the resources available in the state's budgets for social services are expanded and expanded. The state and capitalists have stolen from the workers and the poor, via exploitation and taxes, and demands should be made on these thieves.

It is highly important that workers and the poor win reforms in the here and now. These struggles for immediate gains should be used to try and improve people's lives, build confidence, build working class pride, and strengthen working class organisations. Ultimately, the battle to win reforms has to turn into a revolutionary counter-power that can eventually fundamentally challenge the state and capitalist system. As such, if everyone is to have a decent house, electricity, water, healthcare, good community facilities, and real control over their lives, then the state and capitalism have to be ended, as these systems exist to dominate, oppress and exploit people. In fact, a fight will have to be eventually waged to ensure that all the companies delivering services, like housing, water and electricity, become the collective property of everyone and are run along the lines of workers' self-management. Thus the struggle for reforms are the building blocks on which a struggle for a new world can be built: a world with no states and capitalism, no bosses and politicians; and no hierarchies. Only in such a world will it be possible to democratically run communities and the economy, via assemblies and councils, so that all wealth can be socialised and the needs of all met. The importance of the struggle to transform the fight for reforms into a revolutionary movement cannot be under-estimated. Without it, the cycle of state budgets being designed by the ruling class for the ruling class, with workers and the poor getting the crumbs, will not be broken.

Corporate collaboration lets Mugabe continue abuses

Patrick Bond 14 August 2012

Zimbabwe's political-economic crisis continues because dislodging

decades of malgovernance has not been achieved by either a Government of National Unity that began in early 2009, civil society activism, or international pressure, including this week's Maputo summit of the main body charged with sorting out democratisation, the Southern African Development Community (SADC). With a new draft Constitution nearly ready for a referendum vote, followed by a presidential and parliamentary election by next April, the period immediately ahead is critical.

Many examples of chaos appeared over the last week (much of which I spent in a rural area northwest of the capital of Harare). On Monday, for example, 44 activists were arrested in the Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe office at a project launching documentation of the repeated violations of their human rights. Though released, it reminded the society of the power of dictatorship mixed with homophobic social values.

Since the draft Constitution was released on July 18, leaders of Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU PF) have repeatedly rejected crucial text within a document that its own negotiators had hammered out this year and issued last month. Amidst the '3 percent' that ZANU PF leaders object to, one hang-up is that wording about presidential running mates complicates the fragile balance of power given how ill the 88 year old Mugabe has been with prostate cancer, according to his close associates.

If a referendum goes ahead with the current text, some in civil society – especially the National Constitutional Assembly, probably to be joined by students and the left-leaning faction of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions – are likely to promote a 'No' vote, and ZANU PF might well make the same choice. Nevertheless it is likely that the Movement for Democratic Change led by former trade unionist Morgan Tsvangirai (known as MDC-T) would win approval.

Although central powers have been weakened in the new Constitution, according to critics in the NGO Sokwanele, "There remains no age limit for Presidential office, immunity from prosecution remains, and the executive remains in control of defence forces."

Constitution confirms land redistribution

There are other important markers of the society's balance of power in the draft Constitution. For example, heeding ZANU PF's wishes, it specifically prohibits that monetary compensation for land will be given to the four thousand whites whose farms were invaded from 2000-08, although improvements (buildings, irrigation and the like, worth around \$3 billion) can be compensated, according to the text, while any land reimbursement should be made by the colonial power, Britain.

There is certainly very important anti-imperialist symbolism at stake here, and from this kind of compensation to the need for long-overdue colonial reparations is not too far a conceptual leap. But recall that Mugabe's 'jambanja' (chaotic, violent) land reform was driven partly by his increasingly unpopular ruling party's need to retain power after a prior Constitutional draft was rejected 55-45 percent in February 2000. Another reason was the immense rural pressures building up from below that were craftily channeled into land invasions of the country's best land, which white settlers had originally stolen during the sixty years or so after Cecil Rhodes' 'Pioneer Column' invaded in 1890.

Attempts to redress the Land Question after Independence in 1980 failed due to lack of political will and an incorrect technicist assumption that if instead of land redistribution, rural credit was extended to impoverished small farmers, they would be boosted into the mainstream economy (in reality, four out of five had defaulted on their debts by 1988 because the markets were unattractive).

The MDC-T position is that the post-2000 land redistribution is now 'irreversible' so white farmers have no basis for confidence they can return, if Tsvangirai wins the presidency. Debate also continues over whether the land redistribution 'worked' for the estimated 10 percent of Zimbabweans who directly benefited: 146 000 households who were the main small-farmer beneficiaries of jambanja, and the 16 000 farmers who got access to much larger plots including the most productive commercial farms, according to 2009 government data.

Tragically, as rains failed again this year, 1.6 million Zimbabweans – about 12 percent of the population – will be in need of food aid, the World Food Programme estimates. The country's best land, with irrigated agriculture that would permit a return to food security, isn't yet in the hands of the masses, as cronyism on good farmland means a new era of land reform will be needed.

Still, argues Sam Moyo of the African Institute for Agrarian Studies, "Only about 15 percent of the land beneficiaries could be considered 'elites', including high-level employees and businesspeople who are connected to Government and the ruling ZANU PF. By far, the largest number of beneficiaries are people who have a relatively low social status and limited political or financial-commercial connections, although some of these may have important local connections and influence."

Aside from periodic drought, Moyo cites inadequate input supply – fertilizer, pesticides, credit – as the main reason for the failed small resettled farmers, but one in five also suffer "land conflicts, including their lack of 'title' and fear of eviction as factors which limit their social

reproduction and/or production.” Nevertheless, according to Sussex University researcher Ian Scoones and his colleagues, huge increases in output have been registered by resettled farmers in one central district, especially in small grains, edible dry beans, cotton and tobacco.

On the other hand, the overcrowded ‘Communal Areas’ where Rhodesians forced blacks to live until 1980 appear not to have become decongested, and nor did Mugabe’s ‘Operation Murambatsvina’ – the violent displacement of 700 000 urban residents in 2005 – make the Land Question any easier to answer. The charge that cronyism allowed Mugabe’s allies to cherry-pick the very best farms closest to big cities remains intact, characterized by multiple farm-holdings by leading elites. Along with persistent food aid required annually since 2000, this problem will continue to mar Mugabe’s reputation, as he and his family remain prime cases of abuse.

Gripping to political power requires greedy corporates’ cash

In another indication of ongoing political manipulation last week, Mugabe’s army initially threatened to derail the official Census count, scheduled from August 17-28. It is desperately needed not just for socio-economic planning but also future election districting. The army tried to place 10 000 of its troops amongst 30 000 teachers being trained for census taking, and some beat those civil servants who objected.

Until they were finally reigned in this week, why were army troops intent on intervention? Explains Claris Madhuku of the Platform for Youth Development, “As they go through the process of counting, they want to provide some form of intimidation so that the community in the next election, they must vote for ZANU-PF or else.” A victim of such intimidation, Madhuku was arrested last April and after seven court appearances acquitted simply for holding a community meeting to air grievances against a biofuel corporation which was grabbing small-farmer landholdings.

Such experiences drive the desire for a less repressive government. In a free and fair election, Tsvangirai would probably win hands down; in March 2008, he trounced Mugabe in the first round by nearly 10 percent before withdrawing in protest from a run-off vote several weeks later, because meanwhile hundreds of his supporters were killed, tortured or injured by desperate ZANU PF political thugs.

For Mugabe to retain power in what was a financially-broke government in 2008 also required an infusion of enormous financial resources, and as a Mail&Guardian investigation last week revealed, when Mugabe was running out of funds during the election campaign, his regime was bolstered by a \$100 million loan from New York-based Och-Ziff Capital

Management Group. Ironically, the firm's financier founder, billionaire Daniel Ochs, is also vice-chair of New York City's 'Robin Hood' Foundation, which according to Fortune magazine, "was a pioneer in what is now called venture philanthropy, or charity that embraces free-market forces."

Och's loan was made possible thanks to intermediation by London-based Central African Mining and Exploration Company (Camec), run by famous English cricket spin-bowler and businessman Phil Edmonds, and by Anglo American Platinum, whose gifting of a quarter of its platinum assets to Mugabe's regime was the basis for securing the deal. The Mail&Guardian reported, "Anglo was granted empowerment credits and foreign exchange indulgences that would allow it to develop a valuable remaining concession." Zimbabwe slipped further into foreign debt.

When Edmonds was accused of funding Mugabe in 2008 in the context of a business alliance with the notorious Zimbabwean businessman Billy Rautenbach, The Telegraph remarked, "In the boardroom and on the African sub-continent, the two places where Edmonds now conducts most of his business, he is said to have a similar presence, capable of charming and terrifying business rivals at the same time."

According to The Telegraph, Zimbabwe mining has been profitable, for "It was with Rautenbach's help that the fortunes of Edmonds and Camec rose beyond anyone's expectations in 2006. The company's share price increased by more than 700 per cent in just a year, drawing in blue-chip investors eager to cash in on the boom in mining stocks."

It is in this context that the 'sanctions' critique offered by United Nations Human Rights Commission Navi Pillay in May needs revising. "There seems little doubt that the existence of the sanctions regimes has, at the very least, acted as a serious disincentive to overseas banks and investors," she said while visiting Mugabe. Yet 'sanctions', which are limited to the personal affairs of 112 elites close to Mugabe, were obviously sufficiently porous to allow the Och-Ziff/Camec/Anglo deal.

So who will pay Mugabe's campaign bill in 2013? The next greedy mining house is Anjin, a diamond mining company co-owned by Beijing investors and the Zimbabwean Ministry of Defense, whose leaders have said they will never accept rule by Tsvangirai's party. Anjin is the main beneficiary of what is probably the world's largest diamond field at Marange, near Mutare in eastern Zimbabwe, where hundreds of informal miners were killed by the army in November 2008.

Abuses continue at Marange. Two weeks ago, Anjin fired 1 500 workers who, desperate for decent pay, launched their eighth strike since 2010.

Diamond watchdog Farai Maguwu, director of the Mutare-based Centre for Research and Development, termed Anjin's move "a gross violation of the right of workers to engage in industrial action if their working conditions are appalling."

Another Marange diamond firm, Mbada, is chaired by Mugabe's former helicopter pilot Robert Mhlanga, who recently purchased \$23 million worth of properties in the highest-priced suburbs of Johannesburg and Durban (Sandton, Umhlanga and Zimbali).

This is the kind of company ZANU PF keeps, notwithstanding rhetoric regularly hostile to foreign capital. For example, at this week's Heroes Day ceremony, Mugabe intoned, "We should join hands to resist the unjustified pander of our resources by undeserving foreign forces that come to us like friends in the name of democracy and globalization, yet they have sinister ulterior motives."

Mugabe perfected this talk left, walk right gimmickry; his support for the Marange looting represents one of Africa's most extreme Resource Curse problems.

For the next election, probably in March, we can expect another tactic – 'indigenisation' (giving local people a share in white- or foreign-run corporations) – familiar to those who witnessed Mugabe's 2000 campaign, explains Bulawayo writer Mary Ndlovu: "The indigenisation agenda ZANU PF is pushing has now replaced the land issue as a programme to simultaneously win support from a new constituency and frustrate the opposition. It seems dishonestly designed to further enrich themselves, consolidate their patronage lines and prevent the MDC getting credit for increased investment, rather than honestly redistributing wealth to the people."

The first two multinational corporations to play the game of diluting local holdings so as to hold onto immensely valuable resources are platinum exporters Rio Tinto of London and Johannesburg-based Implats. There is no evidence yet that the ordinary Zimbabwean is benefiting, although a new extreme-nationalist ZANU PF political tendency is emerging around 41-year old Savior Kasukuwere – the minister in charge of indigenisation – that may one day threaten the party's two other core factions, run by potential Mugabe successors Joice Mujuru (now vice president) and Emerson Mnangagwa (defence minister).

Financial and fiscal failings

Another source of crony capitalism is the financial sector, through which disgraced Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono and his allies arranged lucrative illicit foreign exchange takeovers prior to the Zimbabwe dollar's

collapse in 2009. Bankers close to ZANU PF made dubious loans which now require the kinds of bailouts that Wall Street and the City of London received from their own purchased politicians in 2008-09.

This is the main reason for Zimbabwe's banking crisis, and recently compelled Gono to issue a directive that \$100 million be kept in capital reserves to prevent a devastating run on the banks. Out of two dozen, only six or so – nearly all foreign headquartered – will survive that degree of regulatory restructuring (the rest must be merged or closed). The adverse impact on credit availability, already hampered by the world's highest real interest rates, will be devastating.

On top of that is next month's IMF and World Bank meeting in Washington where Zimbabwe's nearly \$11 billion in unrepayable foreign debt is up for negotiation, not to mention a looming public workers strike which will be uncomfortable for the MDC-T, the party of labour but also under pressure to impose austerity after the state budget was cut from a planned \$4 billion to \$3.4 billion by Finance Minister Tendai Biti, known in his youth as the country's leading leftist lawyer.

The main reason for budget cuts is the failure of the mining ministry to collect taxes on diamonds, which continue to be smuggled out of Zimbabwe on flights from Marange to sites including Israel, India, Dubai, Kazakhstan and China.

Confirms Maguwu, "Revenue is not being accounted for and a faction of ZANU PF is controlling the diamonds. This is was exactly the situation when the Kimberley Process was formed in 2003 with the financing of rebel wars through diamond revenues in West Africa."

According to Maguwu, "The KP suffered huge credibility problems because of allowing Marange diamonds to circulate at their last meeting in Kinshasa last November. At the next summit in Washington this November, where 'diamonds for development' is a slogan against the Resource Curse, the KP can only regain credibility by ensuring that there is revenue transparency, otherwise Zimbabwe's next round of election chaos can be blamed on diamond revenues."

Maguwu insists, "South African President Jacob Zuma is SADC's lead mediator and his team led by Lindiwe Zulu must put this on their agenda. Regional civil society should also be putting pressure on SADC to ensure that Marange diamonds do not sponsor political violence during the coming elections in Zimbabwe and trigger regional instability."

While economic growth may technically still top 5 percent this year, the underlying crises are now being amplified, as the bulk of proceeds from

Zimbabwe's 2012 outputs of diamonds (\$3 billion), platinum (\$600 million), gold (\$150 million) and nickel (\$140 million) disappear into ZANU PF and multinational corporate pockets, with only crumbs left over for the povo. With a \$3 billion trade deficit and only \$500 million in donor aid anticipated in 2012, the untenable economics of a modified Mugabe tyranny still don't add up.

Whether a free and fair election is possible in coming months, or instead ZANU PF loyalists use military might, ill-begotten wealth and crony capitalism to maintain illegitimate power, is too difficult to call. But by the end of this week, SADC regional leaders could have their fingerprints on Zimbabwe's coming corpse if once again, they turn away from compelling at least the minimal conditions for democracy: insistence on the Constitutional referendum and preparations for the country's first genuine vote in a dozen years.

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(Patrick Bond directs the UKZN Centre for Civil Society in Durban, South Africa.)

China: The Wukan uprising and its lessons

Workers' strikes and new local rebellions use the slogan "Learn from Wukan"

Vincent Kolo and Zhang Shujie. 25 February 2012

Wukan is the fishing village in southern China's Guangdong province that achieved worldwide fame as a symbol of mass resistance. Like thousands of other rural communities in recent years, the 13,000 inhabitants of Wukan rose up against corrupt local officials who have stolen land and made millions in profits. But Wukan achieved something else, by displaying a new level of organisation and mass mobilisation, setting up independent popular committees and campaign structures. In so doing, Wukan has become a benchmark for future struggle in China.

Its people waged a daring and impressive four-month long struggle that ejected the local 'communist' (Chinese Communist Party) government, and set up their own elected council to run the community. Finally, in the face of repression, arrests, a siege by thousands of paramilitary police, and the death of a protest leader in police custody, a dramatic settlement was reached on 21 December that seemed to meet most of the villagers' demands. At that time, chinaworker.info warned that the agreement with provincial CCP representatives could not be trusted; that continued mass pressure through the building of democratic grassroots organisations and

links with other mass struggles was needed. Our warnings have been confirmed.

Still, the impact of the Wukan uprising is enormous and goes far beyond its boundaries and even those of Guangdong province. This was, according to numerous commentators, the first time since 1949 that the CCP totally lost control of an administrative area. During a few short weeks the struggle in Wukan shattered the idea that the Chinese people need one-party dictatorship and are incapable of governing themselves democratically.

At the time of writing, Wukan is conducting a three-stage election process to elect a new village government, and this process too is being watched closely by overseas media and – more importantly – by tens of thousands of Chinese netizens. The provincial CCP leaders, headed by the ambitious Wang Yang, a standard bearer for the party-state’s ‘economic liberal’ wing, intervened in December to broker a deal, resulting in the protest leaders agreeing to call off further action. This deal has spawned countless articles and speculation about a political shift and the advent of a new ‘Wukan approach’ to dealing with discontent. As our article will show, such hopes are misplaced.

Wukan incontestably marks an important new phase in the struggle of China’s rural masses, with repercussions also for the urban population – for the first time now a majority in China (51 percent) – and in particular for the working class, which is the most important force for change in society. For socialists and for the supporters of the CWI and chinaworker.info, there are many crucial lessons from the Wukan experience that must be discussed, understood and shared by all those seeking ways to fight against one-party dictatorship, its corruption and capitalist policies. As Lenin once said, an ounce of experience – in struggle – is worth a ton of theory.

Along with several other concurrent struggles – including some very significant workers’ strikes – Wukan shows that mass protests in China are becoming more organised, more bold, and their methods and tactics more sophisticated. In short, they are adapting to the changing situation, studying and taking stock of the evolution of the one-party dictatorship as it upgrades its repressive methods. Just as activists in Wukan, especially the youth who played a decisive role in the struggle, clearly learned and drew inspiration from the ‘Occupy’ movement internationally, we have since seen striking steelworkers in Chengdu and rural protest movements in Fujian and Zhejiang unfurling banners with the slogan: “Learn from Wukan!”

Mass land seizures

“What is happening in Wukan gives an extraordinary view of the social tensions that exist in China,” noted BBC reporter Martin Patience, who was one of several foreign journalists inside Wukan during the struggle. Incredibly, China experienced more mass protests last year than the entire Arab world, based on sheer numbers. The Chinese Academy of Governance reported that the number of ‘mass incidents’ doubled from 2006 to 2010, reaching 180,000. Even this incredible tally was surely surpassed last year. These statistics encompass workers’ strikes, anti-pollution struggles, protests by national minorities, riots against police brutality and countless rural revolts. Of the latter category, around 65 percent were caused by land seizures orchestrated by corrupt government officials usually in collusion with property developers, as happened in Wukan.

Official figures show that 43 percent of China’s villages have suffered from land seizures over the last decade, and every year four million peasants lose their land. A whole generation of local ‘communist’ politicians have become millionaires as a result of this lucrative trade in what is technically still ‘collectively-owned’ land. This massive sequestration of land, smashing the fiction of communal ownership, has been a major ingredient in China’s booming economy.

Yu Jianrong of the Chinese Academy of Social Services estimates that since 1990, local governments have seized 6.7 million hectares of land – an area almost as big as Ireland – while also depriving peasants of US\$340 billion in compensation. A joint survey by Renmin University and Michigan State University found the mean compensation paid by local governments to farmers for confiscated land was approximately US\$17,850 per acre, while the mean price was US\$740,000 per acre once it was resold by officials, mostly to commercial property developers. This represents a staggering 41-fold gain by the local authorities!

In the case of Wukan, the local CCP chief Xue Chang and village leader Chen Shunyi, who ruled for 41 years – “longer than Mubarak” as one Wukan activist commented – sold off some 660 hectares of land to companies constructing roads and housing estates. In the process they cheated the community out of an estimated 700 million yuan (US\$111m). This clique claimed to have been returned to office in successive village elections, which are sanctioned under China’s dictatorial system, although villagers say they were never informed of such elections. Having stormed the local government offices in September, protesters came across financial documents dating back over two decades and are still trying to untangle the complex web of corporate interests that cheated them out of their birth right.

The corrupt village committee set up the Wukan Port Industrial

Development Company in the early 1990s, with CCP boss Xue Chang as general manager. “Most of the village land has been sold through that company,” said Hong Ruichao, one of the protest leaders. Xue’s company developed a close relationship with Hong Kong-based private real estate capitalist Chen Wenqing, whose Lufeng Fengtian Livestock Products was a major buyer of Wukan’s government-sold land, earning Chen the name “land king” in Wukan. More recently, land appears to have been sold to Country Garden, a major Chinese property developer owned by Yang Huiyan, who with an estimated fortune of US\$16 billion was once crowned the richest woman in Asia.

“They [the village committee] sold it as if the land were owned by their families,” Hong, the protest leader, explained. “We knew nothing about when it was sold, to whom it was sold, where the money went, or how the money was spent.” (South China Morning Post, 4 January 2012)

The appearance late last year of signboards for Country Garden announcing a planned luxury housing complex on one of the last remaining parcels of land in Wukan was the final straw as far as villagers were concerned.

Timeline of revolt

Like many other protest movements in China the Wukan struggle had been brewing for a long time. “20 years of anger unleashed” was one headline in the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post. The younger generation led the way in 2009, forming a group that was active on internet message boards, which began to probe the land deals and other shady goings on. They mounted a challenge through the courts, starting at county level and pursuing this to the highest court in the province. After eleven court cases, and two years of following the ‘legal road’, they had reached a complete dead end.

This was the background to the first mass protests in early September of 2011, which were attacked by riot police with several protesters including children being beaten. An eyewitness described the security forces as “like mad dogs, beating everyone they saw.” Police cars were torched, some policemen received retaliatory beatings, and villagers then stormed the police station and local government buildings, putting the officials to flight.

Subsequently the villagers organised themselves through a variety of organs: a women’s federation, youth league and a council of representatives comprised of 13 elected leaders. In the power vacuum that arose these democratic committees took over the day-to-day running of the community. At the climax of this movement, in December, the youth league organised a de facto militia to patrol the perimeters and prevent

police from entering. Roadblocks made from torn-down trees and metal cables were set up at all access roads. The village committees set up a pharmacy, a first-aid centre and a “foreign office” – the media compound where a clutch of Hong Kong and western reporters were based. These journalists were smuggled into Wukan by village guides using lesser-known paths to evade the police cordon.

What followed was several rounds of fruitless negotiations between the elected Wukan council and the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) officialdom in Lufeng county and Shanwei prefecture, under whose jurisdiction the village falls. Realising that the path of negotiation had again led nowhere, Wukan’s council of representatives called for a mass demonstration on 21 November in which 5,000 participated – a staggering number from such a small community. The authorities chose to show restraint and the entire event passed peacefully.

Carrot or stick?

From 9 December the situation changed dramatically. It is clear the local leaders opted to use repression in an attempt to suppress the movement. While negotiations were still ongoing, police arrested five of the 13 elected council leaders including the council’s vice-president Xue Jingbo. Police accused the five of “destruction of property” and “obstructing officials in the course of their duty”. The Shanwei government issued a statement warning of further repression, (typically) blaming “foreign forces” for “inciting the people with ulterior motives” and slamming the temporary village council as an “illegal organisation”. Meanwhile, large contingents of riot police moved into positions on the outskirts of Wukan to impose a full blockade. The village would be sealed off for the next ten days.

As Malcolm Moore of The Telegraph (UK), another Western journalist encamped in Wukan reported:

“Wukan has been encircled by the police cordon since Sunday [11 December], after a failed attempt by 1,000 armed police to capture the village. No food or water is allowed in, and no villagers allowed out.”

Significantly, Moore added: *“By yesterday, almost all the rich families had also retreated out of the village, while the ones who remained refused to comment on the protests, shut in behind high walls and strong steel gates.”* (The Telegraph, 14 December 2011)

Showing the priorities of local governments in China, according to its own website the Shanwei government spent 121 million yuan on its police and security budget in 2011, an increase of 18 percent from the previous year, and three times what it spent on healthcare.

On 11 December, the news broke that Xue Jingbo had died “of natural causes” while in police custody. Karl Marx explained that “revolution sometimes needs the whip of counterrevolution to push it forward,” which sums up the effect of Xue’s death on the people of Wukan. The following days saw some of the biggest and most determined mass demonstrations. Based on all prior experience of police methods, Xue was surely subjected to physical and psychological abuse aimed at breaking his spirit and forcing a ‘confession’. The condition of his body showed signs of torture: the wrists were swollen, the thumb had been broken back, the forehead and chin were bloodied, blood was caked in the nostrils, the neck was black and there were bruises on his back and chest.

Despite the promises made by provincial CCP representatives at the time of the December settlement, the police refused to handover Xue’s body to his family for a further two months, because the latter refused to sign a statement accepting the police version that he died of a “heart attack”. On 16 February the police finally released the body for burial, but only after extracting stringent conditions from the family, limiting the numbers attending his funeral (to prevent this turning into a new anti-government demonstration) and banning photography (to forestall images of the tortured body going viral on the internet).

Xue’s daughter, Xue Jianwan, has documented her family’s struggle on her microblog, detailing how her father’s body was effectively held hostage in order to pressure the family to drop their protest. “I’m not sure if an autopsy is a trap or the truth,” she wrote on her blog last month. In the second round of voting in Wukan, on 10 February, Jianwan was elected as a village representative with the highest number of votes.

A family friend attending the long-delayed funeral of Xue Jinbo gave a graphic description of the effects of the police blackmail upon the family: “He was frozen like a block of ice for over two months. His face was blackened, even after the make-up. Everyone was so sad to see this, especially his bereaved daughters and wife... They cried until they vomited and couldn’t eat or even stand up straight. (South China Morning Post, 17 February 2012)

Mixed consciousness, illusions

At the height of the struggle in Wukan, the local population showed that they could run the community more effectively and in a different way than the expelled CCP representatives – and without their bloated salaries. “We found we were better at administration,” said Xue Jiandi, the 19-year old brother of Xue Jianwan. “The old officials turned out not to have had any accounts in their office, so they must have been swindling us. And we have a nightwatch now, to keep the village safe. We have all bonded

together.” (The Telegraph, 13 December 2012)

In this process we see a glimpse of the possibilities for the masses to exercise democratic self-rule, as Lenin outlined, without the need for a parasitic bureaucracy, but based on the election of representatives subject to recall and without economic privileges.

However, despite its impressive organisation, the Wukan movement lacked political clarity. It is comprised of disparate and contradictory strands of opinion, reflecting its base in the peasantry, which is the most diverse social class containing both super-exploited layers but also exploiters. Many statements made in the course of the struggle showed there are considerable illusions in the CCP at national and provincial level, while the local CCP representatives are held in contempt. Several prominent leaders of the movement are also CCP members, and they of course promoted the idea that the central and provincial leaders can be trusted. But such illusions can be shattered quite quickly. As Xue Jianwan wrote on her blog in January: “I had a terrible thought. What if every official is corrupt? What do we do then?”

The confused consciousness explains the seeming contradiction of banners proclaiming “Down with dictatorship”, but also chants of “Long Live the Communist Party”. Rather than a uniform position, there are evidently divergent views within the movement, some more radical than others. One prominent protest leader, Lin Zuluan, the retired CCP secretary from nearby Donghai, has since the December settlement been promoted to the post of party secretary of Wukan. He and other CCP members acted as intermediaries between the Wukan movement and the government, but also stressed a cautious approach and attempted to restrain more radical layers. It is a familiar CCP tactic to try to co-opt some layers from a potential opposition movement in order to overcome it. This process has clearly begun in Wukan and threatens to shipwreck their struggle unless it is countered by mass organisation and renewed protest.

At the height of the struggle, foreign journalists reported an English language sign in the makeshift press centre urging them not to describe it as an uprising: “We are not a revolt. We support the Communist Party. We love our country.”

This glaringly contradictory stance reflects the great pressure in China to eschew ‘politics’ and political demands, and the hope to lessen or avoid repression. A similar phenomenon has been witnessed in many workers’ strikes. There are various reasons for this. Some layers still genuinely believe the central government is better, less corrupt, and perhaps ignorant of the shenanigans of local officials. Others privately oppose one-party

rule but hesitate to say this openly. There is every reason to believe that the same mix of arguments was at work in Wukan. For some, declaring fealty to the CCP is seen as a way to prevent the authorities from cracking down. There are many examples of struggle, however, where this has not shielded those involved, and it would be a mistake to think this was the decisive factor determining the 'peaceful' outcome to the Wukan events.

Similarly, the mode of organisation during the mass struggle reflected the contradictory social base of the movement. The main vehicles for electing the temporary village leadership were the clan organisations, which are a vestige of feudalism. Some of Wukan's youth activists, who initiated the struggle, have expressed misgivings about the central role of the clans. There are reportedly more than 40 clan organisations in Wukan and it seems these operated – during the mass struggle – on unusually democratic lines. But clan organisations by their very nature are exclusive (based on kinship) and hierarchical. They cannot offer a platform for unifying the majority of poor farmers and other oppressed layers democratically, and on a class basis.

In Wukan's case, a number of businessmen who had left the village were asked to come back by the clan heads and given a leading role in the struggle. Some of these returnees openly support land privatisation – “with clear guidelines” – as a solution. Rather than a homogenous movement, therefore, the struggle in Wukan encompasses different class interests, with conflicting views on what to do with the land should they get to decide.

In many parts of rural China, clan organisations vie for control over villages and their land resources, unleashing sometimes violent power struggles. While a mass movement such as Wukan's, around democratic demands and against repression, tends to pull the masses together, this cannot be maintained without the decisive entrance of the working class into the equation as an organised force, with a programme to transform the economic and political foundations of society. Sectional interests such as clan organisations can become a serious barrier to united struggle in future, and present opportunities for the government to play off one group against another in a classical 'divide and rule' tactic. There is every reason to fear the government will adopt this approach in Wukan in the coming period as its inability to satisfy the demands of the movement becomes more apparent.

What did the December agreement signify?

On 21 December, it was planned to stage a protest march to the offices of the township government some ten kilometres away. This presented a big dilemma for the authorities, with risks either way – if they stood back, or used force against the demonstration. Pressure was also mounting on the

Guangdong provincial government as an even bigger protest movement spilled onto the streets of Haimen, just a few hours northeast of Wukan.

Over 30,000 people occupied a major road intersection in Haimen for four days – clearly mimicking both the Wukan struggle but also the ‘Occupy’ movement in the US. The target of their protest was the plan to build a new coal-driven power plant, following extensive pollution from an existing plant. The opening of this ‘second front’ in Haimen, in addition to dozens of strikes in Guangdong’s manufacturing heartland (Shenzhen, Dongguan, Guangzhou) forced the hand of the provincial party secretary Wang Yang (the province’s top official), who sent his deputy Zhu Mingguo to mediate with Wukan’s elected representatives. In Haimen, where the protests were bigger but less organised, a more ‘traditional’ approach was adopted: tear gas and batons, alongside the announcement of a moratorium on the new power plant, which based on prior experience, should be viewed with scepticism.

The 21 December settlement has been hailed as ground-breaking in some circles, especially by the CCP’s liberal reform wing, now only a small rump, who see this as a new ‘Wukan Model’ for achieving reform and consensus. A closer look at what was and was not conceded by Zhu Mingguo’s team shows this is not the case. In fact, had the Wukan leadership held out for longer, and not immediately agreed to cancel the 21 December demonstration, it is possible they could have extracted more solid concessions. All will welcome the dismissal of Xue Chang and Chen Shunyi as chief of Wukan CCP committee and village head respectively. But this is also a familiar tactic to defuse mass protests. Just 3 percent of CCP officials removed over corruption offences are ever indicted to face criminal charges. Many bounce back at a later date somewhere else in the vast machinery of government.

The decision of the provincial leadership to sacrifice Xue and Chen must be seen for the manoeuvre it is. Until the mass protests made their position untenable, this duo had received just about every imaginable accolade from the CCP’s higher-ups. In 2008, provincial chief Wang visited Wukan and pronounced it a “model village”. Xue Chang was ‘elected’ four times to the Guangdong Provincial People’s Congress (the province’s pseudo-parliament), and was awarded the title “national model worker”. On numerous occasions since 1993, i.e. while its land was being plundered by Xue and Chen, the Wukan party organisation they headed was held up as an “advanced grassroots party organisation”.

There were four main demands raised by the people of Wukan. Which of these have been met? Firstly, there was the demand for the return of Xue Jingbo’s body, to allow an independent autopsy. This was an extremely important issue. As Xue’s son stated at the time: “Right now we have only

one demand, and that is that they return the body of my father, he belongs to us, not to the government.” As already noted, the authorities subjected Xue’s family to a cruel two-month delay and the eventual release of the body was subject to tight controls that prevent an independent investigation.

The new ‘reformed’ CCP village administration under protest leader Lin Zuluan, also seems to have pressured Xue’s family to accept these unjust terms. On 17 February, over a thousand Wukan residents gathered for a memorial march for Xue Jinbo, in defiance of the official agreement. This reflects tensions and an emerging conflict between those advocating compromise with the authorities and those who – correctly – see the need to continue the struggle in Wukan.

Secondly, the demand for dropping the charges against the other four arrested protest leaders (seized with Xue on 9 December) has not been met. The release of the four (Zhuanglie Hong, Zhang City, Hong Ruichao, Zeng Zhaoliang) was staggered over several days. Police refused to release them until they signed documents accepting a measure of guilt. Rather than free men they are out “on bail, pending trial” with the condition that they make no public statements. This familiar police tactic leaves a sword hanging over their heads, should they cause ‘problems’ for the authorities in the future.

Thirdly, the protesters demanded the recognition of their elected representative council. Vague assurances were made by Zhu Mingguo at the time, but the committee was subsequently ordered to dissolve itself to make way for new village elections (currently underway). The present three-stage election process (first of a larger supervisory election committee, then of a new village committee) is widely described as being fair, with the villagers’ campaign organisations playing a role in overseeing this. But the elections are being strictly monitored by the authorities, with riot police sent into the village and controls imposed on the news media. These restrictions have rankled with many, the youth especially.

Village elections have been organised in thousands of China’s villages over the last two decades, with varying degrees of ‘openness’ (from relatively fair to completely fixed). But these village committees can at best play the role of a check on the real base of local power – the CCP officials. This elective process has never risen higher than village level, partly to thwart the formation of campaign organisations that could evolve into new political parties.

Finally, the villagers’ demand for a freeze and investigation of all land sales – the core issue – remains shrouded in uncertainty. Who will conduct

these investigations, and how democratic and transparent will this process be? Will this be under the supervision and control of grassroots organisations? This is extremely unlikely, unless more pressure is built up. And what will be the conclusion of this – to accept the old sales contracts, but share out the compensation more equitably, or demand the land is returned (where this is not too late) to the villagers?

Merely by posing these questions we can see that the Wukan movement has not reached a clear and successful conclusion. In reality, the official promises will remain on paper. It is an unfinished struggle, requiring further discussion over tactics, programme and methods of organisation, in order to achieve a real victory. The crucial ingredient that is lacking is a real, living, democratic party of struggle, based on the working class and youth, which can win the support of the poor peasants with a clear anti-capitalist and socialist programme against dictatorship. Such a party can only develop in a clandestine way at this stage, but that will change as more and even bigger struggles impend.

Does Wukan signal a policy shift?

Wang Yang has squeezed every drop of political capital from the Wukan settlement to burnish his credentials ahead of this year's leadership transition as a leader adept in 'social management'. This claim is highly questionable, even from the authoritarian regime's perspective, with Guangdong experiencing countless 'mass incidents', accompanied by repression and arrests. Even Wang, speaking at the provincial Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee (CPPCC) meeting in January, warned that the province could become "a lit fuse of social conflict".

Wang is campaigning for one of nine seats on the Standing Committee of the Politburo (PSC) – the apex of China's party-state machine – of which seven seats are to have new occupants after this year's once-in-a-decade leadership transition. As an economic liberal (promoting more free-market policies), Wang represents a rival faction within the party-state to Bo Xilai, the Chongqing party boss, who stands for a more 'social democratic' economic policy coupled to tough authoritarian control.

Others have offered their interpretation of these events, with some hailing the "Wukan Model" as a template for political reform (which in China means limited, gradual and top-controlled 'democratisation'). The CCP nationally, having relaxed its earlier media blackout and tolerating some limited online debate (in December the village 'vanished' from the internet), wants to portray Wukan as an isolated case and at the same time as 'nothing special'. Such contradictions are not untypical. Many in the overseas media have speculated that Wukan could signal the beginning of a process of democratisation in China. "Wukan offers democratic model for China" was the headline of one such piece in the Financial Times (30

January 2012).

Unfortunately, without wanting to lessen its impact as an important example of struggle, we must say these interpretations of the Wukan events are exaggerated and somewhat naïve. Another Financial Times headline (8 February 2012) stated, more correctly, “Where Wukan has led, Beijing will not follow.” As Beijing-based author Russell Leigh Moses notes:

“It would be tempting to think that the peaceful end to the standoff in Wukan between local officials and villagers heralds an important shift in the way the Communist Party handles unrest – through new forms of dialogue, rather than the old default of intimidation. Tempting – but wrong.”

The Chinese dictatorship has built up a formidable system for balancing repression with concessions (‘carrot and stick’), in order to isolate and contain challenges to its rule. It is extremely common therefore that promises are broken and concessions delayed or nullified once a tense situation has been ‘stabilised’. This was shown recently in Dalian, where up to 40,000 marched in August to demand the closure of a toxic chemical plant. The city government agreed to close the plant to defuse the protests. It has since been revealed the plant was reopened just weeks later and has been operating secretly ever since. Dalian is a major city, not a village like Wukan. This shows the corrupt CCP officials in Wukan were not isolated ‘rotten apples’. The harsh experience from thousands of previous conflicts tells us that Wukan’s struggle can only succeed if it continues, if the oppressed majority build up their own democratic organisations, and place no trust in the party-state at any level. The masses can only trust in their own power through collective action.

The fact that the regime has been forced to offer concessions is a sign of the times. We socialists see the events in Wukan as a precursor of wider, deeper, more prolific rural revolts that will unfold alongside growing battles of the industrial working class. With the deepening debt crisis of local governments across China, and a possible economic hard landing, land grabs and crooked deals like those that triggered the Wukan conflict are likely to increase, contrary to central government promises. Land sales account for up to half of local government revenue, and as their debts mount so will the pressure to sell more land. Last year there were 70,000 cases of illegal land usage, involving 751,000 mu (50,000 hectares) according to the Ministry of Land and Resources, an increase of 5.8 percent on 2010. Clearly, the central government pledge to crack down on land grabs has had no effect.

Measures adopted by the central government to ease the burden on the

rural masses, to reduce the risk of a social explosion, have invariably created an equal number of new problems. Agricultural taxes, previously a major trigger of protests, were abolished in 2005 to great fanfare. But this has led to unintended results, with an increased reliance by local governments on illegal land grabs and fewer chances for peasants to influence local government spending.

Wukan and the left

There has been enormous discussion within the left in China about the Wukan events. (The left is not allowed to organise in China and therefore most discussion is via internet, where it is intense). Most left groups of course support the Wukan struggle, but are unclear what the struggle signifies and have not raised warnings about the potential dangers and pitfalls it faces. Some Hong Kong left groups have issued statements on the events but, unlike the CWI, have failed to oppose or even mention land privatisation, an idea that is circulating widely within the Wukan movement. While the current situation of 'collectively-owned' land (i.e. by each village) is widely abused by CCP officials, rather than easing the situation, formal privatisation laws would only accelerate and widen the rich-poor divide in rural areas. As former rural official Li Changping has pointed out, privatisation would turn many CCP officials into big landlords overnight:

“The rural community in China today collectively are heavily in debt totalling several hundred billions of yuan. The creditors who make the loans to individual peasants or local governments are primarily members of the officialdom and their relatives or friends. If land privatisation is carried out nationwide, then much of the land will be surrendered to pay for the loans they have made. What will be left then for the peasant families?” (China Left Review, #1 2008)

As opposed to privatisation, we socialists defend state ownership of the land but argue it must be controlled by elected grassroots committees with a programme to develop larger-scale cooperative farming, on a voluntary basis, supported by cheap bank loans and state-funded machinery and technology. This cannot be achieved under the present one-party dictatorship with its pro-business agenda.

The vocal neo-Maoist layers on the internet generally support the Wukan struggle, but take different positions. The reformist wing of the Maoists, linked to the Utopia website, point to this as an example of a “leftward shift” because the Wukan villagers sang red songs (i.e. from the Cultural Revolution era) during the mass meetings and demonstrations. But this ignores the ‘detail’ of demands for land privatisation, a more serious issue than the choice of songs! Many in the leadership of the protests were CCP and CYL (the party’s youth league) members. These sections of the

protest leadership, stressed trust in the central government and the Guangdong provincial leaders. The position of the reformist Maoist commentators is therefore extremely contradictory, seeing the Wukan struggle as a good opportunity to attack the CCP pro-liberal wing around Wang Yang, while Wang heads the government that local CCP members place such 'trust' in.

The more radical 'Red Maoists' also support the struggle in Wukan, but more critically, seeing it is a peasant movement guided by personal self-interest, and therefore not so progressive. But while it is true that some of the economic and political demands (i.e. land privatisation) raised by the Wukan leadership ultimately serve the pro-capitalist interests in the regime, this is also a one-sided and therefore erroneous view, ignoring the hugely encouraging and radicalising effect of this struggle on wider layers, including workers.

The final word in the Wukan struggle has not been heard, and its fate is linked to the unfolding battles of other rural communities, but especially the workers' movement across China. In this way, it has similarities with last year's global struggles in Egypt, Spain, and the 'Occupy' movement. Through experience these mass struggles will see that the road of compromise and 'agreements' with the one-party state is a road to defeat. What is needed is a complete break with today's system. There is no possibility of postponing or downplaying demands for democratic rights, nor can we ignore the fact that control over China's economic and natural resources cannot be left in the hands of an unaccountable despotic party and its capitalist henchmen.

Socialists and the chinaworker.info website call for the toppling of corrupt officials, for democratic public control and ownership of the land and natural resources, and for an end to state repression. We call for immediate and full democratic rights, the end of single-party rule, free elections to a revolutionary constituent assembly, a workers' and poor farmers' government, big increases in basic wages and a maximum 8-hour working day, free public healthcare and education, and democratic public ownership of the biggest companies and banks. We believe this programme will become more and more attractive to workers, poor farmers and youth in the struggles that loom.

www.socialistworld.net

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Pakistan: Souls devoured without measure

Lal Khan 22 February 2012

Yet another excruciating wound inflicted. Insult heaped upon the injuries of the brutalised masses. It is the further exacerbation of the misery of the impoverished souls of this tragic land. The people already suffering from the ethos of this bestial capitalism in terminal decay are groaning with the pain of these policies of 'reforms'.

The blatant price hike of petroleum products along with the agonising dearness of every basic need on February 1st is perhaps a Valentine's gift, emanating 'love' from the rulers for their subjects. The indifference and callousness of the elite towards society is insidiously contemptuous.

And still the incumbent "leaders" of the party of the people have the cheek to defend this cruelty. The hypocritical criticism of the right-wing opposition parties and the allies in the coalition is nauseating. Apart from cheap political point scoring, they have no real trepidation for the oppressed that have to face the brunt of this economic terrorism. They do not have a clue about any policy or an economic system that can retrieve society from such grievous lesions that it has to suffer in the continuation of this merciless system.

Marx once remarked: "Capitalism comes on the stage of history dripping blood from every pore." With the passage of time Pakistani capitalism has rotted into such harrowing conditions that human life has become, in Lenin's words, "a horror without an end".

The main justification of the political oligarchy comprising the present regime and its so-called opposition is the crisis of the world economy and the spiralling prices of oil in the international market. Hence they are absolved. What an easy escape! How convenient! Treachery and deceit can often take vulgar manifestations. Yes, capitalism on a world scale is going through its worst crisis in recent history. But it was not the making of the workers and the youth of the exploited classes. It was the product of the insatiable lust of profits of the rich.

Capitalism's essence is to constantly raise the rate of profit. The tendency of the fall in the rate of profit triggers crises not just in the economy but has ramifications in politics, diplomacy and in the shape of wars, insurgencies and bloody social and national conflicts. But in this severest of crises the capitalists make even more profits. In this prevalent crisis when millions, if not billions, have been plunged into the abyss of absolute poverty, the profits of the 500 largest corporations soared by 81 percent in the fiscal year 2010-11. Just the US magnates made profits of \$ 10.8 trillion that equals 74 percent of the GDP of the world's largest economy. But it is the oil conglomerates that are the main beneficiaries when the oil prices shoot up, not only through speculation but by

orchestrating wars, potential conflicts and tensions between states. The Anglo-Dutch energy giant, Shell, declared its profits in 2011 were \$ 30.9 billion, up from \$20.47 billion in 2010, an increase of 54 percent. The same is the case with other monopolies.

Funds are allocated to buy off politicians, bureaucrats and the media. These mercenaries lobby to incite belligerency and conflicts. The same is the modus operandi of the bosses of the military-industrial complex. Exorbitant profits are extracted through armed conflicts and economic exploitation, the inevitable consequence of which is the devastation of the human race. A similar network of crooks and profiteers operates on a more illicit basis in Pakistan, from agriculture to the energy sector.

If a society cannot be protected from the avalanche of world oil price hikes then what is the relevance of the national state or the flaunted sovereignty of the 'nation'? If the rulers are incapable of curbing inflation and relieving the pain of the people, then what are they in power for? If they blame the economic system, then they should break with the system and fight to overthrow it. After all, that is the real 'politics of the people'. But that they will never do, come what may. The fortunes of the political and the military elite are the products of this system of plunder and oppression.

What is the meaning of democracy? Is this rule of the people to devour the very people it is supposed to represent? This monstrosity of the unravelling spiral of deprivation and misery, worsening by the hour with these price hikes, is not the destiny of the working people. The ruling classes and their 'concubines' in the media call this system 'democracy'.

Hundreds of children die every day due to hunger, thousands perish in poverty. Millions more are grappling in atrocious conditions to sustain their existence. But the harsh reality is that things are not going to improve for the vast majority of the masses in this system. The situation will only continue to deteriorate.

The only option for the present and the next rulers in this system is to be more and more indifferent, fabricating non-issues to distract the people in controversies and conflicts of the various sections of the ruling classes and the institutions of their state. Once the masses rise, they will join up in no time. But with water, energy, health, education, sanitation and other basic needs of life diminishing rapidly and becoming out of reach with runaway inflation, it becomes more and more difficult to even maintain the subhuman existence of the masses. It is already starting to become a question of survival.

The bizarre slogan of "democracy is the best revenge" has produced a

regime that has only struck at the toiling masses with a vengeance. The masses are becoming aware that this moneyed democracy has only taken its revenge from them. They were deluded by their leaders that their dream of prosperity would come true with 'democracy'. The leaders plundered billions; the people are left to rot. Their endurance has been stretched to the extreme. They have endured, fought and defeated military dictatorships only to find that the civilian replacements further desecrated their conditions of life. This vicious cycle of different forms of bourgeois rule cannot go on forever. The judicial delusions, the scare-mongering of dictatorship, the facade of democracy, the conjurations of the mullahs, the leeching aid of imperialism and the sanctity of the state are being rapidly exposed as instruments of their subjugation, misery and exploitation.

The lagging mass consciousness is fast catching up with the economic and social realities. This is very dangerous for the ruling classes. Sooner rather than later the masses will reach the conclusion that for their emancipation they have to break with the system. An upheaval on a class basis will transform the whole situation and challenge the system. Revolution will be on the streets.

www.marxist.com

The writer is the editor of Asian Marxist Review and International Secretary of Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign. He can be reached at ptudc@hotmail.com

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Occupy Heads into the Spring

Rebecca Solnit 22 February 2012

When you fall in love, it's all about what you have in common, and you can hardly imagine that there are differences, let alone that you will quarrel over them, or weep about them, or be torn apart by them -- or if all goes well, struggle, learn, and bond more strongly because of, rather than despite, them. The Occupy movement had its glorious honeymoon when old and young, liberal and radical, comfortable and desperate, homeless and tenured all found that what they had in common was so compelling the differences hardly seemed to matter.

Until they did.

Revolutions are always like this: at first all men are brothers and anything is possible, and then, if you're lucky, the romance of that heady moment

ripens into a relationship, instead of a breakup, an abusive marriage, or a murder-suicide. Occupy had its golden age, when those who never before imagined living side-by-side with homeless people found themselves in adjoining tents in public squares.

All sorts of other equalizing forces were present, not least the police brutality that battered the privileged the way that inner-city kids are used to being battered all the time. Part of what we had in common was what we were against: the current economy and the principle of insatiable greed that made it run, as well as the emotional and economic privatization that accompanied it.

This is a system that damages people, and its devastation was on display as never before in the early months of Occupy and related phenomena like the “We are the 99%” website. When it was people facing foreclosure, or who’d lost their jobs, or were thrashing around under avalanches of college or medical debt, they weren’t hard to accept as us, and not them.

And then came the people who’d been damaged far more, the psychologically fragile, the marginal, and the homeless -- some of them endlessly needy and with a huge capacity for disruption. People who had come to fight the power found themselves staying on to figure out available mental-health resources, while others who had wanted to experience a democratic society on a grand scale found themselves trying to solve sanitation problems. And then there was the violence.

The Faces of Violence

The most important direct violence Occupy faced was, of course, from the state, in the form of the police using maximum sub-lethal force on sleepers in tents, mothers with children, unarmed pedestrians, young women already penned up, unresisting seated students, poets, professors, pregnant women, wheelchair-bound occupiers, and octogenarians. It has been a sustained campaign of police brutality from Wall Street to Washington State the likes of which we haven’t seen in 40 years.

On the part of activists, there were also a few notable incidents of violence in the hundreds of camps, especially violence against women. The mainstream media seemed to think this damned the Occupy movement, though it made the camps, at worst, a whole lot like the rest of the planet, which, in case you hadn’t noticed, seethes with violence against women. But these were isolated incidents.

That old line of songster Woody Guthrie is always handy in situations like this: “Some will rob you with a six-gun, some with a fountain pen.” The police have been going after occupiers with projectile weapons, clubs, and

tear gas, sending some of them to the hospital and leaving more than a few others traumatized and fearful. That's the six-gun here.

But it all began with the fountain pens, slashing through peoples' lives, through national and international economies, through the global markets. These were wielded by the banksters, the "vampire squid," the deregulators in D.C., the men -- and with the rarest of exceptions they were men -- who stole the world.

That's what Occupy came together to oppose, the grandest violence by scale, the least obvious by impact. No one on Wall Street ever had to get his suit besmirched by carrying out a foreclosure eviction himself. Cities provided that service for free to the banks (thereby further impoverishing themselves as they created new paupers out of old taxpayers). And the police clubbed their opponents for them, over and over, everywhere across the United States.

The grand thieves invented ever more ingenious methods, including those sliced and diced derivatives, to crush the hopes and livelihoods of the many. This is the terrible violence that Occupy was formed to oppose. Don't ever lose sight of that.

Oakland's Beautiful Nonviolence

Now that we're done remembering the major violence, let's talk about Occupy Oakland. A great deal of fuss has been made about two incidents in which mostly young people affiliated with Occupy Oakland damaged some property and raised some hell.

The mainstream media and some faraway pundits weighed in on those Bay Area incidents as though they determined the meaning and future of the transnational Occupy phenomenon. Perhaps some of them even hoped, consciously or otherwise, that harped on enough these might divide or destroy the movement. So it's important to recall that the initial impact of Occupy Oakland was the very opposite of violent, stunningly so, in ways that were intentionally suppressed.

Occupy Oakland began in early October as a vibrant, multiracial gathering. A camp was built at Oscar Grant/Frank Ogawa Plaza, and thousands received much-needed meals and healthcare for free from well-organized volunteers. Sometimes called the Oakland Commune, it was consciously descended from some of the finer aspects of an earlier movement born in Oakland, the Black Panthers, whose free breakfast programs should perhaps be as well-remembered and more admired than their macho posturing.

A compelling and generous-spirited General Assembly took place nightly

and then biweekly in which the most important things on Earth were discussed by wildly different participants. Once, for instance, I was in a breakout discussion group that included Native American, white, Latino, and able-bodied and disabled Occupiers, and in which I was likely the eldest participant; another time, a bunch of peacenik grandmothers dominated my group.

This country is segregated in so many terrible ways -- and then it wasn't for those glorious weeks when civil society awoke and fell in love with itself. Everyone showed up; everyone talked to everyone else; and in little tastes, in fleeting moments, the old divides no longer divided us and we felt like we could imagine ourselves as one society. This was the dream of the promised land -- this land, that is, without its bitter divides. Honey never tasted sweeter, and power never felt better.

Now here's something astonishing. While the camp was in existence, crime went down 19% in Oakland, a statistic the city was careful to conceal. "It may be counter to our statement that the Occupy movement is negatively impacting crime in Oakland," the police chief wrote to the mayor in an email that local news station KTVU later obtained and released to little fanfare. Pay attention: Occupy was so powerful a force for nonviolence that it was already solving Oakland's chronic crime and violence problems just by giving people hope and meals and solidarity and conversation.

The police attacking the camp knew what the rest of us didn't: Occupy was abating crime, including violent crime, in this gritty, crime-ridden city. "You gotta give them hope," said an elected official across the bay once upon a time -- a city supervisor named Harvey Milk. Occupy was hope we gave ourselves, the dream come true. The city did its best to take the hope away violently at 5 a.m. on October 25th. The sleepers were assaulted; their belongings confiscated and trashed. Then, Occupy Oakland rose again. Many thousands of nonviolent marchers shut down the Port of Oakland in a stunning display of popular power on November 2nd.

That night, some kids did the smashy-smashy stuff that everyone gets really excited about. (They even spray-painted "smashy" on a Rite Aid drugstore in giant letters.) When we talk about people who spray-paint and break windows and start bonfires in the street and shove people and scream and run around, making a demonstration into something way too much like the punk rock shows of my youth, let's keep one thing in mind: they didn't send anyone to the hospital, drive any seniors from their homes, spread despair and debt among the young, snatch food and medicine from the desperate, or destroy the global economy.

That said, they are still a problem. They are the bait the police take and the media go to town with. They create a situation a whole lot of us don't like and that drives away many who might otherwise participate or sympathize. They are, that is, incredibly bad for a movement, and represent a form of segregation by intimidation.

But don't confuse the pro-vandalism Occupiers with the vampire squid or the up-armored robocops who have gone after us almost everywhere. Though their means are deeply flawed, their ends are not so different than yours. There's no question that they should improve their tactics or maybe just act tactically, let alone strategically, and there's no question that a lot of other people should stop being so apocalyptic about it.

Those who advocate for nonviolence at Occupy should remember that nonviolence is at best a great spirit of love and generosity, not a prissy enforcement squad. After all, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., who gets invoked all the time when such issues come up, didn't go around saying grumpy things about Malcolm X and the Black Panthers.

Violence Against the Truth

Of course, a lot of people responding to these incidents in Oakland are actually responding to fictional versions of them. In such cases, you could even say that some journalists were doing violence against the truth of what happened in Oakland on November 2nd and January 28th.

The San Francisco Chronicle, for example, reported on the day's events this way:

"Among the most violent incidents that occurred Saturday night was in front of the YMCA at 23rd Street and Broadway. Police corralled protesters in front of the building and several dozen protesters stormed into the Y, apparently to escape from the police, city officials and protesters said. Protesters damaged a door and a few fixtures, and frightened those inside the gym working out, said Robert Wilkins, president of the YMCA of the East Bay."

Wilkins was apparently not in the building, and first-person testimony recounts that a YMCA staff member welcomed the surrounded and battered protesters, and once inside, some were so terrified they pretended to work out on exercise machines to blend in.

I wrote this to the journalists who described the incident so peculiarly: "What was violent about [activists] fleeing police engaging in wholesale arrests and aggressive behavior? Even the YMCA official who complains about it adds, 'The damage appears pretty minimal.' And you call it violence? That's sloppy."

The reporter who responded apologized for what she called her “poor word choice” and said the piece was meant to convey police violence as well.

When the police are violent against activists, journalists tend to frame it as though there were violence in some vaguely unascrivable sense that implicates the clobbered as well as the clobberers. In, for example, the build-up to the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York City, the mainstream media kept portraying the right of the people peaceably to assemble as tantamount to terrorism and describing all the terrible things that the government or the media themselves speculated we might want to do (but never did).

Some of this was based on the fiction of tremendous activist violence in Seattle in 1999 that the New York Times in particular devoted itself to promulgating. That the police smashed up nonviolent demonstrators and constitutional rights pretty badly in both Seattle and New York didn't excite them nearly as much. Don't forget that before the obsession with violence arose, the smearing of Occupy was focused on the idea that people weren't washing very much, and before that the framework for marginalization was that Occupy had “no demands.” There's always something.

Keep in mind as well that Oakland's police department is on the brink of federal receivership for not having made real amends for old and well-documented problems of violence, corruption, and mismanagement, and that it was the police department, not the Occupy Oakland demonstrators, which used tear gas, clubs, smoke grenades, and rubber bullets on January 28th. It's true that a small group vandalized City Hall after the considerable police violence, but that's hardly what the plans were at the outset of the day.

The action on January 28th that resulted in 400 arrests and a media conflagration was called Move-In Day. There was a handmade patchwork banner that proclaimed “Another Oakland Is Possible” and a children's contingent with pennants, balloons, and strollers. Occupy Oakland was seeking to take over an abandoned building so that it could reestablish the community, the food programs, and the medical clinic it had set up last fall. It may not have been well planned or well executed, but it was idealistic.

Despite this, many people who had no firsthand contact with Occupy Oakland inveighed against it or even against the whole Occupy movement. If only that intensity of fury were to be directed at the root cause of it all, the colossal economic violence that surrounds us.

All of which is to say, for anyone who hadn't noticed, that the honeymoon is over.

Now for the Real Work

The honeymoon is, of course, the period when you're so in love you don't notice differences that will eventually have to be worked out one way or another. Most relationships begin as though you were coasting downhill. Then come the flatlands, followed by the hills where you're going to have to pedal hard, if you don't just abandon the bike.

Occupy might just be the name we've put on a great groundswell of popular outrage and a rebirth of civil society too deep, too broad, to be a movement. A movement is an ocean wave: this is the whole tide turning from Cairo to Moscow to Athens to Santiago to Chicago. Nevertheless, the American swell in this tide involves a delicate alliance between liberals and radicals, people who want to reform the government and campaign for particular gains, and people who wish the government didn't exist and mostly want to work outside the system. If the radicals should frighten the liberals as little as possible, surely the liberals have an equal obligation to get fiercer and more willing to confront -- and to remember that nonviolence, even in its purest form, is not the same as being nice.

Surely the only possible answer to the tired question of where Occupy should go from here (as though a few public figures got to decide) is: everywhere. I keep being asked what Occupy should do next, but it's already doing it.

It is everywhere.

In many cities, outside the limelight, people are still occupying public space in tents and holding General Assemblies. February 20th, for instance, was a national day of Occupy solidarity with prisoners; Occupiers are organizing on many fronts and planning for May Day, and a great many foreclosure defenses from Nashville to San Francisco have kept people in their homes and made banks renegotiate. Campus activism is reinvigorated, and creative and fierce discussions about college costs and student debt are underway, as is a deeper conversation about economics and ethics that rejects conventional wisdom about what is fair and possible.

Occupy is one catalyst or facet of the populist will you can see in a host of recent victories. The campaign against corporate personhood seems to be gaining momentum. A popular environmental campaign made President Obama reject the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline from Canada, despite immense Republican and corporate pressure. In response to widespread outrage, the Susan B. Komen Foundation reversed its decision to defund cancer detection at Planned Parenthood. Online campaigns have forced

Apple to address its hideous labor issues, and the ever-heroic Coalition of Immokalee Workers at last brought Trader Joes into line with its fair wages for farmworkers campaign.

These genuine gains come thanks to relatively modest exercises of popular power. They should act as reminders that we do have power and that its exercise can be popular. Some of last fall's exhilarating conversations have faltered, but the great conversation that is civil society awake and arisen hasn't stopped.

What happens now depends on vigorous participation, including yours, in thinking aloud together about who we are, what we want, and how we get there, and then acting upon it. Go occupy the possibilities and don't stop pedaling. And remember, it started with mad, passionate love.

www.zcommunications.org

TomDispatch regular Rebecca Solnit is the author of 13 (or so) books, including *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster* and *Hope in the Dark*. She lives in and occupies from San Francisco.

This article first appeared on TomDispatch.com, a weblog of the Nation Institute, which offers a steady flow of alternate sources, news, and opinion from Tom Engelhardt, long time editor in publishing, co-founder of the American Empire Project, author of *The End of Victory Culture*, as of a novel, *The Last Days of Publishing*. His latest book is *The American Way of War: How Bush's Wars Became Obama's* (Haymarket Books).

Syria: For a mass movement to defeat Assad's regime and imperialism!

Protests brutally repressed, armed conflict spreading and threat of imperialist intervention

Aysha Zaki, CWI Lebanon 20 February 2012

On 16 February, a non-binding resolution was adopted by the UN General Assembly backing the Arab League's call on Syria's President Assad to resign. It was based on an earlier resolution in the Security Council that was vetoed by Russia and China, on 31 January, which called on the United Nations Security Council to send "peacekeepers" to Syria to intervene in escalating fighting between the Syrian government and opposition and on Assad to transfer power. Russia said the resolution opens the way for civil war in Syria. Assad's regime states that it will "defeat any foreign attempt to create chaos in Syria".

But in the last weeks, the regime has been deploying its military and security forces and heavy weapons against opposition groups, which include reportedly armed groups that increasingly incorporate former soldiers from the Syrian army. The regime's army has bombarded towns, killing scores of protestors every day, detaining activists and reinforcing brutal sanctions on whole towns, reported to be without gas, power, phone or internet connections and many without some items of food. The state forces' attacks have reportedly targeted homes, schools and hospitals, killing children and women and driving whole families out of their neighbourhoods and into displacement, living in unbearable conditions.

Other reports tell a different story. Some opposition groups are getting armed to defend the protests but are in some cases retaliating to the regime and forming road check points in towns and neighbourhoods. There are reports of kidnappings, intimidations and shops forced to close and to go on strike. People not yet activated by the uprising are reported to be horrified and staying in their homes. Clearly, the Assad regime is exploiting the situation which is developing into an armed conflict and is attempting to subjugate any opposition with the aim of preventing a mass uprising spreading into Damascus. As a result, over 5,000 have been killed, excluding serving soldiers but including defectors. It is estimated that around 2,000 serving military personnel may have died as well.

For 11 months now, Assad's regime has been unleashing its military forces to try to crush the uprising but has failed to reverse events. The brutal Assad dictator has deployed tanks and armoured personnel carriers in towns and cities where protests have been consistently calling for his removal, including Deraa, Homs, Hama, Idlib and suburbs of Damascus. In addition to the thousands killed and injured, tens of thousands are reported to be detained and tortured or missing, among them women and children.

2011 uprising

The uprising started in Deraa 11 months ago and spread as a mass protest movement against the corruption of the ruling elite. Most slogans were, at the beginning, about the deteriorating and unbearable social and economic conditions faced by workers and the urban and rural poor. Inspired by the revolutions sweeping the entire region, the protests soon evolved into a revolutionary uprising by workers and youth heroically standing up to the monstrous state machine's live bullets and mass detentions. Demands escalated to calling for the removal of Assad's regime and the corrupt and repressive rule of his clan.

The Syrian uprising developed as the West was opening up to and establishing ties with the regime and as a result of swift neo-liberal measures in the economy that led to the collapse of the Syrian industrial

and agricultural sectors and the impoverishment of the working class. The uprising is partly an outcome of a process of the looting the country's wealth. The impoverishment of the working class and increasing unemployment affecting a large number of youth and rural poor are a result of Assad's neo-liberal policies intertwined with his clan's corruption and dominance over the economy.

But despite attempts by the opposition to organise strike action and defence committees, recent reports from Syria show that the struggle is developing into an armed conflict between various anti-regime groups with different characteristics, and state forces. This development, which can pose serious dangers, is due to the absence of a mass workers' alternative to Assad that is capable of appealing to and organising workers and the poor across Syria and making a class appeal to the rank and file of the armed forces to split the army along class lines. A mass socialist party is the only force able to unite the masses and challenge to take power from the rotten Syrian capitalist class.

Brutal regime and increasing bloodshed

Today, horrendous images of killings of men, women and children (some of which is seen on YouTube) from Homs, Idlib, Hama, and suburbs of Damascus, do not only consist of footage of protesters attacked or shot by the security forces, but also of armed groups defending their areas from brutal attacks at the hands of the monstrously repressive regime. Pictures increasingly feature killings of armed men and of random bombings by the state forces of areas and towns, some already divided along sectarian and confessional lines, such as Homs. Human rights groups monitoring the daily toll of deaths, injuries and arrests now confirm that this is a growing trend, also evident from the names on the casualty lists.

Horrific reports have been emerging lately about some cases of particularly savage sectarian killings on both sides - images which the conflict in Iraq embedded in the consciousness of the Arab masses a few years ago. In the last few weeks, the 'Local Coordinating Committees' called for demonstrations to be held on Fridays and stressed that they should be peaceful. The Committees issued such calls weekly with warnings about the protest movement becoming infected with the violence implanted by the regime and which has begun to characterize the opposition movement in parts of the country. There have been fears, reported by Syrian activists, that this violence is leading to the bloody chaos that the region has become more wearily familiar with, particularly the Iraqi and Lebanese masses.

Socialists support the right of protestors and revolutionary groups to take up arms in the face of the cold-blooded killing, torture and detention of activists by the brutal Assad regime, which wields overwhelming military

strength. But resistance, if it is to be effective and the basis for an alternative government, needs to be based on democratically-elected defence committees of workers and youth and to act as accountable bodies armed to protect the mass protests. The 'Free Syrian Army', declaring itself the "defender of the revolution", and reportedly made up of 25,000 defected soldiers and officers, is reported to be backed by several reactionary Arab states like the Saudi dictatorship and the Qatar autocracy. Recent news reports have shown film footages of Free Syrian Army men as 'guerilla fighters' and when interviewed, speaking of being supported by Libyan rebel troops and fighting Hezbollah and Iranian fighters, as well as the Syrian state army. However true or false these reports are, they show the volatility of the situation which is increasingly out of the hands of the regime. This turn in the protest movement shows the danger that the movement is taken out of the hands of activists on the ground and shifted from mass protests into armed fighting by unaccountable militias. As the CWI emphasized in previous articles and statements, only on the basis of a mass independent movement of workers and the poor that breaks with capitalism can the Syrian revolution succeed in truly transforming the lives of the vast majority.

This also means having no trust in either the imperialist powers or the regional autocratic dictatorships. Despite all their fine words about defending the Syrian people, powers like the US and Britain kept silent when Israel attacked Lebanon in 2006 and Gaza in 2009 and made only very mild criticism of the Bahraini and Saudi brutal suppression of last year's protest movement in Bahrain or about the current crackdown against protesters marking one year since the Bahrain protests. The Arab League is anything but a group of democratic and 'neutral' regimes and is in no position to preach about democratic rights.

Right wing Islamist groups

The Arab satellite TV news channels, most of which are funded by the despotic regimes, rarely report about the role of far right Islamist groups in Syria, such as the Salafists, who have been funded by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, as seen also in Egypt, Lebanon and Iraq. The role of Takfiri groups in Syria is exaggerated by the regime [Takfiris are regarded as violent offshoots of the Salafi movement and Sunni Islamist groups used the concept previously to justify attacks on Shias] but they do seek to sow divisions along sectarian and confessional lines. In recent weeks, there have been reports and interviews from towns like Homs stating that children from one community were expelled or excluded from their local schools for sectarian reasons, of groups of people fleeing from one part of the country to another out of fear of bloody sectarian revenge, and of civilian buses carrying inter-city travellers or government employees being ambushed and passengers either freed or killed depending on what sect they belong to. The killings have been described as particularly

savage and horrifying.

Some opposition activists say that they have temporarily withdrawn from the protest movement, fearing a drift towards, and in protest at, potential civil and sectarian war. The regime is largely and correctly blamed for this development, having repressed and massacred political Islamists in the past and therefore enhanced their role amongst some of the most oppressed. The political Islamists have also received the funding and backing of the Sunni elite in the region. These developments lead many Syrians to fear what might come after Assad, if the regime is overthrown. But the deterioration in the situation is also a reflection of the failure of the opposition to raise social and economic demands alongside the democratic issues and to build a mass movement of workers and the poor with an alternative workers' programme around which working people and the poor can unite. Such a movement would reject imperialist intervention and stand united against the whole corrupt and repressive Syrian capitalist class, the pro-Assad sections and the big business backed "opposition leaders" in exile. This approach would appeal on a class basis to most soldiers in the army to join the uprising and carry out a revolution that would transform the lives of most Syrians, including workers in uniform.

Foreign intervention

Many analysts have commented on Syria reaching a "new crossroads", with US forces withdrawing from Iraq meaning changes are taking place in the region. Some have pointed to the US, Europe, and their Arab clients as acting in collaboration with various parts of the Syrian opposition to remove Assad. Part of these plans is the most prominent group in the opposition, the Syrian National Council (SNC), with dissident figures like Ghalioun holding an SNC leadership position and pushing for a plan of action similar to the NATO intervention in Libya. Of course, considering the dangers or the consequences, Western powers and most Arab states are not yet willing to comply with all these calls.

However, while it is true that Western powers are less interested in attacking Syria because of its demographic complexities and the potential consequences of the fall-out of a military intervention and because it does not have Libya's oil resources, it is clearly proving to be in the interests of the Arab oil states and imperialism to isolate the Iranian regime by weakening Assad's rule. An illustration of the pressure felt by the Syrian regime, as a result of the determined mass opposition movement on the ground and of the effects of sanctions on the economy, is the announcement by Assad of a 'constitutional referendum' called on 26 February and elections thereafter. This may be a ploy by the regime to attempt to incorporate sections of the Western-backed opposition groups into government. This would, of course, be at the cost of the protestors

whose living conditions will not see a fundamental change. However, a military intervention still cannot be ruled out considering the ruling elite around Assad will be resistant to giving away their position, power, wealth and influence to Qatari and Syrian businessmen in exile. After all, Qatar has announced that it is not only offering to fund a military intervention in Syria but to also fund “reconstruction” in its aftermath. This is because, at the regional level, alongside their enormous wealth, Syria is a strategic prize for oligarchs.

However, given that the experience of the Lebanese civil war is far more applicable to Syria than the experiences of Libya or Yemen, with the two neighbouring countries similar sectarian divisions and political alignments, any military intervention by the US-European Western alliance in league with the Gulf States and Turkey would risk destabilizing the whole region. Moreover, such an intervention would be, in the long term if not the short term, rejected by the masses of the region that have a bitter experience of imperialism. In addition to this, the oil states of the Gulf have to consider the demographic balance of their own populations and the fact that their regimes are also unstable, with the Gulf masses increasingly inspired by the revolutions in the Arab region. However, this does not mean that other forms of a foreign-sponsored conflict in Syria will not take place, such as the arming and backing of some opposition groups to carry out a military overthrow of Assad’s regime, as is already reported to be happening.

Sanctions

In the meantime, economic and financial sanctions are used by the UN and Arab League to not only target the regime and its institutions and leaders, but to target the Syrian capitalist class, who appear largely still prepared to back the regime but will not be indefinitely and not at any cost. At this stage, it is small businesses and the working class paying the price of these sanctions, as big businesses and state companies are making workers pay for the crisis, through higher prices for goods and lay-offs. Moreover, the support that Assad’s regime is currently receiving from Iran, Russia, China, and to a certain degree Lebanon and Iraq, have been partially mitigating the effect of the sanctions in the short term. Iran has been sending a message that it is able to seal off strategic trade routes that would slow the international economy to a standstill and paralyse commercial activity between East and West, if sanctions against it continue. And the Iranian government signed a free trade agreement with Syria in December and bought half of Syria’s agricultural production for the year, confirming its support for the regime.

However, over the last two months alone, prices in Syria have gone up by an average of 25%, power cuts have reached 12 hours a day and the Syrian currency has plummeted by about 15%. And with the oil and

tourism industries affected, the Finance Minister, Al Shaar, has spoken of the government's "responsibility" towards "ordinary citizens" and the "return to domestic production" and "self-sufficiency" (taking some protectionist measures). But Syrian industry has been unable to compete with foreign goods and a number of factories have already closed down and workers were laid off. In addition, Turkish capitalist interests are at stake if the region faces a blockade, with about 160,000 trucks entering Syria each year from Turkey, most of which continue on to Gulf or neighbouring countries. Turkey exports to Syria three times what it imports from the country. Searching for short term solutions to make up the losses to big business in Syria, there have already been talks about Syria looking for other solutions, such as "developing a shared market with Iraq".

Turkey and the Gulf states are seeking to establish powerful footholds inside Syria, as they did in Libya, so as to be able to influence the country's future and undermine its regional influence. It is no coincidence that the US, Europe and their Arab clients want Israel to maintain a low profile so that its involvement does not discredit the regime's "enemies". We saw the same spectacle in Lebanon after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. But the same problem could recur. If the combination of opposition and external military, security and economic pressure fails to bring down the regime, Israel could, with US backing, be re-visited and asked to revert to a war-waging role. But this course of action would be highly problematic, as the Syrian regime would use the nationalism as a pole of support and portray itself as leading the resistance against Israel. A military intervention into Syria could quickly spiral out of control and into a regional war, partly as result of Hezbollah's fear of facing a 'blockade' and Iran's fear of more isolation. The UN Security Council is aware of this dilemma and might well play a role similar to the one it played in Yemen, thus supporting the 'Arab initiative' (bringing down the regime but preserving the system).

However, none of this is detracting attention from Assad's state terror and from the killing of protesters and arresting of tens of thousands. The regime understands that nobody can overlook or excuse this, or act as though the killings, arrests, and torture never happened. Therefore, any 'reform process' on behalf of the regime will need to incorporate opposition leaders to participate in discussing and formulating 'reforms'. What happens in Syria remains to be seen but if the underlying conditions which were behind the start of this uprising are to fundamentally change, it is up to the working class to get organized independently and move into the mass opposition struggle as a class, utilizing its methods of mass struggle, including the general strike and mass insurrection, as we saw in Tunisia and Egypt last year, to sweep aside the Assad regime and the entire rotten capitalist class in Syria.

Balancing between “reform” and reaction

Since coming to power in 2000, Assad has been trying to balance between limited “reform” and ruthless military crackdown. By “reform” is meant the releasing of some political prisoners and allowing the setting up of so-called independent newspapers. For a limited time, Assad even allowed “democratic” intellectuals to hold public meetings, but these were soon banned as arrests and harassment became the preferred way for the regime to suppress opposition. Human rights groups say there are today over 50,000 detainees, in addition to the thousands of political prisoners already in Syrian jails.

At the start of the uprising last year, promises of ‘reform’ were made but did not materialize. The regime stated that it is “premature” to talk about constitutional changes which would end the ruling Baath Party being the “leader of the state and society” ahead of the 2014 presidential election.

But Assad’s fear of the movement growing has led him to issue a number of general amnesties for prisoners, including those accused of political “crimes”. This shows the pressure from the uprising that his regime has failed to suppress despite the use of massive military force. These offers have been rejected by the opposition as just another plot by the regime to gain time. Syrian state television said the amnesty covered, “all members of political movements,” including the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, which led an armed uprising against Assad’s father in 1982. Membership in the party is punishable by death.

The release of political prisoners has been a key demand of the opposition. The first offer came as members of the Syrian opposition gathered in Turkey for a conference in summer 2011, as part of a series of reforms – including lifting a 40-year-old state of emergency and granting citizenship to stateless Kurds in eastern Syria – aimed at addressing the grievances of Kurdish protesters. But this move was seen as too-little-too-late by the masses; hundreds of protesters had already been killed, and the protesters raised their demands from “reform” to “toppling the regime”.

The Syrian opposition

The Syrian uprising was reported last December to have come to a “stalemate”. The pact between the two umbrella opposition organisations had broken down. The Syrian National Council (SNC) – calling for foreign intervention - and the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change in Syria (NCB) – opposed to foreign intervention, while factions within it express openness to dialogue with the regime.

The “opposition” in exile, having announced four months into the protests the creation of a “transitional council” to “lead the struggle against the

regime”, was founded during a three-day conference in Turkey, privately funded by Syrian and Arab big businesses, including the Sanqar brothers’ luxury car distributors based in Damascus, the UAE-based satellite channel Orient TV, which had its Damascus office closed down after it was forcefully bought out by Assad’s cousin, Makhlof.

The former and exiled former Syrian vice president, Khaddam, who went on Israeli state television speaking of a plan for military action against Syria, stated with confidence that the Syrian regime will be toppled and that NATO would be involved in some sort of military intervention. Khaddam was in a previous opposition coalition called, the ‘National Salvation Front’ (Jabhat Al Khoulas Al Watani) along with the Muslim Brotherhood. This led to other political groups, including the former communists and nationalists in another coalition, the ‘Damascus Declaration (Ealan Dimashk)’, to denounce Khaddam for his corrupt personal history and to call the Brotherhood opportunistic. Nevertheless, the two coalitions have agreed to joint efforts in an opposition front against the Assad regime. This indicates that none of these parties and coalitions actually has a real social base of support or the ability to appeal to the masses of workers and youth protesting in Syrian streets.

The traditional opposition inside Syria, other than the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafists, is mainly remnants of the so-called “Left” parties, which were either intellectuals detached from Syrian workers or allied to the regime. The latter, being tainted by their past links with the regime while claiming to be “socialist”, do not appeal to the protesting youth and workers in the streets today.

Role of Muslim Brotherhood

Like many other “opponents” of the regime, the Brotherhood and Salafists initially played a limited role in the protests. Many of the protests began around mosques initially, as these were the only “gatherings” that the government did not disperse, and religious texts the only “opinions” the government cannot suppress.

Rather than Islamist slogans, chants that have been raised in the mosques called for unity of the Syrian people and for freedom. On a number of protests since the 27 May 2011, handmade banners declared: “We’re not Salafists!”, “We’re not armed groups!”, “We’re the youth of free Syria!” and “Where’s the media?”

It is the struggle for better living standards and for the freedom to organise and fight for better conditions which appeals to the masses of Syrian workers and youth. This is the real dynamic behind an increasing number of protestors overcoming their fear of the government and taking to the streets, and is behind the regime being on the defensive. But while the

Muslim Brotherhood might appeal to a section in Syrian society, they cannot appeal to the masses on a class basis. The Brotherhood's impact in the protests is limited on the ground (although it is exaggerated by the mass media). Nevertheless the role of the Brotherhood exacerbates the fears of the 10% Christian population of an Islamic movement driving them out of Syria, as occurred in Iraq. The Brotherhood leaders aim to play a role in the Western-backed opposition, as well as in future possible elections, following the example of the Brotherhood in Egypt.

The Assad regime has taken a conscious step of playing on sectarian and religious divisions in the name of defending the "secular" tradition of Syrian society. They hope this can counter the Syria working class moving into decisive action against the regime.

Syrian capitalism in crisis

In recent years, the Baath Party moved towards embracing a free market economy, which already in Syria has seen combining competition and private 'initiatives' in the corrupt and under-funded public sector, the role of the state receding and the rise of new monopolies. The quality of goods and services went down, jobs were lost and living standards have declined. With local courts corrupt and run under the control of the Baathist party leaders, an appalling bureaucracy developed and the so-called economic "reforms" meant the grabbing of economic power by and for the benefit of the rich and powerful, in almost all cases related to the Assad family.

Economic neo-liberalism in Syria, just like in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, meant that the same state bureaucracy that arose as a result of a military coup became the corrupt capitalist class now facing growing social and political protests. In cities like Dara'a and Latakia, protests started against the feared and hated big property owner, and Assad's cousin, Makhlof. He controls the country's cell phone network and more than anyone else represents the intertwining of power and wealth in Syria.

This protest movement has its roots in the worsening economic conditions facing workers and the poor across Syria, starting with the question of land property along Syria's borders. Most land owners along the borders are not allowed to sell or even invest in their land, making it hard for poor peasants and small farmers to make a living other than trading in the black market and smuggling goods across the borders. Most young men are forced to commute into big cities in search for work which is only available to a small number and for low wages.

This has also led to a crisis in housing. Families cannot afford to buy properties built by construction companies and are not allowed to expand and build additional floors onto their homes. In Daraa, one of the first

protest banners read: “Don’t lift the emergency law, lift the limit on floors”. On the way from Damascus to Deraa, the class make up of the towns can be defined based on status of homes. Hundreds of thousands of families are living in poor housing, facing mass unemployment and poverty. In Syria, it is common to meet young people working in restaurants who hold a degree. Youth unemployment is on the increase and like all other Arab countries neo-liberal capitalism has failed many new generations. The young make up around 60% of the total population of Syria.

The market economy in Syria has also meant that among others, Chinese and Turkish big businesses - mainly furniture factories and agriculture industries – are driving carpenters and small farmers out of business. Shops and small firms have been closing down, with many workers, mainly youth, forced into the cities in search for a living. In addition to this, high taxation is being imposed on the remaining small businesses making it even harder to for most family businesses to be sustained. With crumbling public services and social cuts, gaps have widened between rich and poor and big cities and small towns. Adding to this, corruption has become rife, at all levels of society.

The Syrian ruling elite is fundamentally detached from everyday issues facing the majority of Syrians, in particular the workers and the poor. Those big businesses interests now trying to organize themselves in the opposition will only serve their own class interests, exploiting protestors who have put their lives at risk fighting for a better future for their children.

The need to appeal to the workers in uniform
Syrian capitalism leans on a 500,000 strong army, not counting the security forces and intelligence officers. With a third of the population living under the poverty line and a new generation of youth facing mass unemployment, many working class youth turn to the army and state forces as a means of making a living for themselves and their families. Syrian capitalism is failing a whole generation with registered unemployment at 25% and youth being forced to enter the army ranks with very low salaries. Bribery and corruption among the ranks of the army is common and is a result of the corruption rife in the public sector, as a whole. Since the 27 May 2011 protests, with slogans calling upon the army to join the protests, thousands of soldiers and officers have defected and joined the opposition.

This shows there is the basis for a class appeal to these ‘workers in uniform’, in whose class interests it is to get organised with the working class and poor brothers and sisters, to topple the regime. If this call was adopted by the broad layers of workers in society, combined with mass

action, including strikes, the Assad regime and the big business clans would be brought down. Such a development would, as in the Egyptian revolution, pose the need for the creation of a government of workers' and poor representatives to achieve both real democratic rights and the use of the country's resources in the interests of the mass of the population.

The right to self-determination

A further vital question in Syria is the position of the Kurds and the calls to establish 'Kurdistan'. Socialists call for full and genuine equal rights to all nationalities and oppressed religious minorities and for an end to all forms of national or religious discrimination and persecution. We also support the right of self determination for the Kurds.

In an attempt to sideline the Kurdish masses in Syria from the opposition movement, Assad made a concession on the 7 April 2011, granting citizenship to more than a hundred thousand Kurds. But Kurdish protestors kept joining the protests against the regime, and chanted "The Kurdish cause is not citizenship but freedom!"

Kurdish communities in Syria face daily oppression and have been discriminated against by the Syria state as long as the pan-Arab Baathists have ruled. The Kurdish masses are prohibited from practicing their own culture and speaking their native language. Kurds make up 10% of the population in Syria (more than 2 million), concentrated along the Syrian-Iraqi and the Turkish-Syria borders. Over 300,000 of them are deprived of Syrian nationality, with no right to work in the public sector, to enter certain higher education courses, to own property, to marry Syrian nationals or to travel.

In the 1970s, regime policies aimed at isolating the Kurds in an enclave away from Syria's borders included moving Arab tribes into the Kurdish border trading areas and forcing Kurdish families off their land and out of their livelihoods. The incoming tribes became known among the Kurdish communities as the "Arab settlers". This regime policy was also aimed at isolating the Kurds in Syria from those in Turkey and Iraq, to undermine the potential unity among Kurds across borders, struggling for a movement demanding self-determination.

Like many Kurds in Turkey, Iran and Iraq, Kurdish Syrians see their national question solved with an 'independent Kurdistan'. These national aspirations were exploited by US imperialism in Iraq with the false promise of an independent 'Kurdish zone' which, in reality, led to the creation of a Kurdish bureaucratic ruling class ruling a territory in Iraq and mainly interested in making deals with oil corporations and sharing power in Iraq. Pan-Arab nationalists use this example to describe these aspirations as 'separatist', but do not see that denying the right to

self-determination to the Kurdish masses actually hinders the struggle against oppression and imperialism.

Accepting the Kurdish peoples' right to self-determination does not rule out joint struggle with the Arab masses and the other oppressed people's of the region. The Kurdish workers and the poor have common interests with the Syrian masses and there is the potential for a united movement along class lines. This would challenge the ruling classes in the region, whether Syrian, Turkish or the nascent Kurdish national bourgeoisie who have turned its back on the Kurdish masses in the drive for money and power. The conditions facing Kurdish workers and youth are the same conditions facing all workers and youth in the region and are a result of local and global capitalism's exploitation of human labour and natural resources.

Assad's anti-imperialist rhetoric

Western imperialism has been meddling in Syria and the Middle East for decades, and is only prepared to back protestors if the interests of its big businesses are met. Previous Western allies, like Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt, were only abandoned by US and French imperialism when imperialist strategic interests and big companies' profits were threatened by mass opposition protests and the working class. The ruling classes, in the region and globally, are all prepared to ally with, or oppose, Assad's regime, all depending on their own economic and geo-strategic interests. This is, in fact, part of the counter-revolution in the region, waged by the local and regional elites and by the intervention of Western powers.

However, as a result of Syria's foreign policy traditionally being against the interests of US imperialism and the failure of the regime to make a 'peace deal' with Israel, the Syrian regime probably enjoys wider support than did Saleh, Gaddafi, Mubarak or Ben Ali. Knowing this, Assad relied on the security forces to suppress and isolate the protests, by promising to respond to protestors' demands and recognising the popular longing for freedom and equality.

Although the working masses have not yet moved into the arena of mass struggle as an organised class, Assad's support has been declining. A recent indication of this is the pro-Assad demonstrations where, despite the pro-Syria media claiming they have been several millions strong, have only involved tens of thousands, at the most, and were mobilised by the regime and mainly in the heart of Syrian capital. Clearly, the majority in Syria are not prepared to willingly support Assad. But neither are they confident about risking their lives and to take to the streets facing live bullets when the only alternative on offer by the "opposition" leaders is one which is backed by reactionary Gulf states and Western and big

business interests.

Assad is aware of the mood of the masses and has attempted to balance between promising 'reform' for the future, while leaning on his long used "anti-imperialist" rhetoric and calling the uprising "a conspiracy" and denouncing the armed groups opposing him as "terrorists". In a previous attempt to try to win over the not yet mobilised masses, Assad called on the people to distinguish between protesters who have "legitimate demands" and "saboteurs" who have "fundamentalist ways of thinking" and who use "destruction" to "spread chaos under the name of freedom."

It is true that the opposition leaders are not to be trusted, as they have imperialist backing and big business interests, and therefore an anti-worker agenda and while some protestors are taking up armed struggle - to defend themselves and the protesters from the brutal bloody killings at the hands of the state forces – and are thus unfortunately fighting on behalf of the masses in individual armed action against the security forces rather than appealing to workers and the poor to get organised in democratically elected defence committees, the Assad regime is only using this argument to create and widen divisions in the movement and among the masses. It is using its armed thugs to create chaos and to whip up more fear, especially among the minority Christian and Allawite communities.

Russia has opposed a UN resolution sanctioning Assad's regime because of its interests in preserving economic ties and trade with Syria. Syria is the only ally of Russia in the Middle East and is the biggest consumer of Russian weapons in the region. Russian capitalism fears a change of the Syrian regime against its interests. If a new Western-backed regime was installed, there would be a shift in the weapons industry to the West and big losses to the Russian arms industry.

While the Russian administration has expressed its regret that the Syrian regime was late in calling for 'dialogue' it has opposed US and EU interference in Syria. The Kremlin refers to Libya as the "first station" facing such imperialist interventions, Syria the second and Iran the third. Russia blamed the delay in reform in Syria on "foreign backed" factions in the opposition (as if Russian capitalism, and Stalinism before it, has not long backed the repressive and corrupt regime of the Assad clan!).

Deterioration of social and economic conditions

Syrian working people have been facing deteriorating conditions, such as fuel shortages and inflation. The working and middle classes are starting to feel an economic squeeze due to the country's ongoing political crisis, leading to shortages in a number of essential items, including diesel fuel. As demand for heating fuel increased during the winter season and some

Syrian workers unable to afford fuel costs have to find 'alternative' ways to stay warm.

Moreover, the rise in prices of basic foods has been coupled with stagnation in consumption. International sanctions against Syria have not harmed the regime as much as they have working people. The regime has taken anti-worker measures to deal with the sanctions, such as shortening working hours, decreasing salaries, freezing expenses, mass layoffs of those mainly working in the tourism industry, with only partial compensation, while reassuring the Syrian people that all the problems of shortages are being resolved.

Damascus residents find that diesel is sold to them for higher prices than those officially set by the government, which had taken a decision at the beginning of the protest movement to lower the price of diesel as part of its "reform package". There has been a gradual increase in food prices despite most foodstuffs being produced inside Syria. Sales of new cars have plummeted sharply despite the government decision to ban imports. Furthermore, the economic crisis was particularly aggravated by the decision taken by some big banks to stop financing customers' car purchases.

The sanctions, if they are fully implemented and include a ban on Syrian exports, could lead to an economic disaster, hitting the domestic industrial sector hardest. Companies would sack workers first, as a way to overcome the deficits that could result in Syria's free trade pact with neighbouring countries, such as Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan – Syria's main trading partners.

However, the construction sector in Syria has benefited from the political crisis. In the absence of regime control, construction is booming in many areas that previously faced housing crises, especially in slums where multi-level buildings were constructed in record time. The construction boom has led to an increase in demand for construction materials, and consequently a hike in prices, translating into increased profits for the building sector. Under capitalism, everything possible, including revolutions, is exploited for profits for the rich.

The need to move against Syrian capitalism

Syrian capitalism is unwilling and incapable of carrying out the social and economic reforms which would improve the conditions of the masses, and which have been behind the protests initially in Deraa and other areas across Syria. Moreover, if real democratic rights are granted to the masses in Syria, protests would quickly grow and spread, and not just the Syrian regime would risk being toppled, but all businesses and corrupt leaders would be made accountable.

Similar to Lebanon, if the Syrian ruling elite sees a workers' revolt coming, it will use its remaining weapon of sectarianism to divide and rule. Syrian workers need to unite in their demands for jobs, homes and services but the rich will not want to share the cake with the poor. Under huge pressure from the masses and working class, regimes can be forced to make concession and reforms, to try to save the regime and system, as a whole. But any reforms given by a pro-capitalist government, including by a future post-Assad regime, will be limited and the ruling class will always attempt to take back these reforms if they can.

If workers' social and economic conditions are to be improved under the current regime, it would mean the Assad clan, which is the main power in the Syrian regime, being forced to eat into their enormous wealth. Just like Lebanese capitalism under a pro-Hezbollah government cannot 'afford' lasting pro-worker reforms, Assad cannot either. To stay in power, the regime may try to entice the bourgeois "opposition" or sections of it, into a re-configured Syrian regime. The ruling class in Syria, and the regional despots and imperialism, fear most of all the Syrian working class getting organised and moving into revolutionary struggle. The forces of reaction would go to war, civil or regional, as a way to divide the working class and to preserve capitalism.

The fight for democratic rights and to end corruption is the fight for workers' democracy!

The war which both Assad's regime and the ruling classes worldwide most fear is a class war, waged by the working and poor masses against the corrupt and repressive ruling and capitalist classes. An independent workers' movement would not only fight for democratic rights, which are essential in the Middle East, but also organise mass action and strikes to challenge the power of the Syrian ruling elite and capitalism. By taking Syrian industries and Syrian capital into public hands, under workers' democratic control and management, the working masses and poor of Syria, of all religious and national backgrounds, can start to determine their futures, based on need not profit.

A workers' and poor peasants' representative government would break with capitalism. This would start to lay the basis of a genuine socialist society, which has nothing in common with the former one-party, bureaucratic and dictatorial Stalinist states in the former USSR and Eastern Europe or their autocratic allies in the Middle East, like the Assad-clan Syrian regime.

A revolution of workers and the poor in Syria would act as a mighty inspiration to workers and the poor across the Middle East and the region. Such a revolution would appeal to workers from all ethnic and religious

backgrounds to carry out their own revolutions and get rid of their own corrupt and exploitative leaders, and to fight for workers' unity and for real self-determination. United mass workers' movements, linking up across borders to challenge local capitalism, would force imperialism out of the region, and appeal to workers' internationally to fight for a socialist world.

The CWI in Lebanon and internationally calls: For the building of mass workers' committees in all the communities and workplaces, as the basis for an independent workers' movement

For the immediate formation of independent and democratically elected workers' defence committees, under democratic control, to defend protests, homes, neighbourhoods and workplaces from the brutal Assad state machine

For the escalation of workers' protests and strikes and to build for a general strike and workplace occupations

For a class appeal to rank and file soldiers to organise against the army tops and join the protestors. For trade union rights for the rank and file soldiers

For the defeat of Syrian capitalism and Western imperialism in Syria and the Middle East by an independent united working class movement

For a mass workers' movement against the rule of the Assad clan and big capital

Massive public funding into services and renationalization of the main industries under democratic workers' control and management

An end to privatisation and cuts in social services – for workers' democratic control and management of the economy to improve living conditions, create jobs with a living wage for all, free quality education and health for all

The establishment of a mass workers' party, with independent socialist policies

The ousting of Assad's regime and for a class appeal to all workers in the region to spread the revolution, to kick out tyrants, to defeat capitalism and imperialism in the region, to put an end to the Israeli occupation and oppression of Palestinians, and for the defeat of Israeli capitalism through the workers' unity and collective mass struggles

The right to self-determination of the Kurdish masses and their liberation from Syrian, Turkish, Iranian and Iraqi capitalism

A socialist Syria, as part of a voluntary and equal socialist confederation of the Middle East

<http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/5591>

The Class War in Europe

Steve McGiffen and Ed Lewis 16 February 2012

Steve McGiffen has had a long involvement with left politics in Europe. He is a former official of the United European Left Group in the European Parliament and has been associated in various capacities with the Socialist Party of the Netherlands since 1999. He is also the editor Spectrezine. He spoke to Ed Lewis about the class politics driving both the euro and the ever-deepening austerity in Europe, Neo-Nazism in Greece, and how to frame a left response to the EU.

What do you think is most salient about the ongoing turmoil in Europe that has been passed over or distorted in mainstream discussion?

It's hard to isolate specific points from what is in fact nothing more than a collection of lies, distortions and misunderstandings. There are a few honourable exceptions, such as Larry Elliot in The Guardian and Paul Krugman in the New York Times, but in general the presentation of the eurocrisis in the mainstream media has been misleading to the point where you wonder whether these people are living in a parallel universe.

Firstly, as Mark Weisbrot of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, DC, has pointed out, this isn't a crisis of debt at all, it's a crisis of policy failure. Personally I would avoid the word 'failure', because I think given its real goals, the euro has been a great success, but I'll come back to that. For the moment, let's go with failure, which in terms of their stated goals the EU member states' austerity policies have certainly been and will certainly continue to be.

Look at Greece. We are told that Greece will only be able to pay off its debt if it reduces public spending and starts collecting tax. When people hear that, it sounds logical. If you have debt as a private individual or household, it's a good idea to see where you can trim your spending and whether you can find new sources of income. But this doesn't always apply even at that level, as there are circumstances where you might need to borrow more money in order to invest in order to get out of debt. For

example you might need to upgrade your qualifications. Taken to the national level it is not going to work under any circumstances that I can imagine. Spending cuts in Greece and taxes which hit the poor and middle income groups will exacerbate the already precipitous levels of 'negative growth'. The same applies to Italy, which is a much bigger economy and therefore a much bigger problem for Europe and the world.

Though in the longer term only the revolutionary transformation of the global economy can avoid crises of this kind from regularly afflicting one part of the world or another, you are obviously not going to find calls for revolution in the media or mainstream political life. So it is the fact that reformist solutions exist to all of this, alternative approaches which we might expect to crop up in mainstream discussion, which is odd. In fact, such solutions are discussed by the likes of Krugman, Elliot, Weisbrot and others who do see their work in the mainstream media.

Some of these I could go with and some not, but each represents some kind of policy alternative to the frontal assault on the rights and living standards of workers, people dependent on benefits, low income groups in general. The Greek debt could be restructured and some of it written off as odious. In the film *Debtocracy*, allegations are made that some of the debt results from the bribing of Greek politicians and other decision-makers by German business people. These and other such charges should be thoroughly investigated. At the same time, the ECB could be buying Italian and Spanish bonds in order to reduce interest rates on them and attack speculation and increasing the money supply.

I'm not an economist and can only quote the views of economists I respect, such as Weisbrot, but anyone can see from reading the debate that a range of alternatives exists. Yet every EU member state government has chosen, to one degree or another, the path of austerity. The question therefore is why? And for me, this is the real issue raised by this crisis. In the late 90s I was active in the campaign to stop the introduction of the euro. If you look at what I was saying, as well as material put out by Tom Megahy, the Labour Euro-MP for whom I worked until his retirement in 1999, or the Dutch Socialist Party, which I worked for after that, you'll see that our predictions for what would be the single currency's results were uncannily accurate.

Now I can't really believe that all of those highly-qualified economists who advise the Commission and the ECB were simply too stupid to see what was obvious to our side of the argument. From this I can only conclude that they knew what would happen as well as we did, but saw this not as something to be avoided, but as an opportunity to complete the work of the neoliberal ascendancy. Austerity in this scenario is not something forced upon the political elite by previous mistakes or bad luck, but rather the latest stage in a plan to transform the European economy by

destroying the welfare state – or at best reducing it to a US-style ‘safety net’ – and removing any real powers over the economy from parliamentary democratic institutions and thus from the people.

Two final points. Firstly, Greece is Europe’s biggest arms importer. Secondly, there are Neo-Nazis in its government (editor's note: this interview took place before the recent exit of the LAOS ministers, to whom McGiffen is referring here, from the Greek government). I actually had the chance to confront a member of the European Commission, an old acquaintance of mine, as to why nothing had been said by Council or Commission on these matters, and he said that it was because the media had ignored them. This begs the question as to why that was the case, of course, as well as revealing the corporate media-driven nature of our decision-making process. Clearly Greece, a country with no enemies and no money, should not be continuing to spend billions on armaments. Clearly also, rabid anti-Semites for whom almost nobody votes should not be in government, especially when you consider that PASOK and New Democracy have a parliamentary majority without them. Even though I think the coups-d’état organised by the EU authorities and the IMF in Greece and Italy were an outrage, now that they are done deals I feel that this is a point that ought to be given more publicity.

Can you expand on your comments about the problems built into the euro project from the outset and how they are reflected now?

Although I’m not, as I say above, an economist, when the euro was about to be brought in I met, discussed and campaigned with numerous economists who confirmed what I suspected was the case, that the single currency as planned was completely unworkable and would lead to economic catastrophe. One of these was Ewout Irrgang, who had been recruited direct from the Netherlands National Bank as an adviser to the Socialist Party and who is now an MP and the party’s principle spokesperson on financial matters. And he confirmed that the major problem would be the imposition of a single monetary policy under a single European central bank operating a single rate of interest. Now this even causes problems in a relatively homogenous currency area such as the UK, where although there are big regional differences in income and wealth – I believe the richest region is the South East of England while the poorest is Northern Ireland – these are nothing compared to those which would separate the richest from the poorest in the proposed eurozone. We used to employ an analogy of a thermostat controlled by the temperature in a temperate region such as Brittany. You’d freeze in Finland and roast in Crete. As Irrgang put it at the time “in all of these extremely different economies the stove will be stoked to the same level of heat and the temperature will be determined undemocratically and adjusted to the situation in the biggest countries, Germany, France and Italy. That will create irrevocable problems, problems which will be scarcely solvable.”

In the last few years of the last century I wrote a number of articles for my then employer, Tom Megahy, which we kicked around together and he approved, that hammered away at a number of arguments. These remain at the core of any critique of the euro which takes the single currency project on its own terms and attacks it from that point of view. To rehearse the main points, Tom and I argued the following:

If governments and national banks give up the economic leverage they gain from an ability to determine their own levels of spending and borrowing, if they can no longer decide interest or exchange rates, they will have only one means left to maintain or enhance competitiveness: our wages, our pensions, our welfare rights, our children's education, will all have to cost less – this is of course what has since been called 'internal devaluation'; the single currency would deprive governments of vital tools they need to address immediate and long-term economic difficulties; it would create unemployment in countries and regions deemed to be "uncompetitive" and put downward pressure on wages and working conditions, as such areas attempt to regain "competitiveness"; it would undermine social security and welfare systems; it would hand control over vital economic decisions to unelected bankers.

These predictions have of course been borne out since 2008, as the banks and their obedient servants in governments and in Brussels have dragged the whole of Europe into an unprecedented economic crisis.

Where I differ from much progressive criticism of the euro is that I actually see what is happening not as proof of massive incompetence – though some of those involved clearly have simply been led to a very misguided view of economic reality, in general by a combination of their own naivety and the mendacity of others – but as, in fact, a tremendous success, though one which puts its perpetrators at enormous risk. The euro's purpose was not to facilitate the creation of a Europe of transfrontier love, peace, harmony, boosted trade and economic efficiency, but to attack the economic, social and political gains of working people, accumulated over two centuries in the most bitter struggles. What is happening in country after country, starkest of all in Greece, Ireland and Portugal, but also – just as visibly to anyone who is paying attention - in Britain, is nothing less than the opening salvoes of a new, more intense and more dangerous phase of class war.

So there are two ways of answering this question. The first is to take the euro's supporters' own explanations of what they were trying to achieve, and along with progressive but essentially bourgeois economists – in the sense that they don't really question capitalism per se – say, 'wow, guys, you really screwed up'; and the other is to congratulate the enemy

generals on a pretty good opening to their campaign and see what we can do to counter it. And of course all we can do to counter it is organise, on every possible front, and get out and explain to people what's really going on and discuss with them how we can fight it. The trouble with the class war is that there is so often only one side that understands that it's being fought, and that's what we have to change.

In the British media there has been passing reference to the presence of far right elements in the Greek government but no direct claims of Neo-Nazism. Tell us more about who these people are and what their Nazi credentials are. (See editor's note above.)

The Minister of Infrastructure, Transport and Networks is Makis Voridis. In the 1980s Voridis was the leader of a Nazi group called the Student Alternative. He was thrown out of law school in 1985 and sued by Greece's equivalent of NUS for taking part in attacks on his fellow law students, during which he often armed himself with the tool from which he takes his nickname, Hammer, or a kind of home-made axe.

Well, you know, youthful indiscretions and all that. I dare say in the unlikely event that I ever became a government minister the Daily Mail would find the policewoman who once arrested the young Steve McGiffen for telling her to fuck off! Not quite as serious as violent attacks on political opponents, but I expect the Mail could make it seem so. But there's more to be said about Voridis than this, and it involves much more recent events. Voridis's party, LAOS, is an amalgam of previously existing far right groups. One of these, the Hellenic Front, formed a common electoral list as recently as 2004 with a party headed by Konstantinos Plevis. Plevis is the author of *Jews: the Whole Truth*, whose contents include the following:

“Adolf Hitler: The tragic leader of the German Third Reich is certainly the most impressive leadership figure of the modern age... Human history will blame Adolf Hitler for the following: 1. He could have rid Europe of the Jews, but did not; 2. He did not use the special chemical weapons, which only Germany possessed, to gain a victory... 3. Because of the defeat of Germany then, the White Race and Europe are at risk now.”

LAOS itself was founded by Giorgos Karatzeferis, a well-known Holocaust denier who says that Jews have “no legitimacy to speak in Greece” and who has referred to the Holocaust, Auschwitz and Dachau as “myths.”

Like France's Front National, Belgium's Vlaams Belang and the UK's British National Party and far right Tories, LAOS makes much of its opposition to the European Union. Yet they have been happy to join a government appointed by the European Commission and European Central Bank.

Do you think there is any significance at all to Cameron's antics at the recent EU summit, by rejecting the proposed new treaty and leaving other states to develop an accord without the UK?

To be honest, I didn't attach much importance to Cameron's stand and so didn't give it much thought. Of course, he was right not to sign up to the agreement, but he is hardly likely to have done it to protect the democratic rights of the British peoples. The agreement itself is a further step towards the abolition of democracy, and a big one.

Despite your many criticisms of the EU, when I interviewed you in 2010 you said that you find the question of the UK withdrawing from the EU 'a bit tiresome' and that it is unhelpful because 'it isn't going to happen'. Does the increased isolation of the UK in the EU make this a more meaningful question now? More generally, how do you think a left critique of the undemocratic nature of the EU and eurozone should be framed, especially given that the right continues to dominate this narrative?

Well, I still don't think it will happen, but there seems an increasing chance I'll have the pleasure of being proved wrong. Having lived outside the UK for almost two decades and having no intention of ever returning to live, moreover, I don't tend to see things in terms of whether Britain should get out or not. I'd like Britain to leave the EU because I want to see the EU destroyed, and British withdrawal would be a major blow to its continued existence. Things look different from where I'm sitting, which is a mixture of rural France, where I live, Paris, where I teach, the Netherlands, as I still work as a translator and occasional advisor for the Dutch Socialist Party, and Belgium, as I maintain close contacts there after twelve years living and working in Brussels. I have to teach a very wide-ranging international relations course, and so don't have much time to keep up with the details of British politics. Frankly, competition between three right-wing parties for who can best manage the destruction of the welfare state and royal screwing of the working class doesn't really grab my attention.

A case in point which illustrates how things are different in the UK is what you mention here, the association of EU-critical politics with the right. This isn't a problem in France or the Netherlands, where the 2005 'no' campaigns against the European Constitution were spearheaded and dominated by left forces. The left critique of the EU is very well known in western Europe generally, and all you can do in the UK is hammer away at it. I generally treat different aspects of it in my monthly Morning Star column and on my own website, Spectrezine. The EU treaties - from Rome through Maastricht and on to Lisbon institutionalise - in a way which deepens with each new text, neoliberal capitalism. They outlaw the basic tools of social democracy, let alone socialism. They have removed

the democratic rights of each of the member states' peoples to decide for itself what sort of economic system it favours. They remove popular influence and create the conditions for handing power to a corporate elite.

My concrete advice is this: read the treaties, make sure you understand them, then explain them to people, how they do all of the things I've said above. Invite people over to your meetings who come from EU-critical parties such as the Dutch Socialist Party, Sweden Left Party, Denmark's Red-Green Alliance and so on. And put as much distance as you can between yourselves and the xenophobes of the Tory right, who are the kind of Conservatives Aneurin Bevan characterised as 'lower than vermin'.

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Ed Lewis is a co-editor of NLP, a teacher and political education advisor to Platform

Fuel scarcity and renewable energy option for Nigeria's South-South

Fidelis Allen First Published in [Pambazuka](#) 17 February 2012

The fuel crisis in Nigeria proves the truism that no government ever voluntarily pursues the public good without some form of struggle by the governed. It ought not to be so.

The Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, FRCN, announced on its 7:00am network news of 14 February 2012, perhaps, as a Valentine gift to the people of Rivers State, that the nearly four days of painful experience of staying without fuel for transportation and power generating sets in homes and businesses, now waiting for full deregulation of the power sector before seeing electricity, is the result of conflict between Eleme youths and petroleum tanker drivers. The intensity of the scarcity and the attendant pain to road users and households clearly speak volumes about the existing huge vacuum in governance, with regards to responsiveness of government to the plight of poor Nigerians, who often are the victims of the greed and evil of fossil fuel politics and conflict. It speaks volumes about how few decision makers can influence self-serving decisions that bring pain to the generality of Nigerians without themselves considering the outcome on their sisters, brothers, fathers and mothers and so on. It portrays a country without adequate enforcement of relevant laws and rules for the good of citizens. It further exposes how enslaved Nigerians are to hydrocarbon, when alternative renewable energy sources such as solar and wind can be explored, at least to take care of household energy needs of cooking, electricity and so on.

As I drove out this morning to drop my kids in school with barely four litres of fuel which I bought yesterday at N2, 200, the sight of people standing and waiting at bus stops for commercial vehicles endlessly to take them to work, market, school or so, reminded me of what I heard one of my lecturers say during my undergraduate days at university as a young political science student. 'In the history of governance world-wide, no government has ever voluntarily pursued the public good without some form of struggle by the governed.' On a daily basis, this seems to be playing out globally with governments as those in positions of authority have a tendency to neglect the people and their pain until they cry out. It ought not to be so.

The story goes that Eleme youths have issues with the tanker drivers. Conflict is part of human life, which requires ingenuity and wisdom to tackle. The general good should be uppermost in the minds of those in such conflicts, knowing that conflicts are capable of resulting in massive losses for the economy and Nigerians. Even more important is the question of what relevant governmental authorities do when such conflicts escalate to the point of not only threatening the peace of the nation but also become an instrument of politicking in the hands of those involved in dangerous fuel or petroleum distribution politics.

Already, the crisis has hit nearly all the states in the Niger Delta, South-South of Nigeria, where claims by the government of massive development of gas gathering projects are being utilised for provision of electricity. Ironically, many homes have remained basically without electricity, which would have lessened the effect of the current scarcity by heating water and cooking with it. Life for the average citizen in this part of the country in the last four days has been unbearable. The cost of local transportation has gone up very high beyond what even the N18,000 minimum wage offered workers in Nigeria can afford. Already, Nigerian Bureau of Statistics announced on radio today as having declared current poverty rates in Nigeria to be at 69 percent. This is likely to increase by the end of 2012.

Imagine life without energy. But what type of energy? Oil, coal, natural gas are principal hydrocarbons with demonic qualities. They are responsible for the current global climate change and attendant problems; corruption in governance and malgovernance of many oil exporting countries; are responsible for the delay in renewable energy policies that privilege alternative sources of power from solar and wind, especially at the micro levels of households of the poor. Minor issues of cooking and heating of water can comfortably be handled with such alternative energy. Even the so-called natural gas, which the Nigerian government is developing, is another promoter of greenhouse gas emissions. Of course, all natural gas is incidental to oil and cannot be free from flares that

pollute the earth. The stories, therefore, about reduction in flares from gas gathering projects may be true only to an extent. Worse, hydrocarbons are not renewable and are depleting, even if it takes an unpredictable number of years to happen.

Following the current federal government's reforms in the power sector, states are now to generate electricity, which the private sector can distribute. This provides ample opportunity for states like Rivers State to start using their resources to develop infrastructure for alternative energy from solar and wind. Nigeria boasts of massive availability of sun and wind yet to be explored and exploited for the benefit of the good people of the state, especially in rural areas. It may be expensive but remains the best option to start moving away from fossil fuel addiction. The government can provide the ground for the private sector to get involved by initiating investments in manufacture of solar panels and other resources for engaging with those with facilities for exploring these energy sources. With many households depending on solar energy for cooking and heating of water, at least, pressure for fossil and wood fuel as well as the unruly behaviour of some actors in the petroleum sector would have been reduced.

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Fidelis Allen ,PhD, is based at the Centre for Civil Society, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College Campus.

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Global Sustainability' Wilts In South Africa's Political Hot Air

Patrick Bond 16 February 2012

Durban – The latest acts in this country's intensifying political drama include a sizzling summer-long battle between young and old within the African National Congress (ANC), last week's State of the Nation speech by president Jacob Zuma, and the release of the ANC's 'research' on alternatives to mining nationalization, a demand by the ANC youth which is now one of the main wedge issues dividing the ruling party.

Amidst the chaos, stepping over the political corpse of ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema (about to be expelled for ‘throwing the ANC into disrepute’), Zuma apparently also wants to be considered a world eco-visionary. As co-chairs of the United Nations’ High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability, he and Finnish president Tarja Halonen published an article last week entitled ‘Seizing sustainable development.’ Zuma and Halonen ask, ‘How do we begin to tackle the massive challenge of retooling our global economy, preserving the environment, and providing greater opportunity and equity, including gender equality, to all?’

From the Panel’s report, *Resilient People, Resilient Planet*, comes answers that include neoliberal fixes – ‘Pollution, including carbon emissions, must no longer be free’ – and obvious reforms: ‘Price- and trade-distorting subsidies should be made transparent and phased out for fossil fuels by 2020.’ Plus sanctimony: ‘We need to place long-term thinking above short-term demands, both in the marketplace and at the polling place. Promoting fairness and inclusion is the right thing to do – and the smart thing to do for lasting prosperity and stability.’

Two days later, in a speech to parliament considered the finest in his blooper-filled career, Zuma declared, ‘Let me take this opportunity to congratulate the inter-ministerial committee on COP17 for making the conference a huge success. The final outcome of COP17 was historic and precedent setting, ranking with the 1997 conference where the Kyoto Protocol was adopted.’

But who won at Durban’s climate summit? The biggest polluters, it turns out, who got off scot-free on emissions cuts as well as on North-South fairness. According to the *New York Times*, at the recent World Economic Forum in Switzerland, a top aide to chief US State Department negotiator Todd Stern remarked that ‘the Durban platform was promising because of what it did not say.’ After all, revealed Trevor Houser, ‘There is no mention of historic responsibility or per capita emissions. There is no mention of economic development as the priority for developing countries. There is no mention of a difference between developed and developing country action.’

Zuma’s ‘huge success’ was in reality a sell-out of the UN’s tradition of differentiated responsibility between rich and poor countries. As climate chaos hits, Africa will be the worst-affected continent. (And so who can blame the African Union for its majority-vote hostility to Pretoria’s leadership candidate in a hung election last week?) The only Africans who smiled when leaving Durban were those from South Africa’s mining and electricity-guzzling industry – along with oil extractors – blessed by COP17’s failure to make binding emissions cuts.

Zuma's State of the Nation address expanded his to-do list of climate-destroying investments. Already Pretoria is constructing the world's fourth-largest coal-fired power plant with the World Bank's largest-ever project loan, at Medupi in the beautiful Waterberg mountains where there is insufficient water for cooling it. Not far away, contracts are being signed for the world's third-largest coal-fired plant, Eskom's Kusile.

The main Eskom beneficiary is BHP Billiton, which consumes more than 10 percent of SA's electricity and still gets the world's cheapest power deal at Richard's Bay, where the workforce has been shaved back by increasingly capital-intensive aluminum smelters to now fewer than 1500. The other beneficiary is the Japanese firm Hitachi, which in 2010 pretended not to know that its owners included the ANC's Chancellor House, and whose supply of boilers – for which they are paid a mind-boggling R40+ billion – is so far behind schedule that more Eskom electricity black-outs loom.

Zuma's speech unveiled yet more eco-destructive capital-intensive projects: 'First, we plan to develop and integrate rail, road and water infrastructure, centered on two main areas in Limpopo: the Waterberg in the western part of the province and Steelpoort in the eastern part. These efforts are intended to unlock the enormous mineral belt of coal, platinum, palladium, chrome and other minerals, in order to facilitate increased mining as well as stepped-up beneficiation of minerals.'

There is much more: 'Among the list of planned projects is the expansion of the iron ore export channel from 60-million tons per annum to 82-million tons per annum..., development of a new 16-million-tons-per-annum manganese export channel through the Port of Ngqura in Nelson Mandela Bay... and expansion of the iron-ore rail line between Sishen in the Northern Cape and Saldanha Bay in the Western Cape.'

Speaking to CityPress newspaper after Thursday's speech, Zuma elaborated: 'By 2014, I'd want to see the cranes, building, digging everything. I'd like to see people employed. We are looking at a new kind of city at Waterberg. That's how Johannesburg began, as a mining town.' Set aside that Johannesburg is the world's least sustainable city, does Zuma know that there's a vast national housing shortage and a vast surplus of unemployed people, and that building homes doesn't require cranes, but does create far more jobs per unit of capital spent?

Did he notice that the largest platinum operation, Implats, fired 17,000 workers just a week before his speech, whom when rehired will suffer a substantial cut in their pensions? Did he read the National Planning Commission's finding that 'South Africa needs to move away from the

unsustainable use of natural resources’?

As for non-renewable resources now being drawn from South African soil with only a pittance for communities, workers and the government fiscus, Zuma protected multinational mining capital from Malema’s populist nationalization demands by setting up a commission whose report is already drawing ridicule.

Malema, who became exceptionally wealthy in recent years allegedly by influencing Limpopo Province tenders for large payouts, was predictably hostile. As he explained last Friday, the lead researcher, Paul Jordaan, was ‘compromised’ for opposing 1955 ANC Freedom Charter nationalization promises: ‘Jordaan and the research team visited 13 countries and the only conclusion they could come up with are the opinions held by Comrade Paul Jordaan in 2010. It is possible that the research was a smokescreen to legitimise the personal opinions of Comrade Paul Jordaan and that is not how the ANC works.’

Other critics were just as harsh. Explained University of Cape Town political scientist Anthony Butler, a leading commentator, ‘The document’s intellectual quality is uneven. The research “methodology” involves lots of foreign travel and “stakeholder workshops”. The study team also makes unacknowledged use of “less scholarly” resources, such as Wikipedia and answers.com. The credibility of the report is damaged by long passages that bear a remarkable resemblance to the work of retired North American mine-tax expert Charles McPherson.’

As Butler complained, in one of many ‘unfathomable coincidences of word selection and arrangement (such borrowings are far too extensive to set out fully here) both [the ANC and McPherson] call for “the explicit recognition in budgets and planning documents of the financial and fiscal costs and risks associated with state participation”. Did McPherson help draw up the ANC’s report? If so, was the ANC’s national executive committee aware that a former oil-industry executive, who only recently ended his career in the fiscal affairs department of the International Monetary Fund, was commissioned to contribute to its study?’

Butler worries that the report still supports elements of Malema’s ‘phoney nationalisation drive’, such as transferring mineworker pension funds ‘into special purpose vehicles in the service of developmental objectives. In reality, such instruments would be abused to fund corporate welfare for the politically connected.’

Indeed under conditions of neoliberal nationalism, the outcome of most public policy in South Africa is inevitably crony capitalism rife with corruption. A major ANC-initiated forensic audit into corruption in the

second-largest city, Durban, last week revealed massive illegalities especially in \$400 million worth of privatized housing construction contracts under the 2002-11 leadership of city manager Mike Sutcliffe, who claims he will soon rebut the charges.

The overall problem is not housing, though, which remains an area of vast underinvestment. It is the incessant construction of white elephants and prestige projects. These were what the former trade union leader Ebrahim Patel – now Minister of Economic Development – was reduced to celebrating, in justifying the vast infrastructure investments. In his parliamentary response to Zuma, Patel remarked, ‘We took account of the lessons of the 2010 World Cup infrastructure and the growing experience in the build programmes for the Gautrain, the Medupi and Kusile power stations, the Freeway improvement programme and the major airport revamps.’

But to continue along this track is suicide. The World Cup stadia are nearly all losing money on operations and maintenance. The Gautrain’s speedy lifts from the Johannesburg airport to the financial district and government buildings in Pretoria are too expensive for the masses. The power stations have already raised the price of electricity by more than 150 percent, with another 25 percent increase scheduled in April. The public-private highway tolling partnership with an Austrian firm is so unpopular that on March 9 the trade union movement is threatening a national strike. The utterly unnecessary airport revamps are, again, for elites only.

Zuma’s pandering to mining houses is especially galling. As if to celebrate the state’s renewed orientation to big business interests, the ‘Mining Indaba’ – Africa’s biggest trade fair – in Cape Town last week was capped with a keynote speech by an extremist climate-change denialist, David Evans. The ‘performance’ was ‘well received by an audience of miners, who come from an industry that often feels the pinch of climate control in the regulation of their industries,’ reported the Mail&Guardian.

Zuma’s crucial challenge, under such influences, is to continue opposing the rhetoric of his Global Sustainability Panel, insofar as nearly everything he and the big corporates are doing here place short-term demands above long-term thinking, both in the marketplace and at the polling place, promoting unfairness and exclusion, and thus preventing lasting prosperity and stability. It’s from such accumulation dynamics that South Africa has come to specialize in ‘talk left, walk right’ politics. Whether it is the ‘Black Economic Empowerment’ fronting scams, such as Hitachi and Chancellor House, or the greedy corporations’ influence, the ruling party appears addicted to unsustainable underdevelopment hyped by

big-business cheerleading.

From Zuma's main political base, for instance, Toyota South Africa CEO Johan van Zyl last week argued, 'Durban as a brand is not strong enough to simply say "come and invest in Durban". What it needs to attract investors are big projects.' At a seminar of the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and Business Day newspaper, van Zyl insisted, 'Durban needs to keep ahead of the competition. China is building ports they don't even know when they will use. If return on investment is the line of thinking we may never see the infrastructure.'

In other words, please supply more public subsidies to the high-carbon fat cats. In that very spirit, Durban's new city manager S'bu Sithole inherited a secretive \$32 billion 'Back-of-Port' plan to expand what is already Africa's largest harbour, in the process demolishing the 150-year old neighbourhood of Clairwood and expanding the deadly petro-chemical industry.

Also at that seminar was former Durban mayor Obed Mlaba, criticized in the forensic audit for illegally hijacking a \$400 million waste-energy infrastructure tender at the Bisasar Road landfill, site of a high-profile carbon-trading pilot project. Complained Mlaba, 'Big projects or even creating clusters around them are hampered by small-town mentality.'

Typical of a big-town mentality was this banal command to Zuma by Business Day editor Peter Bruce on Monday: 'mine more and faster and ship what we mine cheaper and faster.'

If we do so, then bye-bye resilient people and resilient planet.

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Bond authored Politics of Climate Justice (UKZN Press), edited Durban's Climate Gamble (Unisa Press), and directs the UKZN Centre for Civil Society: <http://ccs.ukzn.ac.za>

Zambia: Strike wave continues, workers on the offensive

Gavin Jackson 15 February 2012

In Zambia the lightning offensive of the workers has thundered on as the strike wave rolled into the New Year, drawing in broader layers of the class and demonstrating the strength of the workers in action. Undeterred by attempts to victimise striking workers – including the sacking of 200

miners by China Non-Ferrous Metals Mining Group (CNMMG), who were reinstated under government pressure the very next day – the strikes have continued

All the while the PF ministers try to skin the capitalist tiger one claw at a time, their attempts to sweet talk capital into the smallest concessions walking down the same blind alleys. Brushing aside appeals for calm and patience from union bureaucrats and government ministers alike, not only the miners but also postal and transport workers have brought work to a standstill, demanding 100% pay raises and the implementation of an eight-hour work day

While the superb mass action of the Nigerian general strike has become the focal point of the African workers, the labour movement has stepped into action across the continent. In West Africa the strike of transport workers in Senegal paralyzed the country's major cities, with pickets of entire cities enforcing the strike. On 11th January in Uganda, market traders began a three-day strike against an increase in the interest rate on loans taken from the nation's main banks from 20 to 30 per cent. Isah Sekitto, head of the Kampala City Traders Association, made an appeal to "workers in all departments" to join the strike action – in effect, a call for a general strike against the parasitic behaviour of finance capital! Finally the campaign developing in Zambia is having an impact across the artificial border with Zimbabwe. Public sector workers came out on the 19th January with demands echoing those of the Zambian workers, including 100% pay raises and an end to the abuses

Struggles continue

The strikes let loose following the election of the Michael Sata government continued through December and into January. This particular peak in the movement of the Zambian workers has continued for almost six months now. On the 7th December at the Luanshya copper mine – owned and operated by China Non-Ferrous Metals Mining Corporation – 2,600 workers came out on strike demanding that their wages be brought into line with those won earlier at other mines. They called for a wage increase of at least 40-100% as well as the removal of two Deputy CEOs of Luanshya Copper Mines (subsidiary of CNNMG): Wang Jing Jon, whom they cited for abuse of workers, and Fredrick Chola, accused of holding up the negotiating process. The struggle lasted for around five days, bringing production in every part of the mine to a halt. The strike came to an end only when Deputy Minister for Labour Rayford Mbulu ordered the mine owners and union negotiators to resume discussions to reach an "amicable solution to whatever challenges the company was facing" and directed workers to return to their jobs while those negotiations continued. The mineworkers would have worked up copper to the value of \$1.5 million dollars in the same period as the strike

according to the claims of the Chinese owners. Compare this to the demand to double the K200-300 thousand per month wage of the workers (approx US \$40) to K400-600 thousand (\$80) - or a little over US \$200,000 a month for the entire workforce working up anywhere between US \$6-8 million worth of copper!

With the strike over, Mbulu, along with Oswell Munyenembe and Adam Zulu (general secretary of the Miners Union of Zambia and VP of the National Union of Miners and Allied Workers, respectively), expressed the hope that the workers would be kind enough not to express their views or take action on the issues that directly affect them. The Chinese mine owners responded to the weakness of the minister and union leaders with aggression. Within a few days of the strike ending and a “memorandum of understanding” being signed to “improve communication to prevent misunderstanding”, 11 miners who led the strike were sacked. Mbulu intervened again to have the miners reinstated

At the same time as the Luanshya strike the Zambia Daily Mail reported that the workers of Zambia Postal Services Corporation (ZAMPOST) in the capital Lusaka brought work to a halt and held protests outside their workplaces, protesting outside the main post office on Jan 6th. They demanded 100% pay raises and the removal of the top management of ZAMPOST – particularly Post Master General Paul Simfukwe, who the Postal workers accuse of corruption, stating that he used K2 billion from ZAMPOST coffers to renovate his own home. After Patrick Kaonga, President of the National Union of Communications, pleaded with the ZAMPOST workers to end the strike, the workers’ spokesperson Jeff Sitali said the workers wanted the removal of Kaonga as their representative as well, accusing him of failing to represent them adequately. In response to Kaonga’s pleas for a return to work Sitali asked:

“How can our union leaders accept a K40,000 salary increment? It’s an insult.”

With the union bureaucracy clearly losing any authority over the workers, Simfukwe stated that “members of staff have lost confidence in the union executive and that is why they are striking”. The strike spread to the Main Post Office, saw solidarity action from ZAMPOST staff in Kitwe who enforced a go-slow as well as a shutdown of the Post Bus, one of the main nationwide transport services. As with many of the other strikes taking place under the PF government the Zampost strike ended with the workers pressuring the government ministers they put in power into twisting the collective arm of the bosses into granting concessions on wages and working hours

More than this though, within days of the strike ending the Sata government dismissed Simfunkwe along with others in the top management of the company! Replacing him as postmaster general is Macpherson Chanda, a PF cadre who resigned as financial services manager at ZAMPOST a year ago. The example of the postal workers was also taken up recently by staff of the National Housing Authority, who went on strike with demands centred on paid holiday leave, the dissolution of the board and removal of top management

First Quantum

The key point in the current strike wave has been victory by more than 2000 miners in the largest copper mine in Zambia and seventh largest in the world (and which also produces gold), First Quantum Mineral's Kansanshi mining complex in the Copperbelt. Beginning the strike on January 3rd the mineworkers, rightly frustrated with the manner in which the bosses dragged their feet in negotiations with union leaders, put forward demands for a 100% pay increase, a 13th pay cheque, permanent contracts and the eight-hour day. Expansion plans at the Kansanshi facility have put the mineworkers in a strong position; First Quantum unveiled plans in 2011 to almost double production from 250,000 to 400,000 tonnes of copper per year by 2015 and to complete the building of a concentrator at the facility

The two-day strike cost First Quantum K50 billion, or US\$10 million (Times of Zambia, 5/1/12), more than 700 tonnes of finished copper every day and as much as US\$3 million in tax revenue for the government. Undeterred by panicked cries from First Quantum about the strike being 'illegal', nor by orders from Labour Minister Shamenda to return to work, the workers continued the strike into a second day. Such was the impact of this struggle that after the second day First Quantum caved in to the demands for the 13th pay cheque, eight-hour day and permanent contracts and returned to the table to negotiate new salaries with the miners' union. The strike at First Quantum (particularly the manner in which it hit him where it hurts – the profit margin!) has convinced the new owners of Maamba Collieries coal mine based in Zambia's Southern Province to forego the strike and simply give the 100% wage increase!

As can be seen from the examples above, the wavering and reformist attempts to get worker and capitalist around the table have proven both fruitless and counterproductive. It is only the Patriotic Front and trade union leaders who think that the conflicting class interests of workers and capitalist can be papered over in this struggle. The strikes have presented great risks for those taking part. However, by acting decisively and aggressively in seizing their demands, the Zambian miners have won important concessions out of the mining corporations operating in Zambia

90 days of President Sata

Having passed the 90-day mark at which Michael Sata promised the workers, peasants and youth of Zambia that he would “put more money in their pockets”, the true force in society - the working class - has shown itself to be the power behind even the smallest concessions wrung out of the capitalists. Having driven the Patriotic Front into power by a campaign of workers and youth, Sata – who at one time railed verbally against the abuse of workers carried out by Chinese mine owners – and the ministers of his government have carried out a small number of reforms including increasing the minimum wage and adjusting tax thresholds to take more than 80,000 low paid workers out of taxable brackets

With these few reforms in hand they are more and more urging a ‘dialogue’ between labour and capital. In October of last year (barely three weeks into the PF government’s first term) Minister for Labour Fackson Shamenda, having been put into his position by a movement of the unemployed and the youth, tried to order an end to all workers’ protests, strikes and sit-ins - claiming that workers had “come to misunderstand my statement when I said that people were free to protest because it had reached a level where even those who can solve their issues with dialogue are resorting to protests”. The state-owned Times of Zambia (ToZ) said Shamenda had since “revoked his earlier statement allowing people to protest, adding that whoever would be found protesting would face possible arrest because it was illegal (!)”. Shamenda was quoted again by the ToZ in December (22/12/11) as saying that grievances should be put to the capitalists “in a sober manner as opposed to resorting to illegal strikes which were counterproductive (!)”:

“It is always important to dialogue because when you dialogue, it is easy for people to get what you are trying to put across. But when you are confrontational, it is very difficult to get a point that one is trying to put across...another important issue is to have facts because when you have facts, it is easy to solve labour issues.”

It seems that Shamenda has forgotten the fact that his new found position was won by the extremely “confrontational” action of the unemployed workers and youth of Lusaka, Kitwe and Ndola who battled riot police to prevent the delivery of rigged ballots to polling stations! Perhaps he has forgotten the fact that the “illegal” action of Zambian miners of the Copperbelt region, after the victory of the Patriotic Front, won them not only a 100% pay increase but will also make the owners of the mine think twice before resorting to their old dirty tactics. So terrible is this “confrontational” attitude that only a matter of days after the election of the PF on 20 September a number of businesses in Lusaka began to actually pay the legal minimum wage! In the midst of all of these orders, appeals and threats of arrest directed at the masses that put him in office,

what has happened to the condemnation of the “illegal” action of the capitalists?

The sentiments expressed above by Shamenda were echoed by the head of the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), Leonard Hikaumba, in the same issue of the Times of Zambia. Speaking on the recent increase of the minimum wage by the Sata government, Hikaumba said the following:

“The labour movement welcomes this directive as it will go a long way in improving the income levels for workers, who are not covered by union representation. But we still consider it of utmost importance for social partners to look at these issues critically, so that the outcome on minimum wage will be accepted by all social partners.”

Evidently the trade union and political leadership of the Zambian workers, having yelled and jeered at the very real abuses of the workers particularly on the part of Chinese capitalism, have now discovered that things aren't that bad after all! Only days after signing a loan agreement with the Chinese some ministers in the PF government have begun to preach that by talking in soft tones to ‘social partners’ (a fine way to put class collaboration) they can be lulled into brushing a few more crumbs from their table.

Again reported by the Times of Zambia (13/12/11), PF Finance Minister Alexander Chikwanda signed this same “economic and technical cooperation grant” agreement worth K43.3 billion (approx US \$8.4 million) with the Chinese government and an additional “interest-free loan agreement of K32 billion (US \$6.25 billion), in which the funds will be used in the fight against poverty and projects to be agreed upon by the two governments”. The Zambian masses, who have suffered greatly at the hands of international capital, who waged a great part of the campaign to make the PF victory a reality on the basis of obtaining greater education and healthcare as well as advances on the industrial front, can wait for the Chinese state and the PF ministers to decide what to do with this fund, a fund that is equivalent to a year and a half of all tax revenue – or put another way, large enough to wipe clean the entire Zambian state debt with enough left to pay for almost four months’ worth of imports into the Zambian economy. On signing the deal Chikwanda is quoted by the ToZ as saying:

“Zambia greatly admires the strides made by China in uplifting the standard of living of its people as well as the spectacular advancement in the areas of manufacturing, commerce and trade, infrastructure, information and communication technologies and culture.”

The abuses of the Zambian masses are quickly forgotten when you have a

ministerial title to your name. Evidently Minister Chikwanda could do with a tour of the factories of China where Apple products are assembled – where conditions are so bad Chinese workers are made to sign a legal document promising not to attempt suicide, and the bosses help the workers uphold this agreement by putting up netting around the dormitories where the workers sleep to prevent them from jumping

All the great strides forward of China and Chinese capitalism have been made on the backs of the hundreds of millions of Chinese workers and peasants, throwing the former into conditions which drive many to suicide, while tearing the latter from the soil and throwing them into the ranks of the workers. If the Chinese capitalists were making such wondrous advances in “uplifting the standard of living of its people” then they would be rather less concerned about the thousands of ‘mass events’ which take place every year, “mass event” being a euphemistic term of the state for protests, riots and large-scale strikes. So concerned are they that the defence budget – for a nuclear power, with the world’s largest military and now also developing an aircraft carrier – is smaller than that for internal security, the latter funding both police and paramilitary forces, the police having recently unveiled a new range of machine gun-toting armoured cars

Copper

As was pointed out in a previous Marxist.com article on Zambia, the workers of Zambia have attempted to determine their own future, putting their leaders into power, but have been betrayed - not because of the particular personal characteristics of individual leaders but because of the colossal pressure that capitalist finance can bring to bear on the colonial nations. The previous Movement for Multi-party Democracy government was an attempt by the labour movement in Zambia to have its own political voice. Because the MMD remained within the confines of capitalism – which for Zambia and the rest of the colonial world means being subject to capitalist imperialism, particularly that enforced by the IMF, the favoured tool of US/European finance capital – they soon had to carry out the policies of capitalism. For Zambia this means mass unemployment and poverty

With this lesson of history in mind the words of Minister for Mines Wylbur Simuusa must be taken as a warning to the Zambian masses of how fragile their gains can be. Speaking to Reuters in an article carried by the Lusaka Times at the beginning of December, Simuusa stated that the recent doubling of mining royalties, intended to pay for reforms including widening access to healthcare, education and farming subsidies, could be cut back “if it becomes a crisis, if [copper] prices crash”. The doubling of royalties itself brought protests from First Quantum, whose head of tax Adam Little expressed the desire that reforms to tax collection be made so

that “Zambia’s reliance on the more damaging taxes can be reduced.” As we have previously explained, although copper production and minerals in general are experiencing particularly high prices lately, this will not and cannot last. The fact of the matter is that a very large part of the demand for copper comes from China, which consumes 40% of all copper production. The contradictions within the Chinese economy – not to mention the wider European and American capitalist crises – are being heaped one on top of the other, with every attempt to overcome them on a capitalist basis making the looming crisis worse

When this crisis hits, the effects will be earth-shattering. So long as the PF ministers remain within the confines of capitalism, basing themselves on reformist policies, not only the capitalists but also the PF government will carry out attacks on the masses to attempt to shore up the long-decaying, parasitic capitalist system – mass layoffs and mine closures on the one hand, cuts to education, healthcare, social programs and support for small farmers on the other. Without a political leadership basing itself on proletarian internationalism and the socialist revolution, the Zambian masses, in the long run, will not be able to defend what gains they have made to date. Enough of begging and sweet talk for scraps from the capitalist table! Why seize positions that you will not defend?

The strike offensive must continue! The strikes must be organised on a wider and stronger basis, drawing in and allying with all the workers, poor, peasants and youth. Union activists must reclaim their organizations at all levels. Democratic strike committees must be set up and extended into genuine action committees accountable to the rank and file. The movement should be unified around demands that PF ministers immediately implement the nationalisation of the entire mining sector and its auxiliaries under the democratic control of the working class. This would be a first step towards getting control of the resources that can guarantee genuine social reforms for the majority of the population. Nationalisation of the mines should be seen as part of a movement towards a democratically planned economy by expropriating the capitalists and the multinationals

Any steps taken in that direction would find an echo across the continent. An internationalist appeal to the workers across Africa would guarantee the defence and extensions of any revolutionary gains made in Zambia
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Hot air from Pretoria

President Zuma's 'sustainability' talk rebutted by his pro-pollution walk

Patrick Bond (Eye on Society column, The Mercury) 12 February 2012

Swept under carpet last week, in the drama of old versus young within the African National Congress, the State of the Nation speech, and the release of the ANC's alternatives to mining nationalization, were some extraordinary socio-economic and environmental problems.

Government and business leaders are unanimous in saying they want more mega-infrastructure investments. But President Jacob Zuma apparently also wants to be considered a world eco-visionary.

As co-chairs of the United Nations' High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability, he and Finnish president Tarja Halonen published an article last week entitled 'Seizing sustainable development.' Zuma and Halonen ask, "How do we begin to tackle the massive challenge of retooling our global economy, preserving the environment, and providing greater opportunity and equity, including gender equality, to all? The Panel's report, Resilient People, Resilient Planet, offers suggestions."

These include:

- Pollution – including carbon emissions – must no longer be free. Price- and trade-distorting subsidies should be made transparent and phased out for fossil fuels by 2020.
- We need to place long-term thinking above short-term demands, both in the marketplace and at the polling place.
- Promoting fairness and inclusion is the right thing to do – and the smart thing to do for lasting prosperity and stability.

Two days later, in his speech to the nation, Zuma declared, "Let me take this opportunity to congratulate the inter-ministerial committee on COP17 for making the conference a huge success. The final outcome of COP17 was historic and precedent setting, ranking with the 1997 conference where the Kyoto Protocol was adopted."

Reality check

But who really won at Durban's climate summit? The biggest polluters, it turns out, who got off scot-free on emissions cuts as well as on North-South fairness.

According to the New York Times, at the recent World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, a top aide to chief US State Department negotiator Todd Stern remarked that "the Durban platform was promising because of what it did not say." After all, revealed Trevor Houser, "There is no

mention of historic responsibility or per capita emissions. There is no mention of economic development as the priority for developing countries. There is no mention of a difference between developed and developing country action.”

Zuma’s ‘huge success’ was in reality a sell-out of the UN’s tradition of differentiated responsibility between rich and poor countries. As climate chaos hits, Africa will be the worst-affected continent, so who can blame the African Union for hostility to Pretoria’s leadership candidate last week? The only Africans who smiled when leaving Durban were those from South Africa’s mining and electricity-guzzling industry – along with oil extractors – blessed by COP17’s failure to make binding emissions cuts.

Civil society’s failure to punish errant COP17 negotiators must have encouraged Zuma to expand his to-do list of climate-destroying investments. For already we are constructing the world’s fourth-largest coal-fired power plant with the World Bank’s largest-ever project loan, at Medupi in the beautiful Waterberg mountains where there is insufficient water for cooling it.

Not far away in Mpumalanga, contracts are being signed for the world’s third-largest coal-fired plant, Eskom’s Kusile. The main beneficiary is BHP Billiton, which consumes more than 10 percent of SA’s electricity, and still gets the world’s cheapest power deal at Richard’s Bay, where the workforce has been shaved back by capital-intensive aluminium smelters to now fewer than 1500.

The other beneficiary is the Japanese firm Hitachi, which in 2010 pretended not to know that its owners included the ANC’s Chancellor House, and whose supply of boilers – for which they are paid a mind-boggling R40+ billion – is so far behind schedule that more Eskom load-shedding looms.

Zuma’s speech unveiled yet more eco-destructive capital-intensive projects: “First, we plan to develop and integrate rail, road and water infrastructure, centred on two main areas in Limpopo: the Waterberg in the western part of the province and Steelpoort in the eastern part. These efforts are intended to unlock the enormous mineral belt of coal, platinum, palladium, chrome and other minerals, in order to facilitate increased mining as well as stepped-up beneficiation of minerals.”

There is much more: “Among the list of planned projects is the expansion of the iron ore export channel from 60-million tons per annum to 82-million tons per annum..., development of a new 16-million-tons-per-annum manganese export channel through the Port of

Ngqura in Nelson Mandela Bay... and expansion of the iron-ore rail line between Sishen in the Northern Cape and Saldanha Bay in the Western Cape.”

Speaking to CityPress after Thursday’s speech, Zuma elaborated: “By 2014, I’d want to see the cranes, building, digging everything. I’d like to see people employed. We are looking at a new kind of city at Waterberg. That’s how Johannesburg began, as a mining town.”

Set aside that Johannesburg is the world’s least sustainable city, does Zuma know that there’s a vast national housing shortage and surplus of unemployed people, and that building homes doesn’t require cranes, but does create far more jobs per unit of capital spent?

Did he notice that Implats fired 17,000 workers just a week before his speech – whom if rehired will likely suffer a substantial cut in their pensions? Did he read the National Planning Commission’s finding that “South Africa needs to move away from the unsustainable use of natural resources”?

You can’t blame the president alone, given the extreme pressures he faces from greedy corporations. For instance, Toyota CEO Johan van Zyl last week argued, “Durban as a brand is not strong enough to simply say ‘come and invest in Durban’. What it needs to attract investors are big projects.”

At a Johannesburg seminar of the University of Pretoria’s Gordon Institute of Business Science and Business Day newspaper, van Zyl insisted, “Durban needs to keep ahead of the competition. China is building ports they don’t even know when they will use. If return on investment is the line of thinking we may never see the infrastructure.”

In other words, please supply more public subsidies to crony-capitalist fat cats. Our new city manager Sbu’ Sithole inherited a secretive R250 billion back-of-port plan for South Durban that will demolish Clairwood. Like Mabhida Stadium, King Shaka airport, uShaka water park and other big projects, these cannot provide a positive return on investment.

Also at the seminar was former Durban mayor Obed Mlaba, criticized in last week’s forensic audit for illegally hijacking a R3 billion waste-energy infrastructure tender at Bisasar Road landfill. Complained Mlaba, “Big projects or even creating clusters around them are hampered by small-town mentality.”

Typical of a big-town mentality was this banal command to Zuma in Business Day editor Peter Bruce’s column yesterday: “mine more and

faster and ship what we mine cheaper and faster.”

If so, then bye-bye resilient people and resilient planet.

(I was in the process of lecturing about the global climate and financial crises along these lines in Harare last Thursday, but Robert Mugabe’s riot police prevented me and hundreds of others from entering the Jameson Hotel. Right then, we’ll try again tomorrow.)

Bond recently authored *Politics of Climate Justice* (UKZN Press), edited Durban’s *Climate Gamble* (Unisa Press), and directs the UKZN Centre for Civil Society.

An Excess of Democracy

Hilary Wainwright 14 February 2012

The ability of the Occupy movement to create platforms outside our closed political system to force open a debate on inequality, the taboo at the heart of the financial crisis, is impressive. It is a new source of political creativity from which we all have much to learn.

At the same time, no veteran of the movements of the late 1960s and 1970s can help but be struck by similarities. There’s the same strong sense of power from below that comes from the dependence of the powerful on those they dominate or exploit. There’s the creative combination of personal and collective change, and the bringing together of resistance with experiments in creating alternatives here and now. There’s the spurning of hierarchies and the creation of organisations that are today described as ‘horizontal’ or ‘networked’ – and that now with the new techno tools for networking have both more potential and more ambiguity.

And the same hoary problems reappear: informal and unaccountable leaderships, the tensions between inclusion and effectiveness. *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*, the 1970s pamphlet that tackled these unanticipated pitfalls from the perspective of the women’s liberation movement in particular, may be well read.

But that was 40 years ago – even before the widespread use of faxes, let alone personal computers and mobile phones! How could reflecting on these marginalised earlier movements possibly take forward the debates opened by Occupy and the Indignados?

From social rebellion to capitalist renewal

The fate of the energies and aspirations of that rebellious decade is a long and complex cluster of stories. To consider their relevance today, I want only to point to a historical process that was not generally anticipated at the time and still is not fully understood. This was the capacity of capitalism, as it searched for ways out of stagnation and crisis, to feed opportunistically on the chaotic creativity and restless experimental culture of the movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

For example, from the 1980s, at the same time as attacking the trade unions, corporate management was also dismantling the military-style hierarchies characteristic of many leading companies and decentralising the production process. A new generation of managers, especially in the newer industries, was recognising that workers' tacit knowledge was a rich source of increased productivity and greater profits – so long as workers had little real power over their distribution.

Another example is how, in the endless search for new markets, culturally-savvy marketing managers were able to identify and exploit the commercial opportunities in the expanded horizons and wants of the increasing mass of women with incomes of their own.

The key underlying feature of these and similar trends is that much of the innovative character of capitalism's renewal in the 1980s and 1990s – underpinned by the expansion of credit – came from sources external to both the corporation and the state. In fact, frequently its origins lay in resistance and the search for alternatives to both.

In other words, capital proved very much more nimble in responding to – and appropriating – the new energies and aspirations stimulated by the critical movements of the 1960s and 1970s than did the parties of the left – for which these movements could have been a force for democratic renewal.

What kind of a counter-movement?

Now, with the credit that underpinned the apparent ebullience of this particular period of capitalism having become toxic, the search for alternatives is back. As I write, the Financial Times, much to its own astonishment, is publishing a week of articles on The Crisis of Capitalism. The opening article declares that at the heart of the problem is widening inequality.

Are we seeing in the combination – not necessarily convergence – of unease within at least the cultural elites, the growth of sustained popular resistance and public disgruntlement, the emergence of what Karl Polanyi called a 'counter-movement' to the socially destructive consequences of rampant capitalism? And to what extent might the ideas of the movements

of the 1960s and 1970s influence the character of that counter-movement?

A fundamental break

To answer this we need, briefly, to remind ourselves of the core nature of the original social critique made by the 1960s/70s movements and in particular the nature of its potential break with the institutions of the post-war order: their paternalism, their exclusions, their narrow definition of democracy and their assumption that production and technology were value neutral.

Central to the character of this critique was its aspiration, more in practice than in theory, to overcome the debilitating dichotomies of the cold war: between the individual and the collective/social; freedom and solidarity/equality; 'free' market versus 'command' state – dichotomies that were refrozen through neoliberalism and the manner of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The ideas and practices of the women's movement are particularly illustrative. This movement came about partly from the gender-blind inconsistencies and incompletely fulfilled promises of the radical movements of the time. It deepened and extended their innovations, adding insights arising from women's specific experiences of breaking out of their subordination.

Especially important here was an insistence on the individual as social and the collective as based on relations between individuals: a social individualism and a relational view of society and social change. After all, the momentum of the women's liberation movement was animated both by women's desire to realise themselves as individuals and their determination to end the social relationships that blocked these possibilities. This required social solidarity: an organised movement. The nature of its organisation was shaped by a constant attempt to create ways of organising that combined freedom and autonomy – what every woman struggles for in her own life – with solidarity, mutuality and values of equality. The result – cutting a complex and tense story short – was ways of relating that both allowed for autonomy and also achieved co-ordination and mutual support, without going through a single centre. In other words, here was what could be called an early, pre-ICT, networked form of organisation.

The political economy of networks

This networked form was distinctive because integral to its origin, character and sustainability were values of solidarity and equality and democracy. Awareness of these origins could help us now, when networked organisations are everywhere, to distinguish between the instrumental use of the concept of network in essentially undemocratic organisations (within states and corporations, for example) and, on the

other hand, as a way of connecting distributed activities based on shared values of social justice and democratically agreed norms.

The latter possibility is radically enhanced through the new information and communications technology in its non-proprietary forms. The new possibilities of systems co-ordinating a multiplicity of autonomous organisations with shared values, through democratically agreed norms or protocol, can help upscale economic organisations based on non-capitalist – collaborative, P2P (peer to peer) co-operative or other social and democratic – forms of ownership, production, distribution and finance. What enables us to make this apparently surprising leap from the forms of organisation shaped by the consciousness-raising groups of the women's movement (or indeed other civil society initiatives of the same period, such as the factory shop stewards' committees combining against multi-plant, multinational corporations and developing alternative plans for socially useful production (<http://www.redpepper.org.uk/a-real-green-deal/>) is the importance they give to practical, experiential knowledge and the need to share and socialise it.

The political economy of knowledge

The reason why this is important for the development of a political economy beyond capitalism is that behind the imposed choice between capitalist market and the state is the polarisation between scientific, social and economic knowledge on the one hand and practical knowledge on the other. While the former was regarded as the basis of economic planning and centralised through the state, defenders of the free market held up the latter as being held individually by the entrepreneur and capable of coordination only through the haphazard workings of the market, based on private ownership. The relevant breakthrough of the women's and other movements of the 1960s/70s was to make the sharing and socialising of experiential knowledge – in combination with scientific forms – fundamental to their purposeful, but always experimental, organisations. And to do so through consciously co-ordinated/networked and self-reflexive relations between autonomous/distributed initiatives.

Translating this into economics in the age of information and communications technology – a project requiring much further work – points to the possibility of forms of co-ordination that can include and help to regulate a non-capitalist market. A regulated, socialised market, that is, in which the drive to accumulate and make money out of money is effectively suppressed. It also provides a basis for democratising and, where appropriate, decentralising the state, within the framework of democratically agreed social goals (such as concerning equality and ecology).

It is over these issues concerning the sharing of knowledge and information and the implications for the relationship between autonomy and social co-ordination that the ideas coming from the Occupy movement can creatively converge with those of earlier movements. It is interesting in this context to read the economics working group of Occupy London describing in the Financial Times how Frederick von Hayek, the Austrian economist and theorist of free-market capitalism, with his ideas on the significance of distributed knowledge, is the talk of Occupy London. No doubt this was partly a rhetorical device for the FT audience. But the challenge of answering Hayek and his justification of the free market on the basis of a theory of distributed practical and/or experiential knowledge does provide a useful way of clarifying for ourselves the importance of the networked social justice initiatives of today and the anti-authoritarian social movements of the past for an alternative political economy. (http://www.tni.org/archives/books_arguments)

There is a point at which Hayek's critique of the 'all knowing state' at first glance converges with the critique of the social democratic state made by the libertarian/social movement left in the 1960s/70s. Both challenge the notion of scientific knowledge as the only basis for economic organisation and both emphasise the importance of practical/experiential knowledge and its 'distributed' character. But when it comes to understanding the nature of this practical knowledge and hence its relation to forms of economic organisation, these perspectives diverge radically.

Whereas Hayek theorises this practical knowledge as inherently individual and hence points to the haphazard, unplanned and unplannable workings of the market and the price mechanism, the radicals of the 1960s/70s took, as we have just explained, a very different view. For them, the sharing of knowledge embedded in experience and collaboration to create a common understanding and self-consciousness of their subordination and of how to resist, was fundamental to the process of becoming a movement. In contrast to the individualism of Hayek, their ways of organising assumed that practical knowledge could be socialised and shared. This led to ways of organising that emphasised communication and shared values as a basis for co-ordination and a common direction. It provided the basis for purposeful and therefore more or less plannable action – action that was always experimental, never all-knowing; the product of distributed intelligence that could be consciously shared.

At the risk of being somewhat schematic, it could be argued that the movements of the 1960s/70s applied these ideas especially to develop an – unfinished – vision of democratising the state. This took place both through attempts to create democratic, participatory ways of administering public institutions (universities and schools, for example) and through the development of non-state sources of democratic power (women's centres,

police monitoring projects and so on). It involved working 'with/in and against' the state, such as when the Greater London Council was led by Ken Livingstone in the early 1980s.

Today's movements are effectively focusing their energies especially on challenging the oligarchic market, and the injustice of corporate, financial power. Here the development of networked forms are increasingly linked to distributed economic initiatives – co-ops, credit unions, open software networks, collaborative cultural projects and so on. In this way, today's movements are beginning to develop in practice a vision of socialising production and finance and creating an alternative kind of market, complementary to the earlier unfinished vision of democratic public power.

What they have in common, more in practice than in theory, is an assertion of organised democratic civil society as an economic actor, both in the provision of public goods and in the sphere of market exchange.

Cultural equality

This emphasis on the development of strategies for political and economic change that empower democratic civil society, rather than an exclusive reliance on the state, marks a distinct development beyond the politics of the social democratic reformers of the past. The architects of the welfare state and the post-war order, with all its achievements and limits, believed in economic and political reform. But they did so generally on the basis of assumptions of cultural superiority: they, the professionals, knew what was best for the masses. By contrast, the rebellions of the 1960s/70s were asserting cultural equality. Their goals concerned economic and social needs but in a context of challenging dominant understandings of knowledge, emphasising the public importance of practical, tacit and experiential knowledge. This underpinned commitment to developing the organisations in the workplace and wider society that could share this knowledge and turn it into a source of transformative power.

The broadly anti-capitalist movements since the late 1990s are remaking that struggle, in radically changed political and economic circumstances. The context is framed by a new form of cultural domination. It is in effect the imposition of a financial accounting mentality. Thus, pensioners are defined as a burden; workers are defined as costs. Higher education is defined as a personal investment, as if everyone determined their future in terms of a personal rate of return rather than a contribution to society. The aim is a culture of acquiescence to the cuts and privatisation in the interests of an unproblematised goal of growth.

How can we challenge these new forms of cultural subordination, turning citizens, by the dictat of an imposed accounting system, into mere 'hands' or 'dependants' in the language of 19th-century capitalism?

Alternative values in material practice

Part of the answer is surely to be found by illustrating in practice the alternative values that could found a political economy based on a framework of equality, mutuality and respect for nature. Many such illustrations are up and spreading: credit unions that organise finance as a commons; public sector workers countering privatisation with proposals for improving and democratising services for and with fellow citizens; ‘free culture’ networks insisting on the use of ICT as a means of extending and enriching the public sphere rather than a digital oilfield for profit; a revival of co-operatives and collective consumer action around energy, food and other spheres in which the logic of capital is particularly destructive to society and the environment.

The strategic question we have to work on is how to generalise from, interconnect and extend these scattered developments.

In this sense the insistence on ‘being the change we want to see’ and creating alternatives here and now has a macro significance as well as a micro one. The exhaustion of the existing system is in some ways far deeper than in the 1960s and 1970s but we should never underestimate the ability of capital to adapt and appropriate – which is why we must think ambitiously, though remaining grounded, about our collective organisational innovations.

Finally, what about relations with the state?

One of the distinctive features of the recent movements and the steady development across the world of forms of social or, more radically, solidarity economics is an ambition to be part of a process of systemic change. This inevitably raises the question of the relation of these usually autonomous initiatives to the state and to electoral politics.

Most activists in these experiments, rightly, have no faith in the ability of the political class to lead ways out of the crisis. But there has been an overly-generalised theorisation of engagement with political institutions as necessarily counterposed to the building of non-capitalist economic relations in whatever spaces can be struggled for now. Experience, however, points to the possibility of a pragmatic and cautious engagement with political institutions from a consciously and determinedly autonomous base.

An example of this can be found in Argentina, where networks of workers' co-ops have struggled for legislation favourable to their interests. For example, starting with support at a municipal and provincial level in Buenos Aires, they have won the legal right to maintain ownership and control of occupied factories. The logic of their approach has been to develop autonomous sources of power rooted in actual alternatives, rather

than merely forms of pressure and protest that leave the creative initiative (or rather lack of it) with the political class.

(http://web.gc.cuny.edu/politicalscience/faculty/pranis/pubs/WUSA_273.pdf)

This experience effectively illustrates an alternative, progressive recognition of the creative, productive power of civil society to the one described earlier in capitalism's ability to absorb and subordinate the creativity of the critical culture of the 1960s and 1970s.

In conclusion

This brings us back to my opening question of what use there might be in revisiting these earlier movements. In sum, my arguments point to the importance of the unfinished foundations in democratic civil society of an alternative political economy – including a different kind of state. You could say we were rudely interrupted in our work. But maybe, as we join with new generations with capacities and visions way beyond our own, we will be collectively stronger if we recover what was potentially powerful and what the elites feared and tried to destroy.

It's not easy to sum up succinctly what the managers of the ruling order felt so threatened by in the 1960s/70s, so let's use the words they employed themselves. It was 'an excess of democracy' that lay behind 'the reduction of authority', concluded the Trilateral Commission when it investigated the causes of the political and economic crises of the early 1970s on behalf of governments of the dominant western powers. The elite alarm at that time was thus more than just the regular ruling class fear of the mob. The notion of 'an excess of democracy' implied a fear of intelligent and organised opposition, which was hence less easy to counter.

It was the autonomous and yet purposeful, organised and capable nature of the movements - including, perhaps especially, in the workplace that they feared most. Here was the emergence of a new generation with allies throughout society that no longer accepted the place allotted to them by the elite democracy handed down to them after the war. And yet that generation comprised the children of the post-war democratic order, gaining legitimacy through appealing to its claims and its unfulfilled promises. At that moment, the elites lost their authority. Simple repression would no longer work – not that they didn't try it.

Related to this and later on, as the ideas of the radical movements began to shape political debate in the mid-1970s and early 1980s, the threat, at least in the UK, became that a form of socialism (or at least a viable political vision threatening to the elites) might emerge that could no longer be dismissed by reference to the failure of the Soviet model. Norman Tebbit, Margaret Thatcher's right-hand hatchet man, put it neatly in reference to

the radically democratic Greater London Council of the early 1980s: This is the modern socialism and we must destroy it.

The grounds for these fears lay in the distinctive features of those movements and projects described in this article. In their ways of organising (combining autonomy and co-operation, creating the participatory conditions for the genuine sharing of knowledge), the alliances they built (across the traditional divides of economics, culture, labour and community) and their vision (beyond state versus market, individual versus social), they held out in practice the possibility of an alternative, participatory and co-operative political economy.

For a time, the new political culture seemed unstoppable. Now, in the presence of Occupy and the multiplicity of movements that share in new ways the same hopeful characteristics, it feels as if, like a mountain stream that disappeared from sight, the same excess of democracy, with its springs in the 1960s and 1970s, is bubbling up again.

Many thanks to Marco Berlinguer, Roy Bhaskar, Jackie Cock, Robin Murray, Doreen Massey and Jane Shallice

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Hilary Wainwright is a leading researcher and writer on the emergence of new forms of democratic accountability within parties, movements and the state. She is the driving force and editor behind Red Pepper, a popular British new left magazine, and has documented countless examples of resurgent democratic movements from Brazil to Britain and the lessons they provide for progressive politics.

As well as TNI fellow, she is also Senior Research Associate at the International Centre for Participation Studies at the Department for Peace Studies, University of Bradford, UK and previously research fellow at the Centre for the Study of Global Governance at the London School of Economics. She has also been a visiting Professor and Scholar at the University of California, Los Angeles; Havens Center, University of Wisconsin, Madison and Todai University, Tokyo. Her books include *Reclaim the State: Adventures in Popular Democracy* (Verso/TNI, 2003) and *Arguments for a New Left: Answering the Free Market Right* (Blackwell, 1993).

Wainwright founded the Popular Planning Unit of the Greater London Council during the Thatcher years, and was convenor of the new economics working group of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly from 1989 to 1994.

Has Greece Entered Its Argentina Moment?

Jérôme E. Roos 13 February 2012

Greece's political establishment trembles as banks and government offices burn amid violent anti-austerity riots. Has the country finally reached a tipping point?

Exactly ten years ago, the crisis-ridden country of Argentina spiraled into a bout of social unrest that would eventually lead to the largest sovereign default in history. After three years of being forced to swallow the bitter pill of IMF-imposed austerity, a tipping point was finally reached: foreign creditors and neoliberal governments had pushed the people too far. They rose up in defiance and ousted five successive Presidents in the space of just three weeks.

With the incredible images of flame-engulfed buildings and policemen emerging out of Athens, it now looks like Greece may be headed down the same path. The country has become ungovernable. Even though a majority of traitors was found to pass yet another deeply unpopular austerity package through Parliament, this weekend's violent protests indicate that the 'Argentina moment' may have arrived. The Greek people simply can't take any more austerity.

This weekend's 48-hour strike and mass demonstration witnessed some of the largest mobilizations in Greece to date. Even our weathered comrades inside Greece reported that the scale of the protests and the severity of the violence were some of the worst yet. With over 100,000 descending onto Syntagma Square, riot police desperately clung on to their perimeter as they were pelted with rocks and firebombs. The Guardian reported that: More than 40 buildings were set ablaze in an orgy of looting that left scores injured as protesters vented their anger at the caretaker government and parliament's ordering of a further €3.3bn of savings by slashing wages and pensions and laying off public sector workers ... Meanwhile street battles between police firing rounds of teargas and demonstrators hurling firebombs and marble slabs left Syntagma square, the plaza in front of the parliament building, resembling a war zone.

"The rebellion has begun," the Greek resistance hero and veteran left-winger Manolis Glezos told reporters. Indeed, as students and anarchists fought back waves of riot police assaults on the occupied University Law Department, as hundreds of outraged protesters took over a TV station, and as plumes of smoke and clouds of teargas filled up the Athenian night skies, one thing became overly clear: the social situation in Greece has spun entirely out of control.

Just before the weekend, the Guardian's veteran Greek correspondent, Helena Smith, wrote that she feared for a "social explosion", warning that the "Greeks can't take any more punishment." With poverty deepening, social inequality worsening, protests persisting and the economic situation only spiraling ever deeper into despair, "it is easy to see why, among politicians at least, there is little stomach for more."

A series of resignations by ministers on Friday, unwilling to support the latest measures, not only underlined the panic of the political class – in a country where MPs no longer feel safe walking in the streets – but proved how tenuous public support is for the bailout. If there is to be a social explosion, many said that it would come because Greeks had been pushed too far.

In my own PhD research, which compares the Argentine crisis of 2001-'02 to the Greek debt crisis, I am paying particular attention to the process through which the "impossible" at some point becomes "inevitable". In Argentina, two factors conspired to make a default and a massive devaluation of the peso — both of which previously seemed heresy — inevitable: massive popular protests combined with a willingness of foreign creditors to let Argentina fail.

In Greece, we appear to be approaching a similar tipping point. Six government ministers resigned this weekend, the far-right Laos party deserted the coalition, and over 40 lawmakers were sacked after they rebelled against the terms of the EU-IMF bailout. As the Guardian rightly concluded, "the scenes of mayhem on the streets of Athens and all across the country leave big questions unresolved regarding Greece's capacity to stick with the savage austerity."

Unlike two years ago, "when the angry graffiti demanded that the 'IMF go home' and 'reject austerity', it now exhorts protesters to 'murder bankers' and 'rise in rebellion' and 'never be slaves'. The spirit of resistance shows no sign of abating. With support for the left ... growing by the day, opposition to any cost-cutting reforms is bound only to increase." As one opposition leader put it, "Martial law has to be imposed for these measures to be implemented."

At the same time, Greece's foreign creditors appear ever more willing to allow the country to default. Helena Smith has pointed out that, "as the talks [between Greece and its creditors] rolled on last week, a growing number of voices in the single currency's more stable "core" countries suggested they could manage without Greece ... Some investors, too, argue that, because a default has been a possibility for many months, financial markets would take it in their stride."

Dutch Prime Minister Rutte — who throughout this crisis has been playing hard-ball with Greece, usually followed a few weeks later in his radical neoliberal footsteps by Angela Merkel — has already raised the possibility of a Greek exit from the eurozone. So have EU Commissioner Neelie Kroes and German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schauble. All in all, Greece's creditors appear to be preparing the ground for what they previously told us was "impossible".

Yet as the elites persist with their scaremongering just to buy themselves a little more time, at least the 82-year old WWII survivor Stella Papafagou won't be afraid of the "apocalyptic" consequences that Prime Minister warned of in Parliament today. "We've fought several times for liberation," she told the New York Times. "But this slavery is worse than any other. This is worse than the '40s. I would prefer to die with dignity than with my head bent down."

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The Seed Emergency

The Threat to Food and Democracy

Vandana Shiva 12 February 2012

The seed is the first link in the food chain – and seed sovereignty is the foundation of food sovereignty. If farmers do not have their own seeds or access to open pollinated varieties that they can save, improve and exchange, they have no seed sovereignty – and consequently no food sovereignty.

The deepening agrarian and food crisis has its roots in changes in the seed supply system, and the erosion of seed diversity and seed sovereignty.

Seed sovereignty includes the farmer's rights to save, breed and exchange seeds, to have access to diverse open source seeds which can be saved – and which are not patented, genetically modified, owned or controlled by emerging seed giants. It is based on reclaiming seeds and biodiversity as commons and public good.

The past twenty years have seen a very rapid erosion of seed diversity and seed sovereignty, and the concentration of the control over seeds by a very small number of giant corporations. In 1995, when the UN organised the Plant Genetic Resources Conference in Leipzig, it was reported that 75 per cent of all agricultural biodiversity had disappeared because of the

introduction of “modern” varieties, which are always cultivated as monocultures. Since then, the erosion has accelerated.

The introduction of the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights Agreement of the World Trade Organisation has accelerated the spread of genetically engineered seeds – which can be patented – and for which royalties can be collected. Navdanya was started in response to the introduction of these patents on seeds in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade - a forerunner to the WTO – about which a Monsanto representative later stated: “In drafting these agreements, we were the patient, diagnostician [and] physician all in one.” Corporations defined a problem – and for them the problem was farmers saving seeds. They offered a solution, and the solution was to make it illegal for farmers to save seed – by introducing patents and intellectual property rights [PDF] on those very seeds. As a result, acreage under GM corn, soya, canola, cotton has increased dramatically.

Threats to seed sovereignty

Besides displacing and destroying diversity, patented GMO seeds are also undermining seed sovereignty. Across the world, new seed laws are being introduced which enforce compulsory registration of seeds, thus making it impossible for small farmers to grow their own diversity, and forcing them into dependency on giant seed corporations. Corporations are also patenting climate resilient seeds evolved by farmers - thus robbing farmers of using their own seeds and knowledge for climate adaptation.

Another threat to seed sovereignty is genetic contamination. India has lost its cotton seeds because of contamination from Bt Cotton – a strain engineered to contain the pesticide *Bacillus thuringiensis* bacterium. Canada has lost its canola seed because of contamination from Roundup Ready canola. And Mexico has lost its corn due to contamination from Bt Cotton.

After contamination, biotech seed corporations sue farmers with patent infringement cases, as happened in the case of Percy Schmeiser. That is why more than 80 groups came together and filed a case to prevent Monsanto from suing farmers whose seed had been contaminated. As a farmer’s seed supply is eroded, and farmers become dependent on patented GMO seed, the result is debt. India, the home of cotton, has lost its cotton seed diversity and cotton seed sovereignty. Some 95 per cent of the country’s cotton seed is now controlled by Monsanto – and the debt trap created by being forced to buy seed every year - with royalty payments - has pushed hundreds of thousands of farmers to suicide; of the 250,000 farmer suicides, the majority are in the cotton belt.

Seeding control

Even as the disappearance of biodiversity and seed sovereignty creates a major crisis for agriculture and food security, corporations are pushing governments to use public money to destroy the public seed supply and replace it with unreliable non-renewable, patented seed – which must be bought each and every year.

In Europe, the 1994 regulation for protection of plant varieties forces farmers to make a “compulsory voluntary contribution” to seed companies. The terms themselves are contradictory. What is compulsory cannot be voluntary.

In France, a law was passed in November 2011, which makes royalty payments compulsory. As Agriculture Minister Bruna Le Marie stated: “Seeds can no longer be royalty free, as is currently the case.” Of the 5,000 or so cultivated plant varieties, 600 are protected by certificate in France, and these account for 99 per cent of the varieties grown by farmers.

The “compulsory voluntary contribution”, in other words a royalty, is justified on grounds that “a fee is paid to certificate holders [seed companies] to sustain funding of research and efforts to improve genetic resources”.

Monsanto pirates biodiversity and genetic resources from farming communities, as it did in the case of a wheat biopiracy case fought by Navdanya with Greenpeace, and climate resilient crops and brinjal (also known as aubergine or eggplant) varieties for Bt Brinjal. As Monsanto states, “it draws from a collection of germ-plasm that is unparalleled in history” and “mines the diversity in this genetic library to develop elite seeds faster than ever before”.

In effect, what is taking place is the enclosure of the genetic commons of our biodiversity and the intellectual commons of public breeding by farming communities and public institutions. And the GMO seeds Monsanto is offering are failing. This is not “improvement” of genetic resources, but degradation. This is not innovation but piracy.

For example, the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) – being pushed by the Gates Foundation – is a major assault on Africa’s seed sovereignty.

Agribusiness

The 2009 US Global Food Security Act [PDF] also called the Lugar-Casey Act [PDF], “A bill to authorise appropriations for fiscal years 2010 through 2014 to provide assistance to foreign countries to promote food security, to stimulate rural economies, and to improve emergency response to food crisis, to amend the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 and for other purposes”.

The amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act would “include research on

bio-technological advances appropriate to local ecological conditions, including genetically modified technology”. The \$ 7.7bn that goes with the bill would go to benefit Monsanto to push GM seeds.

An article in Forbes, titled “Why Uncle Sam Supports Franken Foods”, shows how agribusiness is the only sector in which US has a positive trade balance. Hence the push for GMOs - because they bring royalties to the US. However, royalties for Monsanto are based on debt, suicidal farmers and the disappearance of biodiversity worldwide.

Under the US Global Food Security Act, Nepal signed an agreement with USAID and Monsanto. This led to massive protests across the country. India was forced to allow patents on seeds through the first dispute brought by the US against India in the WTO. Since 2004, India has also been trying to introduce a Seed Act which would require farmers to register their own seeds and take licenses. This in effect would force farmers from using their indigenous seed varieties. By creating a Seed Satyagraha - a non-cooperation movement in Gandhi’s footsteps, handing over hundreds of thousands of signatures to the prime minister, and working with parliament – we have so far prevented the Seed Law from being introduced.

India has signed a US-India Knowledge Initiative in Agriculture, with Monsanto on the Board. Individual states are also being pressured to sign agreements with Monsanto. One example is the Monsanto-Rajasthan Memorandum of Understanding, under which Monsanto would get intellectual property rights to all genetic resources, and to carry out research on indigenous seeds. It took a campaign by Navdanya and a “Monsanto Quit India” Bija Yatra ["seed pilgrimage"] to force the government of Rajasthan to cancel the MOU.

This asymmetric pressure of Monsanto on the US government, and the joint pressure of both on the governments across the world, is a major threat to the future of seeds, the future of food and the future of democracy.

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TRANSCEND Member Prof. Vandana Shiva is a physicist, ecofeminist, philosopher, activist, and author of more than 20 books and 500 papers. She is the founder of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, and has campaigned for biodiversity, conservation and farmers’ rights, winning the Right Livelihood Award [Alternative Nobel Prize] in 1993. She is executive director of the Navdanya Trust.

Dale T. McKinley 11 February 2012

One of the questions I am sure many in South Africa (and abroad) have been asking themselves more recently is how the state of the nation more generally and of the ANC itself more specifically has gotten to this point? Let's face it; there is a huge amount of disillusionment and disappointment out there, of varying measure, intensity and origin, which cut broadly across our sizeable societal divisions.

Most often however, the 'answers' ignore the variegated but substantial influence and impact of myriad post-apartheid grassroots struggles and the community organisations and social movements that have largely carried them. In other words, explanations for our present state of affairs cannot simply be reduced to the ANC and its liberation struggle, to individual leaders or to various international crises. The 'story' and accompanying lessons of such grassroots struggles and organisations - both positive and negative - have much to tell us about what has gone wrong and why.

Even if it now seems like a lifetime ago, one of the most fundamental turning points in the political life of our post-apartheid transition took place in the late 1990s. Shadowing the already serious and widening cracks in Mandela's carefully constructed 'rainbow nation' alongside the triumphalist arrival of an Mbeki government clearly determined to paper over those cracks with enforced political unity and neo-liberal dirigisme, there arose a range of new independent community organisations and social movements. One of those was the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) which came onto the scene at the turn of the century but which had ceased to exist by the end of its first decade.

Crucially, the APF was formed by a motley collection of Johannesburg-based political activists, students, unionists and community organisations/residents in direct response to the combined impact of government's neo-liberal inspired privatisation onslaught and the closing down of space for practical anti-capitalist opposition and dissent within the ANC and its Alliance partners. What this meant from the start is that the APF, arising as it did, on the left flanks of the ANC and consisting mostly of those who had historically been part of the ANC-Alliance, became a contested symbol of liberation struggle progeny, an unwanted reminder for the ANC, its Alliance partners and the new political and economic elites of the potential power and reach of independent grassroots struggles. The 'worst' kind of post-apartheid 'enemy' had been born, a 'child' who simply would not obey the 'parent'.

Contrary to the historic portrayal - by both the ANC and mainstream society - of movements like the APF as nothing more than disgruntled 'trouble-makers' taking to the streets at every opportunity, the reality of

the APF's tactical approach to early struggles is instructive for the present. The first step was always to approach local and provincial government officials and relevant government-initiated community structures to try and raise community grievances and engage in a serious dialogue to find solutions. Foreshadowing what has now become a widely recognised hallmark of ANC governance, such efforts were arrogantly rebuffed; supposedly democratic spaces at community level being quickly closed down to those who were not part of the ruling 'family'.

Understandably then, the result was the adoption of a second phase of struggle. This saw the formulation of a set of common and basic democratic demands that sought to contest the implementation of unpopular socio-economic policies and closing of political space for oppositional voices. Confirming the APF's historical foundations in the struggle tactics of apartheid-era, mass-based civics, the basic programme consisted of: various forms of mass, direct action at local, provincial and national levels; internal educational and research activities; regular mass community meetings; alliance-building and solidarity activities with social movements/community organisations and organised labour across the country as well as internationally; door-to-door campaigning; submission of memoranda of demands and policy alternatives to all levels of government; use of legal tactics through the courts; and, regular, community-based report-back meetings.

This was nothing more or nothing less than an organised attempt to play an active, informed but critical role on the contested terrain of an emergent national democracy politically dominated by an ex-liberation movement. And yet, the general response, that cut across South Africa's generic public-private and party political divides and which has continued in various forms until the present, was one of common outrage at the audacity of it all.

How dare these 'poors' and their lefty middle-class 'instigators' question our political and moral integrity, the character of our post-apartheid democracy and besmirch the good name of post-apartheid South Africa on the international stage? There can be few better ways to incubate the further centralisation of socio-economic power, intensified political intolerance and the normalisation of an attitude of unaccountability. No surprise then with the subsequent rise to power of Jacob Zuma and his factionalist backers using pseudo left-populist rhetoric to masquerade as saviours of the 'poor'.

Besides the more generalised and deleterious impact on the state, the ANC and its Alliance partners as well as on society as a whole, the experience of the APF at the community level was that Zuma's politics created both short-term confusion and a variegated 'turn' away from independent

movement-community politics and struggle towards institutionalised party politics and a creeping (Zuma-inspired) social conservatism. Together with the failures of the Zuma government to deliver on its legion of promises to the poor, this forced much of the APF's constituency/membership (even more so than before) into a narrower survivalist mode and engendered a politics that easily gravitated towards a mode of individualism and entrepreneurial engagement.

Coupled to the APF's own numerous and serious internal weaknesses and mistakes - which included egoism of leadership, often lax individual and organisational accountability and a failure to fully confront unequal gender relations as well as the link between a macro-nationalist discourse and xenophobic attitudes/practices - the general environment of state failure, intensified elite accumulation, political conflict, organisational battle, factional opportunism and individual survivalism produced a recipe for implosion.

Yet, despite the APF's demise, alongside that of numerous other social movements over the recent past, the impact of this symbolically representative transitional 'enemy child' is embedded in South Africa's political and organisational landscape. Besides managing to effect shifts of some specific socio-economic policies in favour of the poor, it was: at the forefront of creating a new grassroots organisational 'voice' for many of those socially, economically and politically marginalised; instilling a new sense of collective activism and demand for social/political redress amongst poor communities; helping shift the terrain of political and social engagement and debate in South African society as a whole and in the process, expanding the boundaries of democratic politics and representation beyond the status quo framework; and, catalysing a new consciousness of the possibilities of radical change.

Most of the lessons worth learning are the hardest to learn of all.

Disclosure: Dale McKinley was a co-founder of the APF and at different times its former media coordinator/ spokesperson and also Treasurer.

Stop SOPA, PIPA and ACTA!

Mauro Vanetti 10 February 2012

The Stop Only Piracy Act (SOPA) and the Preventing Real Online Threats to Economic Creativity and Theft of Intellectual Property Act (PROTECT IP Act, PIPA) are two bills that were put before the US House of

Representatives and Senate in 2011. The two bills are supposedly designed to defend owners of copyrighted content, trademarks and pharmaceutical patents in their long-standing struggle against “pirates”. But there is a lot more to it than that!

Three pieces of legislation affecting digital freedom have recently raised big controversies in the US and the rest of the world: SOPA, PIPA and ACTA. I would like to introduce the subject of this article, online liberties and repression, on a personal note. I just had two interesting, if unpleasant, direct experiences somehow related to this matter.

I work as a software developer in an Internet company, and I am a shop steward there. When I heard of the protests against SOPA-PIPA, I sent an e-mail message to the management suggesting that the company should send a press release against this proposed bill, because it is a menace to its core business and the work of my colleagues. Unfortunately, the company has not taken any official position.

A few days later, I was called by the Italian police. Apparently, a Fascist billionaire, who is the national secretary of a far-right party, filed a case in 2007 because he felt “defamed” by a series of articles on the website of the local Communist Youth in my city, Pavia. This individual was put under arrest in 1980 for his involvement in far-right extremism, but escaped to Thatcher's Britain where he became very wealthy. He came back in 1999 and in 2008 managed to become a Member of the European Parliament.

I am currently under investigation because I am suspected of being the owner or the administrator of the website. Billionaire involved in violent Fascist groups: zero days in prison, career as an MEP. Suspected administrator of a small left-wing website: under investigation, lots of money spent on lawyers even if later to be proved innocent. You get the picture.

What are SOPA and PIPA?

The Stop Only Piracy Act (SOPA) and the Preventing Real Online Threats to Economic Creativity and Theft of Intellectual Property Act (PROTECT IP Act, PIPA) are two bills put before the US House of Representatives and Senate in 2011. Their original versions included provisions to hugely extend the firepower of owners of copyrighted content, trademarks and pharmaceutical patents in their long-standing struggle against “pirates”. This was pursued by broadening the definition of the primary offenders and including also a whole series of secondary targets regarded as facilitators of the copyright infringement: search engines, user-edited or social websites, online advertising networks, producers of circumvention software, even Internet service providers (ISPs).

Any website that “facts or circumstances suggest is used, primarily as a means for engaging in, enabling, or facilitating” the violation of intellectual property would be treated as a rogue site. This could allow entire websites to be shut down just because they contain one page of illicit content, or even just because they can make it easier to access material that somebody believes to be their property. If such a website is operated abroad, all other US websites have to collaborate with the copyright owner in enforcing an immediate digital blockade against it. This means, for example, that links to it have to be removed by Google or Facebook or Twitter, or they can be sued too. Civil liberties associations have compared this system to the “Great Firewall” used by the Chinese government to control and restrict the Internet in China. Instead of state control exerted with administrative means, here we have control obtained by forcing the collaboration of private companies.

Among the supporters of these measures we find major labels and big names of the entertainment industry, like Disney, Sony, Warner; pharmaceutical and cosmetics multinationals like Pfizer, L'Oreal, Estée Lauder; producers of goods that are strongly based on the brand, like Nike or baseball and football leagues who make money with merchandising; book publishers like Penguin and McGraw-Hill; scores of professional and trade associations like the Motion Picture Association of America, the Directors Guild of America, the Fraternal Order of Police or the American Bankers Association.

And unfortunately, the AFL-CIO, the Teamsters, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and other organisations of the labour movement have also expressed support for the bills, following the bad tradition, typical of the worst side of American unionism, of illusions in the possibility of defending “American jobs” by standing behind the interests of the bosses of one's own industry. Even Apple and Microsoft were more or less openly in the supporters' list but switched side after opposition started to build up – revealing a greater sensibility to the opinion of the masses than some trade union leaders!

In an attempt to stifle opposition, since December 2011 SOPA supporters have started to limit its scope chopping out the most controversial parts, e.g. excluding US-based “pirates” (already covered by other, more effective legislation) and ISPs. US-based websites providing links, e-commerce facilities etc. to foreign pirates would still be included. This diversionary manoeuvre did not succeed other than in exposing the weakness and incompetence of the pro-SOPA front.

January 18th

On January 18th, 2012, a worldwide protest action was launched in order

to stop SOPA from being passed in the lower house of the Congress. Week after week, the growing pressure against SOPA was such that even before the protests it was decided to postpone the discussion until a new consensus can be formed. On January 16th, Barack Obama threw his political weight on the scales by declaring that he would veto any legislation that could negatively affect free speech. Many believe that SOPA and PIPA are now dead.

The form chosen for the protests was essentially through a symbolic online blackout (web strike), the posting of informational material on the web to raise awareness on the issue, and an appeal to US voters to contact their congressmen in Washington, but there have also been physical demonstrations, like the protest rallies held in New York City, San Francisco and Seattle.

The protest day was marked by a very large participation by individual blogs and the websites of non-profit organisations and activist networks (e.g., the Mozilla Foundation and the Free Software Foundation). Reportedly 115,000 sites blacked out at least their front page, often including links to detailed explanations of the measures protested against and appealing for action.

How Wikipedians learned to fight

The most notable case of blackout was Wikipedia in English. This famous online free encyclopaedia is collaboratively edited by the users themselves and has editions in 283 languages, the largest one being written and maintained by the English-language Wikipedian community. Each of these online communities has developed democratic rules to organise the involvement of its members in all decisions, and it is through long and open internal discussions that the English-language Wikipedia chose to take action so boldly. At http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:SOPA_initiative anybody can read the debate and the arguments used by different users in support of or against taking action. For 24 hours, all pages of the website were replaced by a black screen explaining the reasons of the protest that was accessed 17.5 million times during the day. The importance of Wikipedia in the everyday life of millions of people turned this black page into a mighty statement against SOPA-PIPA.

By showing voluntarily in a controlled and organised way the potential extreme consequences of what they were criticising, the Wikipedians applied a typical form of protest. This was similar to the concept of a workers' strike in that it highlighted the value of the editors' (unpaid) work by not delivering it for a certain amount of time. There was a serious difference, however, with most workers' strikes: no private commercial company had its profit directly affected. Notice, however, that not all

workers' strikes hit the profits of a private company; take a teachers' strike or the strike of a company in deep crisis – the counterpart might actually be economically benefiting by such strikes, although hurt in broader political terms. We, the Marxists, support and participate in several industrial actions that have solely the purpose of hitting the normal functioning of the capitalist economy in an indirect way, and raising awareness among other workers.

The successful Wikipedia strike of January 18th was possible thanks to the example of the blackout launched by the Wikipedia in Italian on October 4th, 2011 against the DDL Intercettazioni (Wiretapping Act), a typical example of legislation of the Berlusconi era: since a lot of embarrassing phone conversations by Berlusconi and his entourage were frequently leaked to newspapers, this draft bill would ban the media from publishing them. On top of that, and without any relation to the wiretapping issue, if anybody felt that a website was offending them, even if the site's allegations were true, they would be given the right to force the website to publish in the same place a non-editable and non-commentable reply written by the person who didn't like the original content. This would clearly impair free speech and criticism of the mighty and wealthy, block the common practice of free blog comments, and make a user-edited website like Wikipedia impossible to run. The paragraph of the law targeting websites was properly nicknamed ammazzablog, “blog killer”. Thanks to the unprecedented decision of the Italian-speaking Wikipedia community to black out the site, and to the mobilisation of countless other individuals and organisations, the ammazzablog section was removed. This successful initiative was cited by the Wikimedia Foundation as an inspiration for the larger struggle against SOPA and PIPA.

The cowardice of Silicon Valley

The conflict in the US has been often presented as a Californian civil war opposing Hollywood and Silicon Valley, i.e. the entertainment industry vs. the Internet-based start-ups and corporations. It is true that mega-companies on both sides have lobbied a lot to support their interests, and while Hollywood and the major music labels have spent much in gaining support from congressmen, Silicon Valley is today more important for the US economy than producers of movies and songs; an anti-SOPA open letter co-signed by AOL, eBay, Facebook, Google, LinkedIn, Mozilla, Twitter, Yahoo! and Zynga proved very influential with politicians. The owners and CEOs of these companies know very well that whatever little conflict they may have at times, they can always rely upon their friends in Washington. And vice versa, of course.

That is why, when it was time to move from words to action, most of these companies preferred not to lose a dollar masquerading as

revolutionaries. On January 18th, Google just placed a black stripe on its logo, with a link to a petition (that, however, collected more than four million signatures). Twitter did nothing, but its CEO said he was supportive of the Wikipedia blackout. Facebook did nothing, but Mark Zuckerberg posted something against SOPA... on his Twitter account!

For those greedy corporations lobbying and complaining is OK, but encouraging an all-out political struggle is an entirely different matter, for one never knows how far it could go, particularly in the current political climate of the United States. At the end of the day, Google co-operates with Chinese censorship, Twitter has recently established the policy of complying with any national censorship legislation, PayPal accepted cutting off funds to WikiLeaks etc. We cannot trust them.

You say piracy, I say democracy

In fact, the victimisation of the whistleblower site WikiLeaks became a testing ground for a kind of “encircling” tactic similar to the one put forward in SOPA and PIPA. Besides the freezing of their account by PayPal, there was Amazon who abruptly ceased the hosting service, the domain name was revoked, the betrayal of mainstream media, etc. Julian Assange called this “the privatisation of censorship”, the same concept behind SOPA-PIPA.

The “Silicon Valley vs. Hollywood” image is a misrepresentation. What is at stake here is not only the possibility of downloading movies for free, but more serious questions that affect free speech and democratic rights. You don't give a machine gun to a kid, and you don't give censoring powers to private companies. Once the process of raising fences in the Internet along national lines starts, nobody can know when and where it is going to end. The existence of a worldwide computer network is not an irreversible conquest of humankind, and the openness and neutrality of the Internet is far from being an established fact. The Net is a battleground.

The radicalised youth and the digital activists are ready for this battle, and the Marxists are part of it too. The rise of Pirate Parties in Europe is a symptom of the mass relevance this question is acquiring. In the USA, the #Occupy movement has taken a strongly supportive stance of the anti SOPA-PIPA movement, which completely contradicts the position of the AFL-CIO. However, the official statement of the New York City General Assembly that can be read at <http://www.nycga.net/sopa/> is somewhat naive in describing the whole Internet infrastructure and industry as intrinsically progressive.

In the same page, there is an interesting comment by user marc ribot. He says he's a musician and composer and complains of the economic difficulties affecting both major labels and independent artists “because of

illegal downloads”. As I already mentioned, it is on the basis of similar arguments that many a trade union has supported SIPA-POPA as a way to protect American jobs. This position is one-sided, because protectionism has never been a successful way to defend the workers, being much more effective in putting local workers against foreign workers, or workers of different industries against each other (and in this case there are many more Americans working to make software and computers than those employed in the entertainment industry). More decisively, this position is also short-sighted because we all know that trickle-down economics doesn't work.

marc ribot is rightly sceptical about the collaboration of #Occupy with major Silicon Valley companies: “And since when does OWS act in solidarity with ‘leading technology companies’????

SAY WHAT???? I thought these were the 1% we were against [...] there is no 99% without workers”. We agree. And later on, perhaps as a joke he actually gives an interesting hint on a possible way out from the dilemma between not rewarding intellectual work and illegalising free sharing of information: “I'm also open to more radical solutions: if OWS wants to recreate music, film and writing as ‘public utilities’, and pay all of us salaries for the work we do, like in Cuba, well then: ‘Estoy presente, compañeros!’”

This is precisely the point. “Free stuff” in a capitalist economy (as suggested by Pirate Parties and the most naive wing of the copyleft movement) cannot be the solution, but we are not going to support Orwellian attempts to make cheap operations like copying a file or burning a DVD become expensive or forbidden just for the sake of letting the capitalists profit on it. The solution is the recognition of the social character of human labour and therefore the need for collective ownership of and responsibility for all its intellectual and material creations. If this is done with control from below empowering the workers and grassroots participation in deciding how to allocate society's resources, how much we want to spend on music and cinema and on books and medicines and for fashion, well then: Presente, compañeros!

Capitalism tries to turn everything into commodities to sell them on the so-called “free market”. In order to do so, the concept of ownership must be clearly defined and the consumption of the goods must be restricted to those who pay the commodities' owners: the consumers. This poses a big problem with things that can be copied at low or no cost, like trademarked goods, patented medicines, and copyrighted digital content. If I get an MP3 file from a friend, it is not a product, it is a “reproduct”, and I'm not consuming it by listening to it. The capitalists' utopia is to find a way to reverse this process and transform users into consumers, but this is like trying to push bubbles back into stale beer. Like all utopias, they end up

easily as a dystopian 1984-like nightmare.

The alternative is to eliminate the profit making motive altogether, through the common ownership of the means of production, so that they can be democratically planned in the interest of the overwhelming majority. Such a system would release the enormous productive potential of humanity which in turn would allow for proper funding of the creative activities of human beings, which are now constrained by the straight jacket of private property and profiteering of the multinational giants which control the entertainment “industry”.

ACTA: a broader attack

The Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) is an international treaty that establishes a new supranational body (the ACTA Committee) devoted to the protection of intellectual property rights. Such an institution will work above national legislations and the countries signing up to it will have to harmonise their legislation in accordance with the provisions of the agreement.

Ironically, had a “rogue website” like WikiLeaks not existed, we would not know much about ACTA. Some details about it leaked out only in 2008, two years after preliminary negotiations between major world powers had already started. A group of 12 countries and the European Union have been involved in the talks. In 2009, private capitalists were consulted in the US, while public opinion was not informed of the matter (which shows once more who really rules the world): they were Big Pharma companies, representatives of the entertainment and software industry, hardware manufacturers such as Dell and Intel, the telecommunications giant Verizon, and a couple of anti-SOPA freedom fighters: Google and eBay...

The first round of signatures was held in 2011 by Australia, Canada, Japan, Morocco, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and the United States. Mexico has withdrawn; Switzerland will probably sign according to the timing of its domestic procedures. The European Union signed the agreement on January 26th, 2012, but a minority of its member states haven't yet done so. Jordan and the United Arab Emirates participated in the negotiations but did not join.

Even if its most astonishing features were watered down during the negotiations, ACTA has some resemblance with parts of SOPA, but on a much wider geographical scale – the aim is clearly to extend it to the whole planet.

It gives a vague and all-inclusive definition of intellectual property rights infringement, and requires that such infringements “on a commercial

scale” be declared punishable by national legislation according to criminal law (as opposed to the civil law). This means that, instead of the copyright holders having to file a complaint asking for compensation, the police can initiate investigations on such violations and potentially punish them with penalties that are disproportionate to the offense. The criteria for appropriate economic penalties are mentioned in the treaty and seem to be aimed at facilitating overestimations.

By threats of liability, it “encourages” co-operation by private companies such as ISPs, search engines, advertising and e-commerce networks, in blockading the violators and even reporting their identification data to the copyright holders or authorities. This forceful co-operation may include severing access to the Internet or online services or terminating accounts.

The concept of “fair use” exceptions for purposes of criticism, education or information is not mentioned in the treaty; therefore any usage of copyrighted material can be treated in the same way as an illicit copy. No fair use is admitted for software that circumvents copy protection for personal use of digital material.

The treaty includes provisions on strengthening border searches and submitting them to the needs of the copyright and trademark holders, substantially reducing the sovereignty of the states in the management of legal controls on import-export and introducing a sort of privatisation of borders. Private companies will be allowed to instruct the border police on what they have to block and where, and will be given information on whatever transit of goods they suspect may harm their interests, to the point of blocking them pre-emptively at the company's request. The devil is in the details: border controls “must” check “goods of a commercial nature sent in small consignments” but they “may” spare travellers' personal luggage.

Generic medicines are treated like counterfeited drugs if the patents are still valid in one of the countries who signed the treaty. This is literally a mortal blow for those underdeveloped countries that rely upon more affordable generic versions of life-saving medicines (e.g., against HIV).

The case of generic drugs is particularly scandalous because in reality Big Pharma is protecting super profits on patents which in most cases they did not even develop but were based on research done in publicly funded institutions. Most of their research funding goes to life-style drugs and even drugs for pets. Providing cheap drugs to cure tropical diseases which kill hundreds of thousands every year is not profitable and therefore they are not interested. At the same time, they are prepared to use their economic and political power to prevent poor countries from developing generic versions of, for instance, HIV drugs, even if this leads directly to

the death of thousands of people. A clear case of how private property rights are in direct contradiction to basic human rights, including the right to live!

Once again, more than this or that detail of the agreement, the very concept of a supranational institution centred on the interests of private companies of the wealthiest countries of the planet being put in charge of controlling the Internet and the national borders is dangerous enough.

We stopped SOPA, we'll stop ACTA

The opposition on ACTA started to organise since the very first days of the negotiations around digital liberties associations, gained momentum with the WikiLeaks leak in 2008, but it is only now in 2012 that it is starting to really become a big thing.

On the day of the EU's adhesion to the treaty, the European Parliament's rapporteur for ACTA, the French Socialist Kader Arif, resigned from his position, attacking the undemocratic character of the procedure and calling it "a masquerade". Politicians from Mexico, New Zealand, Slovenia and Poland have also expressed criticism ranging from perplexity to open opposition.

As a consequence of the participation of the European Union in ACTA, mass rallies and riots have taken place in countries like Poland and Slovenia. Sparked by 15,000 people in Krakow and 5,000 in Warsaw on January 25th, the movement spread to the whole of Poland in the following days, winning the support of the majority of the population.

For significant layers of the youth, influenced by different shades of radical, anarchist and socialist ideas, or more generic anti-government ideas, the idea that the state and corporations might take more control and power over our lives is scary and upsetting irrespective of whether it is our online or our "offline" life. Moreover, the growing role of social networks in political activism, even though we should not overestimate it compared to the real flesh-and-bones class struggle, renders any intervention of the state and the private capitalists in the structure and content of the World Wide Web more and more suspicious in times of deep economic and political crisis.

In an attempt to connect to the mass mobilisations, a group of right-wing Polish MPs even wore Guy Fawkes masks, the symbol of the loose network of online activists known as Anonymous, who had called for anti-ACTA rallies and defaced several websites connected with signatories of the treaty. The Prime Minister Donald Tusk was eventually compelled to suspend the ratification of ACTA.

This is just the beginning, as everything indicates that ACTA and similar issues will become an important catalyst for movements of the youth in those countries where access to the Internet is widespread, through personal computers and portable devices such as smartphones, and social interaction mediated by the Web has become a mass phenomenon. The technological competence and skills of the new generations has largely outclassed those of the lawmakers and political leaders, and it is not going to be easy to have them accept undemocratic legislation like SOPA, PIPA and ACTA.

This is going to be part of a wider movement against the power of the corporations and a system which puts private profit before the needs and interests of the majority of the population. We are ready!

A Europe wide protest movement against the ratification of ACTA has been called for this Saturday, February 11. There will be demonstrations and protest pickets in at least 20 countries and more than 200 cities. Details here: <http://g.co/maps/dm6pt>
www.marxist.com

Further recommended reading:

[The problem with the computer industry under capitalism - Free Software the answer?](#)

["Dying for drugs"- Health warning: capitalism kills!](#)

[Drugs companies putting profits before millions of people's lives](#)

Without women there is no food sovereignty

Esther Vivas 9 February 2012

Systems of food production and consumption have always been socially organized, but their organization has varied historically. In the last few decades, under the impact of neoliberal politics, the logic of capitalism has been imposed upon the ways in which food is produced and consumed (Bello, 2009).²

This article analyzes the impact of agro-industrial policies on women and the key role that peasant women in the Global North and South play in the production and distribution of food. It analyzes how the dominant agricultural model can incorporate a feminist perspective and how the social movements that work towards food sovereignty can incorporate a

feminist perspective.

Campesinas and invisible women

In the countries of the Global South women are the primary producers of food, the ones in charge of working the earth, maintaining seed stores, harvesting fruit, obtaining water and safeguarding the harvest. Between 60 to 80% of food production in the Global South is done by women (50% worldwide) (FAO, 1996). Women are the primary producers of basic grains such as rice, wheat, and corn which feed the most impoverished populations in the South. Despite their key role in agriculture and food however, women; together with their children; are the ones most affected by hunger.

For centuries, peasant women have been responsible for domestic chores, the care and feeding of their families, the cultivation, exchange and commercialization of household gardens; charged with reproduction, production and community—all the while occupying an often invisible domestic and social sphere. The main economic transactions in agriculture have traditionally been undertaken by men in markets, with the purchase and sale of animals, and the commercialization of large quantities of grains in the private and public sphere.

This division of roles, assigning women as the caretakers of the house as well as the health and education of their families, and granting men the “technical” management of land and machinery, maintains the assigned gender roles that have persisted in our societies through the centuries and into the present (Oceransky Losana, 2006).

The figures speak for themselves. According to data from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 1996), in many African countries women represent 70% of the field labor; are responsible for supplying 90% of the domestic water supply and are responsible for between 60 and 80% of the production of food consumed and sold by the family. They account for 100% of the processing of foods, 80% of the activities of food storage and transportation, and 90% of the labor involved in preparing the earth before planting. These numbers demonstrate the crucial role that African women have in the production of small-scale agriculture and the maintenance of their families’ subsistence.

In many regions of the Global South however—in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia—there is a notable “feminization” of salaried agricultural work, especially in non-traditional export-oriented sectors (Fraser, 2009). Between 1994 and 2000, according to White and Leavy (2003), women made up 83% of new employees in the non-traditional agro-export sector. In this way, for the first time, many women have paid jobs with economic gains that give them more power in

decision making and the possibility of participating in organizations outside of the family (Fraser, 2009). However, this dynamic shift has been accompanied by a marked gender division in job duties: on plantations, women perform the unskilled work such as gathering and boxing while men bring in the harvest and plant.

The incorporation of women into salaried labor means a double burden of work for women who continue to care for their families while at the same time working to obtain income—principally in precarious jobs. Poorer labor conditions than those of their male counterparts, along with inferior pay for the same jobs, forces women to work more hours in order to receive the same income. In India, for example, the average salary for day labor in the agricultural sector is 30% less for women than men (World Bank, 2007). In Spain, women make 30% less, and this difference can be as high as 40% (Oceransky Losana, 2006).

Impact of neoliberal policies

The application of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in the 80s and 90s in the Global South on the part of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, further aggravated already difficult conditions for much of the population in those countries and hit women especially hard.

The shock measures imposed by the SAPs consisted of forcing Southern governments to withdraw all subsidies for staples like bread, rice, milk and sugar. Drastic reductions in public education, health, housing and infrastructure spending were imposed. The forced devaluation of national currency (to cheapen exports) diminished the purchasing capacity of local populations. Increased interest rates to attract foreign capital generated a speculative spiral. These SAPs added to the extreme poverty of many in the Global South (Vivas, 2008).

Structural Adjustment Policies and privatization had major repercussions for women in particular. As Juana Ferrer of the International Gender Commission of Via Campesina illustrates: "In the processes of privatization of public services, the most affected people have been women. Women have been affected above all in the fields of health and education where they have historically carried [the most] responsibility for their families. ... In the measure [to which] we do not have access to resources and public services it becomes more difficult to lead a worthwhile life for women" (La Via Campesina, 2006: 30).

The collapse of the countryside the Global South and the intensification of migration to cities has led to a process of "de-peasantization" (Bello, 2009). In many countries this process has not taken the form of a classic rural to urban movement, in which ex-peasants go to the cities to work in

factories as part of the industrialization process. Rather, migration has been characterized by a process of “urbanization disconnected from industrialization” in which ex-peasants, pushed into the cities, are then fed back to the periphery (favelas, slums), many living off the informal economy and comprising the “informal proletariat” (Davis, 2006).

Women are an essential component in these national and international migratory flows. Migration leads to the dismantling and abandonment of families, land, and processes of production, while increasing the burdens of family and community on the women who stay behind. In Europe, the United States and Canada women who do migrate take work that European and North American women have not performed for years, thus reproducing an invisible spiral of oppression, as the Global North externalizes its care, social and economic costs to communities of migrant women origin.

The inability to resolve the current health care crisis in Western countries has resulted in the incorporation of large numbers of women into the labor market. Additionally, the aging population of Western countries and the non-responsiveness of the state to their needs has served as an alibi for the importation of millions of “caretakers” from the Global South. As is noted by Ezquerro (2010) “[This] diaspora fills the function of making the incompatibility between the rise of the capitalist system and the maintenance of life in the Centre invisible, and deepens the crisis of care and other crises in the South. ... The ‘international chain of care’ becomes a dramatic vicious cycle that ensures survival of the patriarchal capitalist system” (Ezquerro, 2010:39).

Access to land

Access to land is not a guaranteed right for many women. In numerous Southern countries laws forbid this right, and in those countries where legal access exists there are often traditions and practices that prevent women from property ownership. As Fraser (2009) explains, “In Cambodia, for example, although it is not illegal for women to own land, the cultural norm dictates that they do not possess land; although they are responsible for farm production and agriculture, women have no control over the sale of land or how it is transmitted to children” (Fraser, 2009:34).

In India, Chukki Nanjundaswamy of the peasant organization Karnataka State Farmers Association³ notes that the situation of women with regards to land and health care access is very difficult: “Socially Indian peasant women have almost no rights and are considered an ‘addition’ to males. Rural women are the most untouchable of the untouchables within the social caste system” (La Via Campesina, 2006: 16).

Access to land for women in Africa today is even more precarious due to increased deaths from AIDS. On the one hand, women are more likely to be infected, but when one of their male relatives who holds title to the land dies, women have great difficulty accessing control. In many communities, women have no right to inherit, and therefore lose their land and other assets when they are widowed (Jayne et al, 2006).

Land is a very important asset—it allows for the production of food, serves as an investment for the future; and as collateral it implies access to credit, etc. The difficulties women have securing access to land is one more example of how the capitalist and patriarchal agricultural system hits them especially hard. Furthermore, when women do hold title to land, it is mostly lower value land or extension properties.

Women also face more difficulty in obtaining loans, services, and supplies. Globally, it is estimated that women receive only 1% of total agricultural loans, and even so, it is not clear who in the family exercises control over those loans (Fraser, 2009).

These practices do not only exist in the Global South. In Europe, for example, many women farmers work under complete legal uncertainty. Most of them work on family farms where administrative rights are the exclusive property of the owner of the farm—and women are not entitled to aid, planting, lactic share, etc.

As Elizabeth Vilalba Seivane, secretary of Labrego Galego in Galicia explains, the problems of women in the field—in the South and the North—have much in common despite some obvious differences, “European women are more focused on fighting for our administrative rights on the farm, while elsewhere profound changes are demanded that have to do with land reform or access to land and other basic resources” (La Via Campesina, 2006: 26).

In the US, Debra Eschmeyer of the National Family Farm Coalition explains practices that show this inequality: “For example, when a women farmer goes alone to seek a loan from a bank it is far more complicated [than] if a male farmer seeks a loan” (La Via Campesina, 2006: 14).

Agribusiness vs. food sovereignty

Today, the current agro-industrial model has proven unable to satisfy the dietary needs of individuals, in addition to being destructive to the environment. We are facing a food and agricultural system with a high concentration of companies along the entire chain. It is monopolized by a handful of multinational agribusinesses and backed by governments and international institutions that have become accomplices, if not co-beneficiaries, in an unsustainable food production system. This model

is an imperialist tool aimed at political, economic and social control over the Global South by the North's major economic powers like the United States and the European Union (Toussaint, 2008; Vivas, 2009).

As Desmarais (2007) notes, the food system can be understood as a broad horizontal chain that has been taking more and more away from production and consumption in favor of the appropriation of various stages of production by agribusiness, leading to the loss of peasant autonomy.

The food crisis that erupted during 2007 and 2008, caused a strong increase in the price of staple foods⁴, highlighting the high volatility of agriculture and the food system. It also introduced the figure of over one billion hungry people in the world—one person in six, according to data from the FAO (2009).

The problem is not a lack of food, but rather the inability to access it. In fact, grain production worldwide has tripled since the 60's, while the global population has only doubled (GRAIN, 2008). We can see that there is enough food to feed the entire global population. However, for the millions of people in developing countries who spend between 50% and 60% of their income on food (up to 80% in the poorest countries), rising prices make it impossible to access.

There are fundamental reasons that explain the deep food crisis. Neoliberal policies applied indiscriminately over the past thirty years on a global scale forced vulnerable markets to open up to the global economy. Payments of debt by the South led to the privatization of formerly public goods and services (water, agricultural protections). Add to this a model of agriculture and food production in the service of capitalist logic, and you have the main contributing factors to the situation that has dismantled a once-successful model of peasant agriculture that had guaranteed people's food security for decades (Holt-Giménez and Patel, 2010). This has had a very negative impact on people, particularly women, and the environment.

Food Sovereignty is a powerful alternative to this destructive agricultural model. This paradigm promotes "the right of peoples to define their own agricultural policies and ... to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and the domestic market" (VVAA, 2003: 1). Food sovereignty seeks to regain the right to decide what, how and where to produce what we eat. It promotes the idea that the land, water, and seeds are in peasants' hands, and that we deserve to control our food systems.

There is an inherent feminist perspective incorporated in food sovereignty. As pointed out by Yoon Guem Soon, a Korean peasant woman and

representative of Via Campesina in Asia: “Feminism is a process for getting a decent place for women in society, to combat violence against women and to claim and reclaim our land and save it from the hands of multinationals and large companies. Feminism is the way for rural women to take an active and worthy role within society” (La Via Campesina, 2006:12).

La Via Campesina

Via Campesina is the world’s foremost international movement of small farmers. It promotes the right of all peoples to food sovereignty. Via Campesina was established in 1993 at the dawn of the anti-globalization movement, and gradually became one of the major organizations in the critique of neoliberal globalization. Its ascent is an expression of peasant resistance to the collapse of the rural world caused by neoliberal policies, and the intensification of those policies as embodied in the World Trade Organization (Antentas and Vivas, 2009a).

Since its founding, Via Campesina has promoted a “female peasant” identity that is politicized, linked to land, food production and the defense of food sovereignty—built in opposition to the current agribusiness model (Desmarais, 2007). Via Campesina embodies a new kind of “peasant internationalism” (Bello, 2009), that can be viewed as a “peasant component” of the new international resistance presented by the anti-globalization movement (Antentas and Vivas, 2009).

In 1996, coinciding with the World Food Summit at the FAO in Rome, Via Campesina highlighted food sovereignty as a political alternative to a profoundly unfair and predatory food system. This does not imply a romantic return to the past, but rather recovers knowledge and traditional practices and combines them with new technologies and new knowledge (Desmarais, 2007). As noted by McMichael (2006), there is a “mystification of the small” in a way that rethinks the global food system to encourage democratic forms of food production and distribution.

A feminist perspective

Over time, Via Campesina has incorporated a feminist perspective, working to achieve gender equality within their organizations, and building alliances with feminist groups, including the international World March of Women, among others.

At the heart of La Via Campesina, the struggle of women is situated at two levels: defending their rights as women within organizations and society in general, and the struggle as peasant women together with their colleagues against the neoliberal model of agriculture (EHNE and La Via Campesina 2009).

Feminist work in Via Campesina has taken important steps forward since its inception. In the First International Conference in Mons (Belgium) in 1993, all the elected coordinators were men. In the final declaration the situation of rural women hardly received any mention. Although it identified the need to integrate women's needs in the work of Via Campesina, the conference failed to establish mechanisms to ensure participation of women in successive meetings. Thus, at the 2nd International Conference in Tlaxcala (Mexico) in 1996, the percentage of women attending was 20% of the total: the same as at the 1st International Conference. To address this issue, a special women's committee was created (later known as the Women's Committee of La Via Campesina) and methods that permitted better representation and participation were enacted.

This move facilitated the incorporation of feminist analysis in Via Campesina. Thus, when Via Campesina publicly presented the concept of food sovereignty at the World Food Summit of FAO in Rome in 1996, women contributed their own demands. These included the need to produce food locally, and they added the dimension of "human health" to "sustainable agricultural practices," demanding a drastic reduction in harmful chemical inputs and advocating the active promotion of organic agriculture. Women also insisted that food sovereignty could not be accomplished without greater female participation in the definition of rural policies (Desmarais, 2007).

For Francisca Rodriguez of the peasant association ANAMURI in Chile: "Acknowledging the reality and demands of rural women has been a challenge in all peasant movements. ... The history of this acknowledgement has gone through various stages of struggle for recognition from within, to break with the chauvinist organizations ... over the past twenty years, rural women's organizations have gained [an] identity ... we have reconstructed as women in a half-labored rural locale," (Mugarik Gabe, 2006:254).

The work of the Women's Commission helped promote exchanges between women from different countries, including women-specific meetings to coincide with international summits. Between 1996 and 2000, the Commission's work focused mainly on Latin America—through training, exchange and discussion—and rural women increased their participation in all levels and activities of La Via Campesina.

As Annette Desmarais noted, "In most countries, agricultural and rural organizations are dominated by men. The women of La Via Campesina refuse to accept these subordinate positions. While acknowledging the long and difficult road ahead, women accept the challenge with enthusiasm, and vow to carry out a major role in shaping the Via

Campesina as a movement committed to gender equality” (Desmarais, 2007:265).

In October 2000, just before the 3rd International Conference of La Via Campesina in Bangalore (India), the 1st International Assembly of Women Farmers was organized. This allowed for greater participation of women in the organization. The Assembly adopted three major goals: 1) to ensure the participation of 50% of women at all levels of decisions and activities of La Via Campesina, 2) to maintain and strengthen the Women’s Commission, and 3) to ensure that documents, training events and speeches of Via Campesina did not have sexist content or sexist language (Desmarais, 2007).

Members at the conference agreed to change the institutional structure to ensure gender equity. As Paul Nicholson of La Via Campesina notes: “[In Bangalore] it was determined that equality of man and woman in spaces and positions of representation in our organization opened a whole internal process of reflection on the role of women in the struggle for women peasants’ rights. ... The gender perspective is being addressed now in a serious way, not only in the context of parity in responsibilities, but also a profound debate about the roots and tentacles of patriarchy and violence against women in the rural world.” (Food Sovereignty, Biodiversity and Cultures 2010: 8).

This strategy forced the member organizations of Via Campesina at national and regional levels to rethink their work in a gender perspective and to incorporate new measures to strengthen the role of women (Desmarais, 2007). Josie Riffaud of the Confédération Paysanne in France, states that: “the decision was critical of [lack of gender] parity in the Via Campesina, as allowed in my organization, the Confédération Paysanne. We also apply this measure.” (La Via Campesina, 2006: 15).

As part of the 4th International Conference in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in June 2004; the 2nd International Assembly of Women Farmers brought together more than a hundred women from 47 countries on all continents. The main lines of action that emerged from the meeting were to take action against physical and sexual violence against women; both domestically and internationally; demand equal rights and invest in education. As its final statement states: “We demand our right to a dignified life, respect for our sexual and reproductive rights; and the immediate implementation of measures to eradicate all forms of physical, sexual, verbal and psychological violence. ... We urge states to implement measures to ensure our economic autonomy, access to land, health, education and equal social status.” (2nd International Assembly of Women Farmers, 2004).

In October 2006, the World Congress of Women of La Via Campesina was highlighted in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Participants included women from agricultural organizations in Asia, North America, Europe, Africa and Latin America; with the objective of analyzing and discussing the meaning of equality in the field from a feminist perspective, and a plan of action to achieve it. As one of the presentations—Sergia Galván’s Women’s Health Collective of the Dominican Republic—pointed out, the women of La Via Campesina had three challenges ahead: 1) to advance the theoretical discussion to incorporate the feminist peasant perspective in mainstream feminist analysis, 2) continue work on autonomy as a vital reference for the consolidation of the movement of rural women, and 3) to overcome the feeling of guilt in the struggle for higher positions of power over men (La Via Campesina, 2006).

The World Congress of Women of La Via Campesina emphasized the need to further strengthen the articulation of women of La Via Campesina, and created mechanisms for a greater exchange of information and specific plans for struggle. Among the concrete proposals were the articulation of a global campaign to combat violence perpetrated against women, to extend the discussion to all organizations that are part of Via Campesina, and to work to recognize the rights of rural women in demanding equality in access to land, credit, markets and administrative rights (La Via Campesina, 2006).

At the 5th International Conference in Maputo, Mozambique, in October 2008, La Via Campesina hosted the 3rd International Assembly of Women. The assembly approved the launch of a campaign targeting all forms of violence faced by women in society (physical, economic, social, sexist, cultural, and access to power) which are also present in rural communities and their organizations.

Work that aims at achieving greater gender equality is not easy. Despite the formal equality, women face obstacles when traveling or attending meetings and gatherings. As Annette Desmarais (2007:282) noted, “There are many reasons why women do not participate at this level. Perhaps the most important is the persistence of ideologies and cultural practices that perpetuate unequal gender relations and unfairness. For example, the division of labor by gender means that rural women have less access to the most precious resource, time, to participate as leaders in agricultural organizations. Being involved in reproductive, productive and community work makes it much less likely [for women] to have time for training sessions and learning as leaders.”

It is a struggle against the tide, and despite some concrete victories, we face a long fight in our organizations; and, more generally, socially.

Weaving Alliances

La Via Campesina has established alliances with various organizations and social movements at the international, regional, and national levels. One of the most significant alliances has been with the World March of Women, a leading feminist global network that has called for joint actions and meetings, and has collaborated in activities: the International Forum for Food Sovereignty held in Mali in 2007, among others.

The original meeting between the two networks was under the anti-globalization movement, and its purpose was to agree on counter-summits and activities within the World Social Forum. The incorporation of a feminist perspective within Via Campesina generated more solidarity, and this has built over time. At the Forum for Food Sovereignty in 2007 in Sélingué, Mali a meeting was convened by leading international social movements such as Via Campesina, the World March of Women, the World Forum of Fisher Peoples, and others to advance strategies within a wide range of social movements (farmers, fishers, consumers) to promote food sovereignty.

Women were a major catalyst in this meeting, as organizers and participants. The Nyéléni Forum in Sélingué was named in honor of the legend of a Malian peasant woman who struggled to assert herself as a woman in a hostile environment. Delegates from Africa, America, Europe, Asia and Oceania attended the meeting and identified the capitalist and patriarchal system as primarily responsible for the violations of women's rights, while reaffirming their commitment to transform it.

The World March of Women has taken up food sovereignty as an inalienable human right, especially for women. Miriam Nobre, coordinator of the international secretary of the World March of Women, participated in October 2006 at the World Congress of Women of La Via Campesina in the global feminist movement. The 7th International Meeting of the World March of Women in Vigo, Spain in October 2008, held a forum and exhibition for food sovereignty, showing the links between the feminist struggle and those of peasant women.

The success of this collaboration is embodied in the dual membership of women who are active members in the World March of Women, and La Via Campesina. These experiences encourage closer ties and collaboration between both networks, and strengthens the feminist struggle of rural women that is part of the broader struggle against capitalism and patriarchy.

Conclusion

The current global food system has failed to ensure the food security of communities. Currently more than a billion people worldwide suffer from

hunger. The global food system has had a profoundly negative environmental impact; promoting an intensive agro-industrial model that has contributed to climate change and collapsing agro-biodiversity. This system has been particularly detrimental to women.

Developing alternatives to this agricultural model requires incorporating a gender perspective. The food sovereignty alternative to the dominant agro-industrial model has to have a feminist position to break with patriarchal and capitalist logic.

La Via Campesina, the largest international movement for food sovereignty, is moving in this direction: creating alliances with other social movements—especially feminist organizations and networks such as the World March of Women—to promote networking and solidarity among women in North and South, urban and rural areas, and between them and their companions. As Via Campesina says: “Globalize the struggle. Globalize hope.”

["esthervivas.wordpress.com"](http://esthervivas.wordpress.com)

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Notes:

1. Esther Vivas is a member of the Center for the Study of Social Movements at the University Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona.

2. For a more detailed analysis of the historical evolution of the global food system see McMichael (2000).

3. All women farmers mentioned in this article are part of member organizations of La Via Campesina.

4. According to the index of food prices by FAO, recorded between 2005 and 2006, an increase of 12% the following year, in 2007, an increase of 24% between January and July 2008, a rise about 50%. Cereals and other staple foods were those that suffered the largest increases (Vivas, 2009).

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The Formerly Advanced Economies

Robin Hahnel 8 February 2012

Just as the European settler economies in North America grew to eclipse the economic power of “Old” Europe during the twentieth century, at least some of the BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – were already on a trajectory to rise relative to both North America and

Europe in economic power during the twenty-first century. However, a natural process that would have taken five decades or more may now be shortened to only a decade or two as the elites in charge of economic policy in the North Atlantic region seem hell bent on committing economic suicide.

During the twentieth century it was common to distinguish between the “advanced” or “more developed” economies, and the “under” or “lesser developed” economies. Soon it may become commonplace to refer to Europe, the US, and Canada as the formerly advanced economies. What follows is a brief anatomy of economic suicide being committed by ruling elites in a region which long dominated the global economy but soon no longer will.

Escalating Inequality

What most distinguishes more advanced from less advanced economies is the size of the middle class. During the middle third of the twentieth century political victories by progressive movements raised a significant portion of the workforce to middle class status in Europe, the US, and Canada as productivity gains from new technologies and expansion of education were more widely shared than ever before. Unfortunately, this trend came screeching to a halt at the end of the 1970s, and ever since we have experienced the most dramatic increase in economic inequality in world history. Not only is this terribly unfair, it has also proved to be destabilizing.

When wages rise along with increases in productivity, demand for goods and services, and the labor to make them tends to keep pace with productive capabilities. But when the top 1% appropriate the lion’s share of productivity gains, as they have now for over thirty years, more and more income goes into purchasing assets rather than more production, creating two problems: Unemployment – which further aggravates the lack of demand for production -- and asset bubbles -- which eventually burst, destroying illusions of wealth.

Financial Deregulation

Whatever one may think about the pros and cons of markets in general, there should be no doubt that free market finance is an accident waiting to happen! Theory predicts it, and history has proved it time and time again. Whenever the financial industry is allowed to do as it pleases it will engage in activities that increase their leverage and are highly profitable for them, but create ever greater “systemic” risk for the rest of us. Only when the financial industry is subject to competent regulation can the risk of financial crises be reduced to socially acceptable levels.

In the aftermath of the financial crisis of 1929 which triggered the Great

Depression, governments in the North Atlantic region imposed competent regulations on their financial industries which produced decades free from major financial crises in our advanced economies. But the financial industry predictably chafes under regulation since restrictions prevent them from engaging in activities they know to be highly profitable. So the financial industry constantly searches for ways around existing regulations and lobbies politicians relentlessly to remove restrictions. And the more successful they are, the more profits they have to ply the political system to further de-regulate their activities. As a result, eighty years after the crash of 1929 the financial system in the North Atlantic region was once again an accident waiting to happen.

However this time there was one big difference. Instead of a massive financial crisis giving rise to successful political efforts to erect a competent regulatory system to prevent recurrence, Wall Street's influence with both major political parties was so great that it easily forestalled meaningful regulatory reform. The Dodd-Frank "Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act" was neither. Instead it was a toothless fig leaf providing cover for politicians but no real protections. Three years after the crash of 2008 systemic risk in the financial system is just as great as it was before, consumers of financial services are still without effective protection, and taxpayers are still "on the hook," as former Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson put it when explaining to Congress in November 2008 that the big Wall Street Banks were too big for the rest of us to allow them to fail.

Ignoring Keynes at Our Peril

Paul Krugman summed it up well in his New York Times column on December 29:

Slashing government spending in a depressed economy depresses the economy further; austerity should wait until a strong recovery is well under way. Unfortunately, in late 2010 and early 2011, politicians and policy makers in much of the Western world believed that they knew better, that we should focus on deficits, not jobs, even though our economies had barely begun to recover from the slump that followed the financial crisis. And by acting on that anti-Keynesian belief, they ended up proving Keynes right all over again.

In futile attempts to reduce deficits, the Tory government in the UK and the Conservative government in Canada have subjected their own middle and lower classes to crushing fiscal austerity. Hard line fiscal conservatives in power at the European Commission and European Central Bank have visited even more draconian austerity policies on the citizens of the so-called PIGS – Portugal, Ireland, Iceland, Greece, and Spain – in exchange for financial bailouts that have proven time and time again to be too little, too late. Germany, sheltered from unemployment by

favorable trade surpluses with the rest of the Euro Zone, steadfastly refuses to engage in fiscal stimulus. And when Obama aided his mortal Republican enemies by pivoting from an inadequate fiscal stimulus in 2009 to deficit reduction in 2010 the entire North Atlantic economic region was united in fiscal austerity. Unfortunately, what was, and still is desperately needed is exactly the opposite – fiscal stimulus!

When consumers are tapped out, when businesses have little reason to invest in new plant and capacity since they can't find customers to buy what they are already producing, government needs to step up to the plate and provide the necessary demand for goods and services to get the economy going again. That was Keynes' great truth. Instead, ruling elites in the North Atlantic region have united to reject the advice of Keynes and instead repeat Herbert Hoover's mistake. Instead of fiscal stimulus they are giving us ever more draconian fiscal austerity. This, more than any policy failure, has the North Atlantic region on the road to recession and mass unemployment without end. As a result, for the first time in many generations citizens of the formerly advanced economies are left to ask ourselves: "How does it feel/ To be on your own/ With no direction home/ Like a complete unknown/ Like a rolling stone?"

www.zcommunications.org

Robin Hahnel is Professor of Economics at Portland State University. His most recent book is Economic Justice and Democracy and he is co-author with Michael Albert of The Political Economy of Participatory Economics. This column originally appeared in Portland's 'Street Roots' newspaper and exclusively available online at NLP.

Mubarak's state machine behind football stadium massacre

David Johnson, Socialist Party (CWI England and Wales) 7 February 2012

The mostly young and working class football fans killed in the 1 February massacre played a crucial role during the Tahrir Square uprising. Parts of the old regime seem, through this massacre, to be trying to take revenge. Also in this way, the SCAF (Supreme Council of the Armed Forces) tries to use the fear of chaos to justify its role. But new demonstrations are developing. Below, David Johnson, Socialist Party (CWI England and Wales) reports.

According to Al Arabiya news agency, political groups, movements, trade unions and students' unions from several universities have announced a strike for 12 February, the first anniversary of the toppling of Mubarak.

74 football fans were killed and hundreds injured after the final whistle blew at the Al Masry-Al Ahly match in Port Said on 1st February. Many had head wounds, some had been stabbed, some thrown from the stands and others crushed in the panic as they tried to escape the erupting violence. Why did this horror take place?

The head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi, described the bloodshed as “something that can happen anywhere in the world.” But it is clear that this was anything but ‘normal’ football violence. Demonstrations across Egypt in the days since have blamed SCAF.

The hardcore fans of Al Ahly, a big Cairo club, are known as Ultras Ahlawy. The last time this match took place, in April 2011, they were blamed for fighting and destruction in Port Said, home of Al-Masry. The Ultras blamed lack of security for the violence. Video of vandalism on that occasion was apparently circulating on the Internet prior to this match, stoking up tension. A fixture with this history would normally have a strong police presence to separate home and away fans and prevent trouble developing. So why did the security forces between their stands depart during the match?

"Hundreds would storm the pitch after every goal, so we could sense what was going to happen," reported an eyewitness. "There was a huge lapse in security. The police non-intervention was very strange – there was practically no security outside the stadium and inside it they didn't do anything when events escalated." (Guardian 3 Feb 12) People reported seeing knives and swords outside the stadium yet people were not searched on their way in. It also appears that exits were locked.

Port Said residents condemned the attacks on Al Ahly fans and maintain that the attackers were not local. "We were surprised by buses coming from out of town carrying supporters wearing the shirts of Al Masry ultras," said one. (Guardian 3 Feb 12) Seven protest marches, with over 20,000 taking part, were held on Friday 3rd February in this city of 600,000. The size of these demonstrations far exceeded those of January and February 2011, which had been on a smaller scale than in many other cities. Many protest marches took place in other cities around the country, holding SCAF responsible for the events.

Fans' record against regime

Why should SCAF want to see Ultras Ahlawy attacked? The mostly young and working class fans played a crucial role during the Tahrir Square uprising, not least during the ‘Battle of the Camel’ on 2nd February 2011 when they heroically fought off a brutal attempt to crush the developing revolution.

In September 2011 Al-Ahly fans had been attacked by security forces after chanting slogans against Mubarak and his Interior Minister, Al-Adly, whose trial had begun, and against the police. A few days later a united march of fans from the three big Cairo clubs took place, putting aside their normal rivalry, protesting against security forces' violence. Despite the normally heavy policing of the ultras, on that occasion a breakaway march to the Israeli embassy went unchallenged, and there were virtually no security forces around as the embassy was attacked. This conveniently served SCAF to divert attention away from the crimes of the security forces to the crimes of the Israeli government.

Ultras Al-Ahlawy also played a prominent part in the battles against security forces' repression at the Interior Ministry last November. They were in the front line again in December, outside the Cabinet Office, protesting against SCAF's appointment of Kamal El-Ganzouri as prime minister, who had held the same post from 1996-99 under Mubarak. Ultras Ahlawy have been punished for their record of opposition to the regime.

It seems that SCAF also deliberately allowed violence to take place at the Al-Masry stadium to fuel insecurity and chaos, strengthening those who say that only the armed forces can save Egypt from descending into lawlessness. On the eve of the anniversary of the 25th January uprising, Tantawi announced the lifting of Mubarak's long-standing Emergency Laws except in cases of "thuggery". How strange that this terrible example of 'thuggery' should occur a week later!

Thuggish security forces

At the same time as this football stadium massacre, 800 protestors, both Muslim and Coptic, camped in front of Nagaa Hammadi police station protesting at the killing of a Coptic trader and his son for refusing to pay protection money to thugs associated with police officers. There have been many other occasions when police and security forces have viciously attacked those opposing them. After a Coptic church had been burnt last October, a protest at the Maspero TV centre was lethally attacked by security forces, killing 28. And in the days after the Port Said violence there were further pitched battles in Cairo and elsewhere. Tear gas, birdshot and live ammunition were used, leading to five deaths in Cairo and seven in Suez, with 1500 injured. Mubarak's security forces are still intact, even if their old boss is held in jail during his trial.

Students at Cairo University and the German University in Cairo have announced a strike on 11th February, the anniversary of Mubarak's ousting. They are demanding that SCAF hand over power to a civilian government and the prosecution of those responsible for the Port Said

massacre. Students should call on the trade unions to join them, to demand the end of military rule.

But workers and youth can have no confidence that this parliament will take measures in their interests. Leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafist and pro-business liberal parties that make its big majority will put the interests of big business first. Workers, the poor masses and the youth need their own party. With a programme of socialist change, including genuine democratic control over all security and policing, it could win mass support and lead the way to a society without the state-sponsored brutality seen this past week.

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Popular protests still far from posing a genuine threat

Patrick Bond, Ashwin Desai and Trevor Ngwane (Eye on Civil Society) 6 February 2012

As we enter a 2012 politically bookmarked by the African National Congress 100th birthday in January and its potentially dramatic – but more likely boring – leadership conference in December, let us first acknowledge that our society is among the most consistently contentious places on earth, with disruptive protests on a nearly constant basis.

In the wake of two decades of neoliberal policies which made the society more unequal than during even Apartheid, what are often called ‘service delivery protests’ occur many thousands of times a year, according to police statistics. These are, however, intensely localized and self-limited in their politics.

Many protesters operate in close interconnection with parts of the Tripartite Alliance, and the line between movements and governing organizations is not always clear. They also suffer from geographic and political isolation from each other.

As a result, national sources of the neoliberalism – the Treasury and most Cabinet decisions – are so far unaffected. Only a distant National Health Insurance promise, rising numbers of people on inadequate welfare grants, tokenistic ‘free basic services’ and three million badly-built, poorly-located, tiny houses let ANC leaders posture that they serve the masses.

Context is important, because poor and working people’s disorganisation reflects the new ‘precariat’ in society. Instead of a proletariat with the possibility of consciousness-formation and collective organisation forged

in the massive factories and mines of yesteryear, our precarious economy is now characterized by diffusion, dispersion and deindustrialisation.

Some sectors – construction, finance and commerce – boomed but most former labour-intensive manufacturing sites either went bust, casualised jobs to labour brokers, replaced workers with machines, or shifted from general production for a local mass market to niche production for a global upper-class market, such as luxury autos and garments.

From sports stadia to shipping/airports to smelting, the recent major capital investments generated very little employment, especially in Durban. The new R24 billion oil pipeline to Johannesburg, for example, creates only 100 new permanent jobs.

Unevenness of development is also geographical, with small areas of South Africa operating within a circuit of luxury consumption and new technologies, but inner cities, rural areas and small towns continuing their decline.

Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma share the ‘two economies’ myth, that rising Sandton skyscrapers, suburban shopping complexes and office parks can be made to trickle wealth downwards. Mbeki bemoaned the ‘structural disconnection’ of poor areas to rich.

What any serious student of Apartheid can confirm, instead, is that over more than a century, our economic system was structurally connected in order to create poverty at one pole – especially Bantustans – as a condition for wealth at the other: the white man’s factories, fields and especially mines. Those who hired migrant workers would get a mostly uncompensated subsidy in child-rearing, healthcare and old age care from rural women.

The subsequent worker remittances, pension grants and child welfare payments did not reverse this dynamic, nor has slightly-increased post-apartheid state aid reached Southern Matabeleland or Mozambique from where so many new migrants hail.

The challenge for progressive politics is to create a common project from this unevenness, capable of transcending familiar tensions – urban/rural; worker/poor; local/national/global; society/nature; gender; etc. – in part by linking what are essential relations amongst these contradictions.

In many of the successful instances of protest – e.g., the reconnection of water and electricity, the rolling-back of privatization schemes (with Gauteng road tolls the big fight of 2012), or the reduction in the annual price of antiretrovirals from \$15,000 per person to zero – relatively

privileged townships like Chatsworth and Soweto were the initial sites of urban discontent. Leading activists were found amongst residents who already had houses, but were now fighting a defensive battle just to stay on in the ghettos.

Initially, those in shacks clinging to a fragile urban existence appeared to be patient. The Alliance's promises to the poor included access to the city, while at the same time, municipalities were evicting others for non-payment as unemployment increased to more than forty percent of the workforce.

For a while, the enormous historical prestige of the ANC explained this patience. But ongoing waves of protests broke across the country's formal townships and shack settlements, beginning in 1999 when Fatima Meer's critique of Durban's misrule helped launch the 'new urban social movements'.

Though the first waves ebbed after a huge national protest at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, more surges began from mid-2004 in impoverished Zevenfontein north of Johannesburg, in dorps like Harrismith in the Free State, in Durban's Kennedy Road shack settlement beginning in early 2005, and in border towns like Khutsong fighting provincial location decisions.

But not only did state repression inevitably follow, in many cases what started out as insurgencies outside the control of the Alliance were siphoned off into calls for participation, legal challenges, and 'voice'.

Another of the striking elements of the protests is their failure to 'scale up,' or join together either geographically or politically. With some few exceptions, the recent upsurge of service-delivery protests have taken the form of 'popcorn protests', that is, community activism that flies high, moves according to where the wind blows – rightwards even in xenophobic, patriarchal or homophobic directions at times – and then falls to rest quite quickly.

Attempts at coordination since the early 2000s – Johannesburg's Anti-Privatization Forum and the national Social Movements Indaba – suffered continual splintering and a failure to make common cause with the left of the labour movement, a problem that continues in the Democratic Left Front. So there have developed no common programmes and no bridging organisational strategies to challenge neoliberalism on a national level.

In a longer version of this essay (<http://ccs.ukzn.ac.za>), we dwell on three elements of this failure: the importance of access, localism, and

leadership. We optimistically conclude that what appear to be debilitating divisions are more a symptom than a cause of the strategic impasse faced by South African urban movements. Internal tensions often come to the fore when there is no clear way forward for externally oriented action.

But pessimistically, we also observe that urban community movements are at once extraordinarily militant in actions and excessively moderate in politics, drawn – often counter-productively – to expanding rights through time-wasting litigation and creating coopted spaces for what we might call ‘inside-the-box participation’.

At a time parliament is steamrolling secrecy legislation – extending to anti-corruption whistle-blowing and even prohibitions on pollution alerts by the likes of the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance – it is vital that social activists continue challenging the ruling party’s venal elements, which appear unreformable and ensconced in power.

Yet if a crisis consists in the fact that ‘the old is dying, but the new cannot yet be born’, it begs the question of what ‘the new’ will be and what its birthing process could look like. No, we don’t have clear answers, but if tensions continue rising, 2012 will provide some if we go beyond the media’s trivially-minded fascination with personality factionalism and listen more carefully to the society’s vast base of dispossessed people.

(Bond at UKZN, Desai at University of Johannesburg and Ngwane of the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee wrote this as a contribution to a forthcoming book, *Marxism and Social Movements*)

Victims of Agrochemicals Break their Silence

Raul Zibechi 4 February 2012

“My wife washed her face with rain water the day after they fumigated farmland about three kilometers from here and she started getting rashes on her arms and her body. That was a year ago. Now she’s very affected, she’s been diagnosed with lupus and is undergoing chemotherapy.” Jorge Mérola, a farmworker from Villa del Carmen in the middle of Uruguay’s soy region, speaks from the depths of a pain that is easy to understand, but almost impossible to relay to others.

A local doctor explained that the marks on Mérola’s skin are caused by “agrochemicals” sprayed over fields from small planes. “Six of my calves

died with the same symptoms. They go stiff, they have no muscular mobility, and their jaws lock. The same thing happened to some neighbors,” he explains between long pauses.

When asked why he didn’t report what happened to his wife, Mérola reveals his abysmal distrust of authorities: “I didn’t want to report this to the Ministry of Livestock because a while ago there were a lot of fish dying in the Yi river, and their response was that it was because there wasn’t enough oxygen in the water. With that kind of response, I didn’t want to report anything.”

Mérola’s testimony is one of the many included in the video *Collateral Damages (Efectos Colaterales)*, a documentary made by *Redes Amigos de la Tierra Uruguay (Friends of the Earth in Uruguay)* and the *Programa Uruguay Sustentable (Sustainable Uruguay Program)*. Reporters Ignacio Cirio and Edgardo Matioli led the production and it will be released in early February. It can be found on Radio Mundo’s web page. It’s the first visual work that presents proof of the serious human consequences of fumigations.

Breaking the Silence

All the workers interviewed by Cirio demonstrate a keen understanding of the changes in local production: the introduction of crops like soy and fumigation with agrochemicals, the spread of monoculture farming to such an extent that “you see yourself getting closed in on,” as Isabel Olivo, from the Rural Women’s Group Network, puts it. Despite being active in grassroots organizations, Olivo admits “you feel like you have no weapons to fight it.”

Mérola’s case shows the solitude of those affected by fumigations—a solitude characterized by the distance and absence of the State and the complicity of actors like doctors who should be playing an active role. In spite of the seriousness of what happened to his wife, Mérola did only one interview, on the Sarandí del Yi radio station, which Cirio picked up and turned into the beginning of his investigation. Today his project is one of the very few to break the silence.

“Those affected don’t see the State as an entity that guarantees their rights,” he affirms, after traveling hundreds of kilometers across the areas most affected by fumigations like Florida, Flores, Durazno, Paysandú and Salto.

“Professor Elsa Gomez filed a complaint after her school was sprayed two times in a row. When public health workers interviewed her, they demanded proof that would link the health problems with agrochemicals. The State doesn’t protect them, but it makes demands of them,” concludes

Cirio. Gomez teaches in a small town in the province of Durazno. In *Collateral Damages* she explains how the planes sprayed pesticides just meters from the school over the course of several days in 2009 without anyone showing, at least publicly, the slightest sign of concern.

“There are many things that people don’t want to come out and say, because they’re neighbors, because they rely on each other, but I know of cases that have been covered up and I see how they go out to fumigate with broken equipment,” says Luis Ferreira, who was president of the school commission in Merinos, in the province of Paysandú. His son, like other children, has stomach problems and vomits every time the planes fumigate less than 100 meters away from the school.

In his film, Cirio interviews beekeepers who have watched their hives disappear, small-scale livestock owners and farmers, village neighbors, nurses and teachers who discover the consequences of agrochemicals for their students’ bodies. He didn’t interview any doctors. When asked about the silence of those who are aware of the situation and its causes, he reflects: “Businesses make deals with schools, social clubs and hospitals. The doctors don’t say anything.”

On several occasions the team that made *Collateral Damages* had problems with “mosquito” (a vehicle for land fumigation) drivers who saw them filming. Some of them got out of their vehicles and wanted to know what the piece was about. “They have orders not to let themselves be filmed,” Cirio concludes.

In spite of the difficulties, he found that rural and small town inhabitants were aware of the growing problem they are facing. This is because, among other things, “they are informed, they travel, they ask questions and, for this reason, they demand that the government carry out an in-depth study of the situation.” Onelia Dominguez, a nurse’s assistant in the town of Rincón de Valentín, believes that the workers don’t demand adequate working conditions because they’re afraid they’ll lose their jobs. She agrees with Cirio that “no one has ever come to investigate.”

Overcoming the Solitude

Although the indifference of both the government and the university is the main cause for the silence among the victims, this is also a population with little opportunity to make itself heard.

In March of 2001, the Uruguayan Ministry of Livestock, Agriculture and Fishing prohibited aerial spraying closer than 500 meters from schools and land spraying closer than 300 meters “to diminish the risk of exposure to intrinsically dangerous substances.” But to comply with the rules, someone must control or report abuses. Isabel Cárcamo, from the Red de

Acción en Plaguicidas (RAP-AL), said, “We have had the experience of working with communities that find it very difficult to denounce the impact of fumigations, either because they have relatives working in crop-dusting or because it’s their livelihood, or because they live in small towns where everyone knows everyone and the business even ‘helps’ the community.”

It’s the same problem that the anthropologist Carlos Santos detected. Beekeepers, for example, “confront the dilemma of not reporting the death rate of the bees so they don’t get kicked off the place where they’ve been allowed to set up their hives or lose whatever space they have,” because filing a complaint causes trouble for the landowner who rents the land used for growing soy.

Dr. María Elena Curbelo pointed out that in the vicinity of Bella Unión, an agroindustrial city where she’s been working for 16 years, rice and sugar cane plantations are sprayed with pesticides. This has led to congenital deformities in newborns and year-round respiratory problems.

She affirmed that there are various cases of pediatric leukemia in the region. She recognized that “while there were fumigations on the edge of town and one part of the population wanted to complain, the workers preferred to not risk their jobs and the people opted to remain silent.”

Most people affected by fumigation live in small towns, where everyone knows each other and there exists a persistent “cultura de esperar”—a culture of expecting someone else to solve their problems. People look to rural bosses (caudillos), landowners, and now businessmen or the government. In Uruguay, they are small towns with between 400 and two thousand inhabitants.

The rural population is systematically declining throughout Latin America. Uruguay is perhaps the most alarming case— only five percent of Uruguayans live in rural areas. Adults between the ages of 50 to 65 represent 42% of the rural population. It’s not hard to conclude that the population is in a slow process of extinction. The model of production with its disastrous health effects adds to out-migration by making rural life inhospitable.

“The Ministry of Public Health can’t recruit doctors who want to live in these places. Under such conditions,” Cirio says, “there’s an awareness of the seriousness, but there are only a few isolated efforts made with little support from organizations or professional associations.”

Cárcamo insists that powerful interests are behind the silence surrounding the effects of agrochemicals. “There is no political interest. If there were,

it would be necessary to question the country's so-called production model and the use of biofuel, among other things. The issue will really only be exposed when a political decision is made. One example is the contrast between the aggressive campaign against tobacco, while nothing is said about the impacts of the daily ingestion of agrochemicals through food and water. And the worst thing is that smoking is something you can choose, but eating and drinking water aren't."

Brazil, World Champion in Agrochemicals

According to a recent report by the Movimento Sem Terra (MST), Brazilian society is more and more aware of the health problems caused by agrochemical contamination. "Toxins are one of the pillars that sustain the agribusiness production model," the organization affirms. It defines the model as export-oriented and characterized by the expulsion of families from the countryside.

Since 2008, Brazil holds first place in world rankings of agrochemical use, even though it is not the largest agricultural producer. Billions of liters are poured onto crops, and this is a practice that even the MST has not escaped. In 2010, a national campaign against agrochemicals was born and created official entities like the National Cancer Institute (INCA), Fiocruz and the Sanitary Vigilance Agency. Specialists have no doubt that agrochemicals are related to cancer. According to the INCA, in the next two years one million Brazilians will be diagnosed with cancer and only six out of every ten of those affected will recover. Furthermore, there will be consequences for millions of people who experience a number of afflictions every year. In a recent conference in Rio de Janeiro, João Pedro Stédile, MST coordinator, complained that in the movement's settlements "there are instances of breast cancer in 13 and 14 year-old girls" (Carta Maior, December 20).

Brazil's 2011 Human Rights report, released in December by the Social Network of Justice and Human Rights explains that each year 5,600 people are poisoned with agrochemicals while only half the cases are reported. Based on reports from the Ministry of Health, the report concludes that every year there are 2,300 "suicide attempts" made with agrochemicals. The southern region prides itself on agribusiness, but at the same time this model explains 75 percent of deaths there. This surprising revelation led various scientists to undertake field studies.

One study published in the Revista Brasileira de Saúde Ocupacional by the Ministry of Labor notes the connection between suicides and the massive use of agrochemicals because organophosphates, among other things, produce psychological disorders. "Scientific evidence shows that exposure to pesticides can cause irrevocable health damages. For example, advanced neuropathy is a result of overexposure to organophosphates.

Indeed, exposure is associated with a long list of symptoms and with significant deficits in neurobehavioral performance and abnormalities in nervous system functions.

The journal of the Brazilian Association of Postgraduates in Public Health also published case studies based on a survey of 102 rural workers from Nova Friburgo. They concluded that there is a direct relationship between emotional and psychological disturbances and exposure to agrochemicals.

Argentina: Doctors in Fumigated Towns

In the agricultural cycle of 1990, the Argentine countryside received 35 million pounds of pesticides. In 2010, agribusinesses used more than 300 million liters of toxins. The numbers continue to grow. In 1996, when fumigation with glyphosate began, about two liters were used per hectare. By 2010, the figure had increased to more than ten liters, and there is some land fumigated with more than twenty liters per hectare.

This data was presented during the First National Conference of Doctors in Fumigated Towns, in August 2010 in Córdoba, Argentina. The conference was held by the Department of Medical Sciences of the National University of Cordoba. A hundred and sixty doctors from ten provinces and dozens of towns attended.

The conference led to the creation of the University Environment and Health Network, committed to following up on health problems created by agrotoxins.

The event's final report states, "The doctors pointed out that, generally speaking, they have served the same populations for more than 25 years, but they find that recent years have been completely different, and they link the differences directly to systematic fumigation with pesticides." Rodolfo Páramo, pediatric and neonatal doctor at the Malabrigo hospital in the Norte de Santa Fe reported the disturbing rate of twelve deformations of 200 births in 2006.

The neonatal service at the Perrando Hospital in Resistencia, Chaco, released its own statistics: in 1997, there were 19.5 deformities in every 10,000 newborns. In 2008, the number tripled to 85.3. In the same period, the land area planted in soybeans in the province quadrupled.

The final conference report took into account the many testimonies and reports presented and concluded, "It's important to point out that official epidemiological reports are scant. According to what the doctors say—relying on their own figures acquired through observation—public health officials haven't heeded the alarm from health groups and reports from the general population." The Chaco report is "one of the only such

reports generated publicly with interjurisdictional participation.”

Medardo Ávila Vázquez, coordinator of the medical network, stated that despite the scientific evidence presented, authorities from national and health care sectors are unwilling to accept reality and, in particular, unwilling to acknowledge the pathological changes in the rural population.

He decided to work with groups like the Mothers of Ituzaingó, a neighborhood group in Córdoba surrounded by soy where 300 out of 5,000 inhabitants have cancer, or the Stop Fumigating Collective that opted to protest instead of dying in silence. This group insists that “there is no controllable or safe fumigation,” which is why all fumigation should be stopped.

The Ituzaingó case shows that fumigations affect the poorest of the poor. Without organization and public protest, nothing will be gained. Back in 2002 the Mothers condemned “endosulfan and heavy metals in water tanks in people’s homes,” but to this day their children keep dying of leukemia and suffering from deformities.

Avila’s data is deeply disturbing. “There are more than 12 million people affected by fumigation in the country. In these areas, the rate of birth defects is four times higher than in the cities. Cancer is responsible for 33% of deaths in Barrio Ituzaingó—the leading cause of death— while in big cities the primary causes are cardiovascular problems, which accounts for 27% of the deaths, followed by cancer at 19%.”

www.zcommunications.org

Raul Zibechi is an international political analyst from the weekly Brecha de Montevideo, a professor and researcher on grassroots movements at the Multiversidad Franciscana de América Latina, and adviser to many grassroots groups. He writes the monthly “Zibechi Report” for the Americas Program <http://www.cipamericas.org>
Translation: Jenny Marie Forsythe

The IMF and Tunisia

Will Neoliberalism Make a Comeback in Africa?

Patrick Bond and Khadija Sharife 3 February 2012

With International Monetary Fund (IMF) managing director Christine Lagarde visiting Tunis today, the stage is set for ideological war over the progress of democratic revolutions.

Until 27 year-old fruit seller Mohamed Bouazizi committed suicide by immolation in the provincial town of Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia was packaged as an IMF success story. In 2008, dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was embraced by Lagarde's predecessor, Dominique Strauss-Kahn: 'Economic policy adopted here is a sound policy and is the best model for many emerging countries.'

Ben Ali's regime was the 'best model' for two other Washington institutions: the State Department just a few blocks from the IMF headquarters, and the Pentagon. From within Hillary Clinton's lair, as WikiLeaks revealed in 2010, 'The United States and Tunisia have an active schedule of joint military exercises. US security assistance historically has played an important role in cementing relations.' (Clinton is a leading candidate for World Bank president, to be chosen in mid-2012.)

Also in 2010, the IMF celebrated Ben Ali's commitment 'to reduce tax rates on businesses and to offset those reductions by increasing the standard Value Added Tax (VAT) rate,' which hurts poor people most. The IMF advised the tyrant to 'contain subsidies of food and fuel products.' While squeezing the poor, the IMF diplomatically turned a blind eye to widespread corruption by Ben Ali and his wife's notorious Trabelsi family, the two families' extreme level of business concentration, the regime's reliance upon murderous security forces to defend Tunisian crony capitalism, and the hedonistic lifestyle for which Ben Ali's clan had become famous.

The informal sector is vibrant in Tunisia, about half the size of the formal Gross Domestic Product, but doesn't contribute to the 18 percent VAT rate. So like in South Africa where the state just announced tax filings by a record four million people, the pressure is intense for authorities to bring survivalist home-production businesses into the net. Police harassment worsened, and Bouazizi killed himself after his fruit cart was overturned and goods confiscated. He had borrowed \$200 the night before to buy the produce, and with the meager earnings, he supported a family of four. He died of the burn wounds last January 4.

Before long, another self-immolation occurred, politically, when the notorious sex pest Strauss-Kahn allegedly raped a 32-year old Guinean maid, Nafissatou Diallo, who fought back with a charge that, ultimately, could not be prosecuted in the criminal courts, though a civil trial looms.

But the legacies represented by both immolations continue: high-risk pro-dictatorial neoliberalism and courageous popular resistance. A month ago, Strauss-Kahn's successor Christine Lagarde, also a former French finance minister, visited Abuja to offer neoliberal advice to Nigerian

president Goodluck Jonathan on fuel subsidy cuts. Lagarde was effusive about Jonathan. 'I was extremely impressed', she said, 'with the energy and pace at which he wants to transform the economy.'

However, as for Nigeria's very low fuel price, as the BBC reported, 'The IMF has long urged Nigeria's government to remove the subsidy, which costs a reported \$8 billion a year.' Lagarde also emphasized this 'reform', and the result was nearly Tunisian in scale: a national popular struggle, Occupy Nigeria, that shook the country to the point of Jonathan's overthrow before civilized society – the trade unions – called off protests, agreeing to a government fuel price concession.

The preceding paragraphs are based upon leftist ideological argumentation, but this is not the only narrative about Tunisia. The Third World's most celebrated neoliberal is probably Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto. He blames the series of revolutionary uprisings in North Africa on limited access to capital.

In an interview last year, de Soto told us, 'Bouazizi immolated himself in a terrible suicide because he never got a right to the land his house was built on, which could have been used for credit to develop his business, for example, to buy a truck. He was never able to get an official right to put a stall in a public place and so, he never had a property right to it. The only way to get the police to accept it was to pay off a bribe of several dinars every day. When they take that away from him, the space, he knows he does not have much of a future anymore.'

De Soto also blames Islam's Sharia law for the inability of Bouazizi's mother to benefit from belated municipal recognition of his home: 'When he died, she wasn't able to pass the title from his name to her name, because the paper that recognises the property is hard to transfer and in the process, someone could do very dirty tricks. Should she wish to sell it, to rent it, to use it as a guarantee to get capital for credit, she's got a problem. The kind of papers that the Municipality dishes out are not good enough for the bank. So women are not protected because of Shariah laws of the country, where property would go to the eldest son, even if the son is not able to benefit from the asset.'

But one fatal flaw in his argument, as shenanigans at Muhammed Yunus' Grameen Bank and recent suicides by 250,000 over-indebted Andhra Pradesh farmers suggest, is that microcredit can just as easily add to the woes of ordinary people, amplifying the deeper economic contradictions. Moreover, Tunisia's system was structured to diminish the power of citizens in order to sustain a dictatorship, with an estimated 17 percent of one major Tunisian bank in the hands of Ben Ali's son.

Thus, the poverty innate to the IMF's best model, Tunisia, cannot be solved by paper rights aiming to integrate poor people into a rotting 'formal' economy locked up by political and military elites. The same is true in Egypt, where repression by the post-Mubarak military against progressive democrats has worsened. The majority of parliament represented by Islamic parties is not yet sufficiently powerful to support the democrats – if that is their wont. The re-emergence of political Islam in the Middle East and North Africa, especially Tunisia where progressives do have influence over economic policy, requires new narratives. The revolutionary alliance in several countries between political Islam and democratic civil society, against Washington-backed dictators, has not yet ended.

In a speech last December, Lagarde attempted to coopt the ideas of the Arab Spring. Speaking of Bouazizi, she asked, 'Who could have predicted that his tragic death would herald a whole new Middle East? Who would have foreseen that this act of desperation against a violation of human dignity would ignite a flame that would eventually illuminate the entire region, toppling governments and leading to mass awakening of social consciousness?'

But for Lagarde, the awakening was dangerous: 'This is naturally a risky and uncertain period. It is a period when hard choices must be made, when post-revolutionary euphoria must give some way to practical concerns.'

Her concern was partly about Tunisia, where yesterday she seemed to be making progress. 'It will be important to manage this difficult transition in an orderly way. And here, I want to pay tribute especially to the people of Tunisia, who are going through a smooth and inclusive process of transition. Just as Tunisia provided the first spark of the Arab Spring, so now can it light the path forward for other countries in the region.'

Will that light include the kinds of subsidy cuts and privatization strategies her institution backed in pre-revolutionary Tunisia? After all, said Lagarde in her December speech praising the Arab Spring, 'We are offering the best policy advice possible. We will provide financial help if requested. And with our technical assistance, we are helping countries build better institutions for a better world. Some examples: We are helping Egypt make its tax system more equitable. We are helping Libya develop a modern system of government payments. We are helping Tunisia improve its financial sector. And we are helping Jordan with fuel subsidy reform.'

Then Jordan will surely follow Nigeria in protest. But in Tunisia the pitch is insidious, for yesterday, interim prime minister Hamadi Jebali was quoted in the local press as 'commending the IMF's active and

constructive support to Tunisia's economy particularly after the revolution.'

But Jebali's former advisor, and current spokesperson of the ruling Al-Nahda party, Said Ferjani, offered a more balanced view yesterday during a talk in Durban, South Africa: 'The IMF was bad in describing Ben Ali as a model.'

Although he conceded there were no plans to cut ties to the IMF, 'We won't be in a situation where we will be blackmailed by anything. Across Africa they pushed for privatization of the safety net. We will never listen to such things. We will not accept anything that compromises our national interest. The poor people of Tunisia are the prime priority for us because at the end of the day those are our people and we will not bow to any pressure or any kind of policies that would exacerbate the plight of the poor people. The IMF can say what they want but we will do what is right for our people. It's the aim of our revolution.'

If the likes of Lagarde continue their visits to African capitals – including Pretoria last month when who knows what advice she chummily proffered to South African finance minister Pravin Gordhan – then we need to hear more from Tunisians, Egyptians, Nigerians and so many others about how underlying causes of revolt, especially inequality and neoliberalism, can fuse opposition from diverse traditions. After all, no country exemplifies neoliberalism, inequality and multifaceted protest – and resulting political confusion – as acutely as South Africa.

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Patrick Bond and Khadija Sharife are researchers at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society.

Belgium: January 30 General Strike

A strike corresponding to the level of anger over austerity programme

Eric Byl, LSP/PSL (CWI in Belgium) 3 february 2012

Rail infrastructure was completely paralysed. Only one out of five buses was on the roads. The ports of Antwerp, Ghent and Zeebrugge came to a halt, as did the airport in Charleroi and all major steel, metal and car industries, including subcontractors. With the exception of security teams, nobody worked in the major chemical and pharmaceutical industries. Hundreds if not thousands of picket lines were set up. This was the way

the Belgian working class answered the smears, lies, threats and intimidations poured out massively by the media, the bosses and the politicians over the past weeks in the run up to the general strike on 30 January.

Historic record in length of government formation

This general strike took place less than two months after a new federal government was formed under the leadership of the francophone Socialist Party leader, Elio Di Rupo. Di Rupo is the first prime minister from an immigrant background, the first to be openly gay, the first francophone prime minister since 1979 and the first 'socialist' prime minister since 1974. He leads a six-party coalition composed of social democrats, liberals and Christian democrats from both sides of the language border (all the main parties in Belgium are split along communal lines). It took over 540 days to form this government, an historic world record. The major reason for this long and difficult period was the necessity for structural reforms declared by the bosses and all political parties. This involves the questioning and removal of some, if not all, the major gains of the working class considered to be outdated and hindering the economy's competitiveness.

But how to tackle this with a working class that combines a degree of organisation more characteristic of the Scandinavian countries – over 3 million workers are unionized in two major union federations from a total workforce of 4.3 million – with the explosiveness more typical of the working class in the South of Europe? Major class battles in the past taught the Belgian establishment to prefer compromise with the union leaderships over open confrontation. In this way, public debt was reduced from over 130% of gross domestic product (GDP) in the early nineties to 84% in 2007. This was done through wage restrictions, reduced social spending, privatisation, sale and lease back operations and the postponing of urgent investment in roads, school infrastructure and health care.

This policy of social retrogression through compromise however undermined the social base of the major traditional parties, including the Greens which were in and out of the government. For a number of years, different right-wing populist parties, especially in the economically stronger Flemish area in the north of Belgium, exploited the resulting discontent. In essence, they claimed the Flemish area would be better off without poorer Wallonia. They demanded sufficient economic powers for the regional government so that structural reforms which would be stopped by workers' resistance at a federal level would be applied in the north, thus creating regional competition at the expense of social conditions everywhere. In this way, they also tapped a mood of impatience growing amongst small bosses and subcontractors from multinationals mainly based in the north.

With the onset of the crisis in 2008, the federal and regional governments were forced to intervene and save the heavily indebted and overstretched banking sector at a level of 10% of GDP with another 30% to guarantee bad banking debts. Public debt rose again to 100% of GDP, pushing up real interest rates to a level unseen for a whole epoch. This was seized on by the establishment to increase pressure on the model of compromise. The Flemish nationalists, the biggest party in the northern area since the last elections and rising in the polls, were manoeuvred out of the negotiations to form a government; a limited state reform was agreed and a classic tripartite government was formed to apply structural reforms but this time with the francophone Socialist Party in the driving seat. Although this party has been in government without interruption since 1988, it had always succeeded in presenting itself as the opposition in government, pretending to soften the attacks carried through under pressure of the more right-wing Flemish coalition partners. But this time, the francophone Socialist Party is in charge of what is the biggest austerity plan in Belgian history.

No honeymoon

Most probably, the establishment hoped the long and difficult period of government formation and the 'socialist' prime minister would help to temper the reaction of the unions. But even before the government was formally approved in parliament, the union leaderships, not yet fully aware of the implications of the change in policy, organised in mid-November a joint national meeting in Brussels with the aim of strengthening their position for the negotiations and the compromises they thought would follow. They agreed amongst themselves to limit the number of participants, but the ranks of the unions seized on this initiative and appeared in much bigger numbers, inflating the meeting to 6.000 participants! On top of this, steel producer Arcelor Mittal announced at the worst possible moment for the new government the closure of the warm phase of its production in Liège in the Walloon area, leading to massive demonstrations and anger, with the metal unions demanding the nationalisation of the plant.

And then the Flemish Liberal Party, under pressure from the right-wing Flemish nationalists, went to the press stating that although the government had not yet agreed to attack wage indexation, they would definitely put it on the table for discussion. This pushed the union leaderships into organising a demo on 2 December of over 80,000 in the streets of Brussels. They presented it as aiming to strengthen the position of the Socialist Party in government negotiations against its more right-wing coalition partners, but at a rank-and-file level it was considered more as a 'warm up' for battles to come.

On 6 December, the new government was finally installed and the austerity plan announced. It is in essence a major attack on pensions for public servants and imposing stricter conditions for early retirement in all sectors, increasing the number of years service required for entitlement to early retirement from 35 to 40; an attack on unemployment benefits, stricter follow up and control of willingness to accept a job, a reduction of unemployment benefits and far stricter conditions for school leavers to be entitled to benefits; a severe cut in health expenses; a cut in the budgets of regional and local authorities, etc. There are some measures aimed at fighting tax fraud and reducing some of the tax advantages for companies, but all of them are very vague, while the measures attacking working families are concrete and immediate. There is also a contribution included from the main electricity company and from the banks, but both will be presenting the bill to their customers.

Part of these measures will be imposed by special decree, officially because of parliamentary calendar problems. The level of the attack and the fact that it was announced without detailed negotiations with the 'social partners' inflamed the unions, who delivered notice of a strike for 30 January and also announced they would support other action during the weeks running up to that date. The railway unions immediately announced a strike to take place within four days (22 December), which was successful, and they were followed by the other public-sector unions. They did this because railway workers, mainly organised at rank and file level across the different unions, have been involved in fighting partial privatisation, and have been followed only belatedly by the union officials who have tended to lose control. Many railway workers were critical of the short notice and would have preferred a better organized strike, but nevertheless seized the opportunity, as did the bus drivers. Other public service workers, in sectors which demand more organisation to get prepared, like education and hospitals, were even more critical about the timing. For the union federations it represented also an opportunity to force the government into negotiations with the aim of calling the strike on 30 January.

Under pressure from all sides

In the weeks following the December strikes, silence set in. What was happening? Were negotiations taking place? Was the government considering changes to some minor details which would then be used to remove the general strike from the agenda? This seemed very unlikely because the European Commission had already made clear the government would have to cut even more at its budget review planned for February. At a meeting on 10 January of the socialist trade union in Antwerp attended by over 300 shop stewards, the leadership announced that the strike was still on, but that since the public-services strike, the government and the bosses seemed to have come to their senses and were

prepared to negotiate. So the federal council of the unions would decide on 26 January whether the strike would take place.

Shop stewards from the metals sector, different public services, chemical industry and construction, twenty in total, all intervened, mainly on two issues. One explained how he and his delegation build a strong position in his metal factory, involving many young workers. His workmates knew he was at this meeting. They would be a few hundred workers the next morning waiting for him to announce clearly the strike was on, in order to start organising. But with this message from the leadership, he said, he would consider calling in sick next morning. Another argued we should be preparing to organise the blocking of special employment zones of smaller companies where workers are less unionised instead of discussing minor changes. Many, if not nearly all who spoke, questioned and criticised the union leader over his membership of the social-democratic Socialist Party: "What are you still doing there?" All present felt this meeting raised the stakes in favour of striking and most of those present believed the government would not concede anything anyway.

The government did not offer concessions, neither did the bosses, but what they did do was try to undermine the strike in every possible way. They seized on the representation of the union in the leading bodies of the socialist parties to accuse them of having co-written the government agreement. They pretended the negotiations were still on and that actually they were within centimetres of an agreement. They claimed the unions called the strike only because of the social elections for workers' representatives in companies and organizations, which are due in April and May. They also seized on a letter from a student, who later appeared to be a leading member of the Liberal party youth, to claim the unions were defending only their older members and did not care for young people. It must have passed through their mind to utilize concessions made by the unions on contract flexibility at the expense of young workers. They seized on an internet poll where only 21% of those interviewed declared in favour of the strike with 55% against. They threatened bailiffs and police intervention to protect the 'right to work', etc. One boss went even so far as to promise an illegal bonus for those who would work on the day of the general strike! He had to withdraw and actually, as a consequence, the unions forced him to pay a bonus for every worker, striker and non striker!

You could not open a paper or a magazine, watch or listen to television and radio without witnessing attacks on the strike for being irresponsible, organised by archaic outdated unions, under pressure from a radical minority, and threatening to attract the attention of the international financial markets to the country. Ratings agency Fitch reduced its rating for Belgium only two days before the strike. It was claimed the strike was

extremely harmful because it took place on the same day of yet another European summit. It took courage to say you supported the strike. Even if the poll quoted above is very doubtful and a similar poll was removed from the main news website once those in favour of the strike outnumbered those against, to have 21% in favour and 23% neutral despite the barrage of hostile publicity is considerable. If this was correct, it would mean that 44% of the population is not represented in parliament because all MPs stand for these cuts or worse! And this is just at the beginning, when none of the measures can actually be felt yet. This austerity plan is worth €11.3 bn., it is expected to be increased by €3bn in February and later this year another budget review will take place. In 2013, the government wants to cut or tax another €13bn and in the following two years another €25 bn. If there is already 21% in favour of a general strike now, how many will there be once the full impact of these measures is felt?

An avalanche of cuts

The campaign against the strike actually had the opposite effect. It polarised society and increased also the preparedness to fight. Certainly, some workers must have thought, “Let’s pay now if that can solve the problem”. But as the Linkse Socialistische Partij/Parti Socialiste de Lutte (LSP/PSL) – the CWI in Belgium – warned, we are underneath an avalanche of cuts which we had better stop before it hits us. If we give in to blackmail once, we will sink deeper and deeper and our opponents will come back for more. That is also how a lot of strikers felt.

On the day of the strike, the railways were paralyzed as always, but the picket lines were much better attended than before. It has been years since a strike in the railways took on more than just an organised guerrilla struggle by a minority occupying some crucial points such as the control towers. This might seem effective, but in the long term tends to reduce most workers to passive bystanders. For a few years now, railway workers and some crucial activists, including from the LSP, have been consciously reviving the idea of mass pickets and with it the number of activists has grown steadily.

There are still workplaces where strikers just stay home, some of them very effectively, but the point is workers just don’t know whether that will be successful. Workers become dependent on the boss to tell you how effective or otherwise the strike has been. In some workplaces, it is a question of completely rebuilding this tradition which is crucial to discuss the issues, convince those who are less confident and create confidence between activists from the different unions so that workers do not appear divided in front of the bosses. It is also an opportunity to meet new, future militants and renew the trade union delegation. The unions organised hotlines and flying pickets, partly to support weaker workplaces, but also

to be able to inform those who were on the picket lines about the successes or misfortunes elsewhere. Political activists visited picket lines, with LSP attending well over hundred pickets, interviewing strikers and discussing the strategy, the tactics and the demands which could win this battle. It was a two-way process. It can help popularise and develop the struggle, but it is also a way of getting young activists and those never on strike before to learn from those in struggle and hopefully prepare them for future battles.

Some of the stronger picket lines had their own tents and barbecue, sometimes caravans, put up posters, banners and timetables for picket duty. Unfortunately the unions did not always organise meetings in work time before the strike in order to pass on information and answer questions, and certainly did not vote collectively on the strike so that workers would feel totally involved in decision making. A strike called from above can, of course, be more easily called off than one voted for in a mass meeting. Also, with a few exceptions, the unions did not organise demonstrations this time. We believe that was a mistake. It offered the media an opportunity to question the success of the strike. At least in the bigger cities, demonstrations would have easily mobilised thousands. It would also have been an opportunity for those who could not attend picket lines to participate in a more active way.

The battle continues

The battle over this strike continues in the media. Because all media outlets, including the so-called 'public' television and radio are in the hands of managers hostile to the strike, every weakness is blown out of proportion and every strength is brushed aside. In the run up to the strike, the union leaderships had given in to pressure not to block the special employment zones. In these zones, the internal regime of workplaces is often dictatorial. Unions are not allowed and representation has been stopped, even though Belgium has been condemned several times over this by the European labour court. To speak out in favour of, let alone to participate in the strike often meant the sack immediately in those companies. This is the reason union activists always want to stop those zones from functioning by blocking their entrances.

This time, the blocking of these special zones only took place in limited numbers because the union leaderships did not endorse it. LSP warned up front it meant giving up the idea of a general strike. Over 40% of workers work in local units with less than 50 employed, in many cases without any union representation, although even there probably more than one worker in three is a union member. 70% work in units with less than 200 employed, and only 18% in the 600 units with over 500 employed. Near the ports and in some areas, such as Liège, Charleroi or Ghent near the Volvo factory, they were blocked anyway. Despite their threats, the bosses

only appealed five times to bailiffs and the police took a very cautious attitude. This illustrates they were well aware about the overall success of the strike and understood only to provoke the workers when they are either at work or at home, but not when they are on the streets.

Nevertheless the bosses' organizations and the media, under whose pressure the union leaderships had given in, seized on it to declare the strike was not general. The headlines in the press read: "Strike not general" or "Unions come out of strike weakened". The Flemish bosses' organisation went even so far as to pretend that three quarters of workplaces were unaffected. That appears demoralizing but nearly 75% of work units employ less than 10 workers representing only 15% of the total workforce! Even though the trains and buses were on strike, traffic flowed well all day. In some industrial zones it looked like a Sunday! The bosses pretended that was because a lot of people worked from home; this was not true for truckers and construction workers though! Other examples given to try to undermine the strike included the delivery of mail. However the postal service today is totally different from what it used to be. More than half of its workforce is no longer composed of public servants but contract and casual workers. Management is extremely repressive and the union leaderships in the postal services are legendary in accepting all attacks and have lost any credibility amongst workers.

The establishment also seized on the functioning of hospitals and schools to try to illustrate their propaganda. In hospitals, a minimum service is legally required. In theory, the union does not have to help out, in which case the hospital directors have to ask for a court injunction to arrange staff cover. Most union delegations however prefer not to let it go that far and arrange the minimum service through negotiations. When they realize that the bosses seize on this to undermine the strike, unions might change their attitude. It will be something LSP members in their unions and delegations will certainly raise. Teachers prefer not to go in conflict with their colleagues in front of the pupils. Schools also did everything they could to assure care. But again, this is seized on by the bosses to undermine the strike. In one case, the LSP organized 30 school students to strengthen the picket line after they discussed with their teachers. However when they turned up at the picket line, one of the teachers, the shop steward, sent them away, we assume because she was afraid of being accused of mobilising the students. Our group did not argue and decided to occupy the space in front of the school, chanting and waving with only five teachers standing idle at the entrance.

What next?

The success of the strike often depended on the presence of a few combative individuals who have been organising and building trade unions delegations, groups of militants and forging unity amongst the

different union federations. LSP members are part of this layer, some of them with a reputation far beyond their own workplace: in the chemical industry in Antwerp and Ghent, in the railways in Antwerp, Brussels and nationally, at the universities in Brussels, Leuven, Antwerp and Ghent, in secondary education in West-Flanders and Antwerp, in the health sector in Leuven and Brussels, and in the postal service in Bruges and Brussels. In our ranks, we have a layer of young workers in metal works, the building and chemical industries, social workers and others. They are often quickly spotted by union activists because of their political understanding and their serious approach, and this opens up new fields of intervention for us. We have union representatives in both major union federations, socialist and Christian, and even in some independent unions.

Our interventions on the picket lines are not only about organising pickets and discussing union strategy and tactics. The unions elaborated an alternative budget, in essence taxing the rich, fighting tax fraud and putting an end to all kind of tax concessions to the bosses. We agree with those measures. But who will carry them out? The social-democratic misnamed Parti Socialiste (PSB) and its Flemish even more right-wing sister party Socialistische Partij Anders (SP-A)? Nobody believes that anymore, not even those who argue not to bring the government down out of fear for the Flemish nationalist N-VA. The union leaderships should not only break links with social and Christian democrats but should also initiate the creation of a real workers' party, organising everyone who wants to resist the austerity measures aimed at making us pay for the crisis provoked by the greed of bankers and other speculators. We can and will fight at company level, in industrial sectors and even across all sectors, but we also urgently need a political instrument to put forward fighting policies in the political field.

Many on the picket lines would agree with this and also with our criticism that just calling for tax rises on the rich, without the threat of nationalisation under workers' control, could simply lead to a capital flight, which would then be used by the bosses to accuse workers of irresponsible behaviour. Whether they consider this realistic is an open question. Some on the picket lines clearly call for another society, but how is that to be achieved? Others stated that parties like LSP would grow in the next period, but as a kind of prophecy, not necessarily as active engagement. Some workers are clearly open to a real socialist alternative; LSP members sold 150 papers on picket lines, but more workers than that agree with the necessity of something broader. In the past LSP was practically on its own promoting the idea of a broader fighting workers' party. Today more and more feel this potential. The Maoist PTB broke with its former Stalinist programme only to exchange it for a more explicitly reformist one, in the hope they will be able to reproduce what the ex-Maoist Socialist Party in the Netherlands has done. Erik de Bruyn,

a former candidate for presidency of the Flemish Socialist Party, left that party and created Rood (Red) in which LSP participates. Rood aims to promote and be part of the process of creation of such a broader party.

Because of the lack of an alternative and, on the other hand, the strength and combativity of the union ranks, it looks as if this is going to be a prolonged struggle, with some defeats but also with many workers searching for an alternative. National divisions will be whipped up by the capitalists, but also by the social democrats and maybe even by some union leaders to cover up the failures of their policies. Parties will be forced to take positions. In the run up to the strike, Bart De Wever from the N-VA called for heavy repression from the police if special employment zones were blocked because, he said, some bosses approached him saying otherwise they would take things into their own hands. His party proposes a drastic cut to public transport. Whether this cuts programme will translate immediately into a loss of votes for the NV-A, as some workers in the Flemish public bus company expect, is not yet certain. But that De Wever's party will also be tested in a period of intense class struggle is inevitable.

The pressure on the socialist trade union to break with social democracy and on the Christian trade union to break with Christian democracy will increase enormously. Our demand for a new, broader fighting workers' party will become more and more a central aim amongst the union activists. The exact form it will take is impossible to predict now. What seem like insurmountable obstacles today will be washed away once the class struggle accelerates.

So far, no further action has been organised. The unions will definitely have to do something in the coming months if not weeks. The ETUC has announced a day of action for 29 February. It is very probable the Belgian unions will want to seize this opportunity. More cuts are going to be announced. Resistance will come in ebbs and flows. This general strike has confirmed the readiness amongst the advanced layer of union activists to struggle. This layer will certainly grow once the real impact of the measures becomes clear. The endless implementation of one austerity plan after the other might depress the movement for a while but will also remove illusions that if we pay now, the problems will be solved tomorrow. Pressure on the unions to break with their so-called 'social partners' will become unbearable. The creation of a new workers' political formation will become a real possibility, especially since different variations of such formations already exist in the neighbouring countries. With its combination of a foothold in some crucial sectors of the workers' movement and a dynamic youth wing, we believe LSP will also be able to play a role in the political and organisational rearmament of the working class. In this process we will also make sure we build out own forces

simultaneously.

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What Happened to Canada?

Chris Hedges 2 February 2012

What happened to Canada? It used to be the country we would flee to if life in the United States became unpalatable. No nuclear weapons. No huge military-industrial complex. Universal health care. Funding for the arts. A good record on the environment.

But that was the old Canada. I was in Montreal on Friday and Saturday and saw the familiar and disturbing tentacles of the security and surveillance state. Canada has withdrawn from the Kyoto Accords so it can dig up the Alberta tar sands in an orgy of environmental degradation. It carried out the largest mass arrests of demonstrators in Canadian history at 2010's G-8 and G-20 meetings, rounding up more than 1,000 people. It sends undercover police into indigenous communities and activist groups and is handing out stiff prison terms to dissenters. And Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper is a diminished version of George W. Bush. He champions the rabid right wing in Israel, bows to the whims of global financiers and is a Christian fundamentalist. The voices of dissent sound like our own. And the forms of persecution are familiar. This is not an accident. We are fighting the same corporate leviathan.

"I want to tell you that I was arrested because I am seen as a threat," Canadian activist Leah Henderson wrote to fellow dissidents before being sent to Vanier prison in Milton, Ontario, to serve a 10-month sentence. "I want to tell you that you might be too. I want to tell you that this is something we need to prepare for. I want to tell you that the risk of incarceration alone should not determine our organizing."

"My skills and experience—as a facilitator, as a trainer, as a legal professional and as someone linking different communities and movements—were all targeted in this case, with the state trying to depict me as a 'brainwasher' and as a mastermind of mayhem, violence and destruction," she went on. "During the week of the G8 & G20 summits, the police targeted legal observers, street medics and independent media. It is clear that the skills that make us strong, the alternatives that reduce our reliance on their systems and prefigure a new world, are the very things that they are most afraid of."

The decay of Canada illustrates two things. Corporate power is global, and

resistance to it cannot be restricted by national boundaries. Corporations have no regard for nation-states. They assert their power to exploit the land and the people everywhere. They play worker off of worker and nation off of nation. They control the political elites in Ottawa as they do in London, Paris and Washington. This, I suspect, is why the tactics to crush the Occupy movement around the globe have an eerie similarity—infiltrations, surveillance, the denial of public assembly, physical attempts to eradicate encampments, the use of propaganda and the press to demonize the movement, new draconian laws stripping citizens of basic rights, and increasingly harsh terms of incarceration.

Our solidarity should be with activists who march on Tahrir Square in Cairo or set up encampamentos in Madrid. These are our true compatriots. The more we shed ourselves of national identity in this fight, the more we grasp that our true allies may not speak our language or embrace our religious and cultural traditions, the more powerful we will become.

Those who seek to discredit this movement employ the language of nationalism and attempt to make us fearful of the other. Wave the flag. Sing the national anthem. Swell with national hubris. Be vigilant of the hidden terrorist. Canada's Minister of Natural Resources Joe Oliver, responding to the growing opposition to the Keystone XL and the Northern Gateway pipelines, wrote in an open letter that "environmental and other radical groups" were trying to "hijack our regulatory system to achieve their radical ideological agenda." He accused pipeline opponents of receiving funding from foreign special interest groups and said that "if all other avenues have failed, they will take a quintessential American approach: sue everyone and anyone to delay the project even further."

No matter that in both Canada and the United States suing the government to seek redress is the right of every citizen. No matter that the opposition to the Keystone XL and Northern Gateway pipelines has its roots in Canada. No matter that the effort by citizens in the U.S. and in Canada to fight climate change is about self-preservation. The minister, in the pocket of the fossil fuel industry like the energy czars in most of the other industrialized nations, seeks to pit "loyal" Canadians against "disloyal" Canadians. Those with whom we will build this movement of resistance will not in some cases be our own. They may speak Arabic, pray five times a day toward Mecca and be holding off the police thugs in the center of Cairo. Or they may be generously pierced and tattooed and speak Danish or they may be Mandarin-speaking workers battling China's totalitarian capitalism. These are differences that make no difference.

"My country right or wrong," G.K. Chesterton once wrote, is on the same level as "My mother, drunk or sober."

Our most dangerous opponents, in fact, look and speak like us. They

hijack familiar and comforting iconography and slogans to paint themselves as true patriots. They claim to love Jesus. But they cynically serve the function a native bureaucracy serves for any foreign colonizer. The British and the French, and earlier the Romans, were masters of this game. They recruited local quislings to carry out policies and repression that were determined in London or Paris or Rome. Popular anger was vented against these personages, and native group vied with native group in battles for scraps of influence. And when one native ruler was overthrown or, more rarely, voted out of power, these imperial machines recruited a new face. The actual centers of power did not change. The pillage continued. Global financiers are the new colonizers. They make the rules. They pull the strings. They offer the illusion of choice in our carnivals of political theater. But corporate power remains constant and unimpeded. Barack Obama serves the same role Herod did in imperial Rome.

This is why the Occupy Wall Street movement is important. It targets the center of power—global financial institutions. It deflects attention from the empty posturing in the legislative and executive offices in Washington or London or Paris. The Occupy movement reminds us that until the corporate superstructure is dismantled it does not matter which member of the native elite is elected or anointed to rule. The Canadian prime minister is as much a servant of corporate power as the American president. And replacing either will not alter corporate domination. As the corporate mechanisms of control become apparent to wider segments of the population, discontent will grow further. So will the force employed by our corporate overlords. It will be a long road for us. But we are not alone. There are struggles and brush fires everywhere. Leah Henderson is not only right. She is my compatriot.

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Israel's War On Democracy

Conn Hallinan 1 February 012

From its birth more than 60 years ago, Israel has always presented itself as “an oasis of democracy in a sea of despotism,” an outpost of pluralism surrounded by tyranny. While that equality never fully applied to the country’s Arab citizens, Israel was, for the most part an open society. But today political rights are under siege by right-wing legislators, militant settlers, and a growing religious divide in the Israeli army, all of which threaten to silence internal opposition to the policies of the government of Benjamin Netanyahu. Since that may include a war with Iran—and the

probable involvement of the U.S. in such a conflict—the move to stifle dissent should be a major concern for Americans.

The U.S. media has reported on growing tensions between Israeli women and the ultra-orthodox Haredim over the latter's demand for sexual segregation of schools, public transport, and public life. But while orthodox Jews spitting on eight-year old girls for being "immodestly dressed" has garnered the headlines, the most serious threats to democratic rights have gone largely unreported, including a host of proposed or enacted laws. Some of these include:

- *A law that allows Jewish communities to bar Arab families from living among them. Arabs make up about 20 percent of the population.
- *A law that makes it illegal to advocate an academic, cultural or economic boycott of Israel, including settler communities.
- *A law that would limit the power of the Supreme Court.
- *A law that bars any state institutions, including schools and theaters—from commemorating the "Nakba," or "catastrophe," the term Palestinians use to describe the loss of their lands in the 1948 war that established Israel.
- *A law that prohibits Palestinians from living with their Israeli spouses within Israel proper and denies them citizenship.
- *A law that drops Arabic as an official language.
- *A law that requires anyone obtaining a driver's license to swear loyalty to the state.
- *A law that would limit the number of petitions non-governmental organizations, including peace and human rights groups, could file before the Supreme Court.
- *A law that forces human rights and peace groups to limit the money they can receive from abroad, and forces them to go through burdensome registration requirements.

Tzipi Livni, former foreign secretary and head of the Kadima Party, told the Knesset that Arab states were "trying to become a democracy, while we—with these bills—are headed toward dictatorship."

Most of these laws are being pushed by Israel's rightwing Likud and Yisreal Beiteinu parties, but the proposal to drop Arabic comes from the Kadima Party. Ram-rodging many of these laws are Likud's so-called "fantastic four": Danny Danon, Yariv Levin, Tzipi Hotovely, and Ofir Akunis.

"We are in the process of reducing freedom of speech and the freedom of association, and we are infringing on the right to equality, especially vis-à-vis the Israeli Arab," Mordechai Kremnitzer, a professor of law and vice-president of the Israel Democracy Institute told the Financial Times.

“We are also weakening all the elements in society that have the function of criticizing the governments, including the courts.

Israeli society is filled with sharp divisions on everything from war with Iran to growing economic inequality. Israel has the highest poverty rate out of the 32-nation Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and ranks twenty-fifth in health care investment. The poverty rate for Israeli Arabs is between 50 and 55 percent.

Starting in the 1980s, Israel began dismantling its social safety net, a trend that Netanyahu sharply accelerated when he served as finance minister in 2003. While slashing money for housing, education, and transport, he cut taxes for the wealthy and corporations.

Most of all, however, Israeli governments poured the nation’s wealth into colonizing the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights, where, according to Shir Hever of the Alternative Information Center based in Jerusalem, Israel has spent about \$100 billion. A vast network of bypass roads, security zones, and walled settlements siphoned off money that could have gone for housing, education and transportation in Israel. Special tax rebates and rent subsidies for settlers added to that bill. Some 15 percent of the Israeli housing budget is used to support four percent of its population in the Occupied Territories. Add to that the 20 percent the military budget sucks up, and it seems increasingly clear that the settlement endeavor is no longer sustainable.

Wealth disparity—a handful of families control 30 percent of Israel’s GDP—was partly behind last summer’s social explosion that at one point put some 450,000 people into the streets of Haifa, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem demanding reductions in rent and food prices. But so far, organizers of those massive demonstrations have avoided making the link between growing income inequality and Israel’s policies in the Occupied Territories. Many of these new laws are aimed at organizations that have been trying to do precisely that.

There are other divisions as well. Israelis are split down the middle over whetherto attack Iran—43 percent yes, 41 percent no—but 64 percent support the creation of a Middle East nuclear free zone, and 65 percent feel that neither Israel nor Iran should have nuclear weapons. Those are not exactly the home front sentiments that a government wants when it is contemplating going to war.

Besides the avalanche of right-wing legislation coming out of the Knesset, Israel is increasingly at war with itself over the role of religion in daily life, a conflict that is playing out in one of Israel’s core institutions, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).

Two years ago, soldiers of the Kfir Brigade, a unit deployed in the West Bank, unveiled banners declaring they would refuse orders to remove settlers. By international law, all settlements in the Occupied Territories are illegal, but Israel claims that only unregistered “outposts” are against the law and subject to removal. The soldiers held signs that read, “We will not expel Jews.” Six of them were arrested and spent 30 days in the stockade.

The soldiers were graduates of army-sponsored “hesder yeshivas” that allow orthodox soldiers to divide their time between active service and Torah study. Settler rabbis rallied around the six and even provided money for some of the soldiers’ families.

Writing in the progressive Jewish weekly, the Forward, Columnist J.J. Goldberg says that a “secret report” in 2008 warned that such “yeshiva graduates comprise 30 percent of the junior officer corps and rising. In a decade they will be the military’s senior commanders. If a peace agreement is not reached in 15 years or so, Israel may no longer have an army willing to carry out its side.”

A majority of Israelis support some kind of compromise to achieve a settlement with the Palestinians, but in the most recent set of talks, the Netanyahu government made it clear that Israel will not surrender any settlements, any part of Jerusalem, or the Jordan Valley. In essence, Palestinians would be forced to live in isolated enclaves surrounded by networks of restricted roads and over 120 settlements. The Netanyahu proposal not only violates numerous United Nations resolutions and international law, no Palestinian government that accepted such an offer would survive for long.

But Israelis who protest an offer that is widely seen as little more than a way to kill the possibility of serious negotiations may find themselves treated in much the same way as Israel has dealt with its Arab citizens. Those who agitate against the current government may find themselves hit with the new libel law that no longer requires plaintiffs to prove they were damaged and increases awards six-fold. Bloggers, who lack institutional support, are particularly fearful of the new law. Organizations critical of the government that try to raise money from sources outside the country could face huge fines.

According to Hagai El-Ad, director of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, there is growing resistance within Israel to the attempt to silence critics, as well as pressure from abroad, including the American Jewish community. Even a pro-Netanyahu hawk like the Anti-Defamation League’s Abraham Foxman warns “the very democratic character of the state is being eroded.” That resistance has delayed some of the more odious proposals, but the “fantastic four” and their allies are pushing hard

to get them on the books.

Why should Americans care? Because if Netanyahu silences his domestic opponents, he will have carte blanche to do as he pleases. And if Tel Aviv attacks Iran, it will be very difficult for the U.S. to keep clear of it. For starters, the IDF will be firing U.S.-made cruise missiles, flying American-made F-15s, and dropping “made in the USA” bunker busters. With the exception of the monarchs from the Gulf states, no one in the Middle East—or most of the world—is going to give Washington a pass on this one.

Does America need another war? If it doesn't protest the assault on democracy in Israel, it may get one, whether it likes it or not.

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Tunisia: “The mass of people continue to struggle”

<http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/5556>

Interview with two Tunisian socialists, one year after the fall of Ben Ali

The Socialist, paper of the Socialist Party (CWI in England and Wales) 31 January 2012

14 January marked the first anniversary of the downfall of the hated dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali by the Tunisian revolution. ‘The Socialist’, paper of the Socialist Party (CWI in England and Wales) spoke to two socialists who are campaigning in Tunisia and who sympathise with the politics of the Committee for a Workers’ International.

Can you describe the situation in Tunisia today?

Revolution is a process, not a single act. This process is still continuing, which can be seen by the new wave of protests which has taken place in Tunisia, especially since the beginning of the year.

Every day, new protests against the authorities, new strikes for better social conditions, sit-ins by people expressing their grievances are occurring all over the country.

The anniversary of the revolution has provided a momentum for what seems to be the biggest wave of mobilisations since one year ago, which has taken in some areas an almost ‘insurrectional’ character. In the mining areas around Gafsa, the situation is explosive, with regular strikes and demonstrations, and entire localities being self-run by inhabitants.

A regional general strike has also taken place and lasted five days in the governorate (region) of Siliana, in the south, between 13 and 18 January, to protest against poverty and the social marginalisation of the region.

'Revolution', in Arabic, means a complete, fundamental break from the past; but this has not happened. All these protests show that people have still got much to fight for, that conditions for the majority have not fundamentally changed.

The objective conditions in society that caused the revolutionary upheaval are still present. In many respects daily life for the majority has actually got worse. Unemployment has literally exploded, while this issue was at the heart of people's demands in the first place.

Since 14 January of last year, there have been 107 cases of new self-immolations in the country, with at least six during the first week of this year. Most of them are unemployed people, desperate and ready to do anything to get a job.

There has been no fundamental break from the past system; consequently it is entirely predictable that the mass of people continue to struggle. So it is clear that the revolution – people looking for real change in society, and erupting en masse onto the scene to impose it – is still alive.

After the first stage of the revolution can you draw up a balance sheet of what has been won and what is still to be won?

The first thing to note is that the capitalist class was relying on the old regime of President Ben Ali to defend its interests. When Ben Ali was overthrown, the capitalists were initially destabilised. Faced with a revolution that threatened their social existence, they had to concede important demands especially in the political sphere, in an attempt to restore a certain control.

Under the pressure of the mobilisations, a lot of leading figures in the state machine were removed, the ex-ruling party, Ben Ali's RCD, was dissolved, etc. The movement was so powerful that even the commentators in the capitalist-controlled media were forced to admit that this was a revolution.

However, since the initial revolutionary upsurge, there has been a conscious attempt by the capitalists to concentrate attention solely on questions of political democracy and political representation, but not to concede on the fundamental social foundations of capitalism.

All the elements linked to the capitalist class have deployed efforts to

derail the revolutionary process towards the safe channels of 'legality', towards the old existing constitution and institutions. But it was the revolutionary youth and workers who imposed the election for a new Constituent Assembly, after the second mass occupation of the Kasbah Square.

The majority have not clear objectives in which direction to take society, the political consciousness is quite mixed. The mass of the people are trying to navigate themselves through the daily poverty and corrupt state bureaucracy bearing down on them. However, there is a realisation among many that simply by removing the figurehead of the old regime, their lives have not and will not improve fundamentally.

People are angry and frustrated by the lack of progress. Many lost friends and relatives in the revolution, but see that their sacrifices have been hijacked by the ruling class. Even the martyrs' families have seen their cases denied real justice. A lot of the killers are still running free, including some whose identity is known.

And the people injured by the state's repression in the beginning of the year have been denied proper medical assistance. 90% of the people who were shot have still the bullet in their bodies, because of the lack of serious medical treatment! A lot have lost their jobs, or even their lives, since. In some cases the police have even been sent against them when they were protesting.

The British press has made a lot of the Islamist parties' election victory. How do socialists view it?

The 'moderate' religious party Ennahda was the main winner of December's parliamentary elections. It made gains at the expense of the other parties because it exploited the pressing social issues – poverty and unemployment, etc - of the majority.

Ennahda was also able to convince many voters that the other 'secular' parties were 'anti-religious' and wanted to attack Islam. This was made possible because most secular parties encouraged the political debate to be polarised in such a way that the burning social issues were not really addressed.

Ennahda also bought votes with money from the Qatar regime and elsewhere. Ennahda members promised voters gifts of all sorts, such as sacrificial sheep for the feast of 'Aid al-Adha'. When these didn't materialise there were protests.

It is not so much that Ennahda is a strong force in society; rather it is the case that the other opposition parties are very weak. And Ennahda was

then able to fill in the vacuum.

However, Ennahda will lose support as it fails to deliver in terms of improving the social conditions of the poor. This cannot fail to happen, as Ennahda's policy is nothing but a new version of the old regime's policies. And many people are drawing such a conclusion. In January Ennahda attempted to impose figures associated with the old regime at the head of the public media. This provoked such an outcry that they had to step back.

Already Ennahda has experienced a fall in support in the opinion polls, from 41% to 28%. And a certain part of Ennahda's electoral support is on the streets to protest against the party they voted for in October. That does not mean an automatic drop in support for right wing political Islam in general –as more fundamentalist wings are also trying to step in- but it shows that a significant layer of Ennahda's votes is not based on firm ground.

The workers, through strike action, played a decisive part in the revolution. What is happening now within the workers' movement?

In December 2011, a new national bureau of the UGTT [Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail] was elected. This is significant, as this new leadership is currently in a 'cold war' with the government. Among the 13 members of the new bureau, there are nine who purport to be from a 'Marxist' tradition.

The UGTT is potentially more powerful than any political party in the country, and to an extent the new leadership understands this. Although the UGTT leaders are not revolutionary, and despite coming from a Marxist background, are not relating their day-to-day activities and propaganda to the socialist transformation of society, they are nonetheless much more to the left than the previous leadership and not directly associated with Ben Ali's dictatorial regime as the previous ones were.

A number of them come from a militant background, they know that the crisis of capitalism is worsening the attacks on the working class and are more attuned to the mood of the rank-and-file workers. They are therefore pressurised to speak the 'language of the class struggle' and adopt a more radical stand in relation to the new government.

There are workers' struggles breaking out everywhere in Tunisia at the present time, including some key sectors of the working class, for example in the gas industry where a blockade of the port of Gabès has taken place. The oil sector has also been hit by strike actions. Workers and poor have also been involved in blocking the railways and roads. Figures have been released stating there are on average four road blockades taking place

every day. There have been sit-ins and in some cases hunger strikes, to improve working conditions and to demand more jobs.

These strikes have not only addressed social and economic demands, but have also been political in character – demanding the removal of corrupt officials and managers associated with the old regime, and targeting the new government’s impotence to face with their grievances.

The main challenge is to transform the UGTT into a democratic and fighting body for the organisation of the working class, which also means orientating it towards the massive amount of angry unemployed, and to embrace a positive programme which can challenge the rule of capitalism.

Of course we are not utopian. Without a mass party for working people that can be a lever for achieving a socialist revolution, all sorts of prospects could open. That’s why building such a party is now the most important task for revolutionaries.

The imperialist powers want to showcase Tunisia as a democratic ‘model’ of a capitalist-controlled transition. Imperialism would be panicked if there is a workers’ movement going in the direction of controlling the economy. That is something they want to avoid at all costs because of the consequences for the entire region. This is the reason why there is such an aggressive ideological campaign in the media to attack workers on strike, a campaign aimed at scaring people, saying that strikes and sit-ins are “pushing away investors and destroying jobs”, etc.

But this campaign seems to have little effect on the working class. The capitalists expected that with a new elected government, it will have sufficient authority to bring social stability. The demand from the new President of the Republic, arguing for a “social truce of six months” has reflected this. But it does not work. The continuous pressure put on the government because of the struggles and strikes could result in imperialist countries providing the Tunisian government with more financial support to calm the situation. But their margin of manoeuvre is limited, given the general economic conjuncture.

What role has been played by the left forces in Tunisia?

The left has historically played a central role in many important working class struggles and social gains, including on women’s rights and to provide a public healthcare system.

There are now many organisations on the left. However, the litmus test in Tunisia today is the application of a socialist programme to take the workers’ struggles forward.

The country could experience a Greek-style period of protracted struggle, because of the lack of a mass workers' party with a socialist programme to carry the movement towards challenging the capitalist system.

There can be no permanent solution for society's problems within capitalism. Those forces on the left who argue that a first, 'democratic capitalism' stage needs to be fulfilled before talking of socialism are misleading the working class. Because capitalism is only interested in exploiting workers, not in putting in place a real democracy. The only way out of the impasse is for the working class to achieve socialism. Concretely, a socialist programme must address the questions of a full jobs-programme based on sharing the work and on massive investment in public infrastructure, a decent welfare for all, workers' control on industry and banks... But unfortunately the left does not put forward a clear programme on these issues.

The group sympathising with the CWI in Tunisia demands the non-payment of the country's 'debt' from the old regime, the nationalisation of the banks and of the entire wealth of the ex-ruling clans under democratic control of the working class and the population, and a government based on the workers and on the people who have made the revolution, in order to fulfil these measures. At the moment we argue for the organisation of a general strike as a first step to unite in one powerful show of strength all the people who are struggling in different parts of the country.

What message would you like to give to workers fighting austerity measures and the crisis of capitalism in other countries?

After the revolution the media opened up a bit in Tunisia. So instead of the usual football matches, we were also able to see on TV workers' struggles in Europe, such as in Greece. Greece is to Europe what Tunisia was to the Maghreb and the region, in the sense that these workers' struggles have been hugely inspiring.

In Britain there has been recently a regeneration of the trade unions and workers' strikes after a relatively long period of quiescence. This is very significant, as it also shows the limitations of the rulers' propaganda, and how the situation can be transformed if working people organise and take their fate into their hands.

www.socialistworld.net

Tunisia one year after the revolution - wave of strikes and uprisings

Jorge Martin 30 January 2012

One year after the revolutionary overthrow of Ben Ali, Tunisia faces a wave of strikes, regional uprisings, sit-ins and protests of all sorts. For hundreds of thousands of Tunisian workers and youth who bravely defied the bullets of the dictatorship to get jobs and dignity nothing has fundamentally changed.

It is true that the dictator has gone, but the system which condemns the best of the Tunisian youth to a future of unemployment or emigration still remains. As a matter of fact, for many, the economic situation has only gotten worse.

Formal democratic freedoms, important as they are, have not given the Tunisian poor neither jobs nor bread. Since the beginning of the Tunisian revolution, unemployment has jumped from 600,000 to 850,000 in a country of 11 million inhabitants. In percentage it has gone up from 14% to nearly 20%. In the impoverished regions where the revolution started it is as high as 40 or 50%.

Unemployment is just the tip of the iceberg of a mass of social problems.

A trade union activist from Gafsa explains the reasons for the growing feeling of frustration: "Since the fall of Ben Ali, not a single step has been taken to stem the sharp rise in prices, particularly of bread and medicine, nor to reduce regional inequalities and promote jobs."

In Redeyef, a revolutionary stronghold in the Gafsa mining basin, 62% of graduates are unemployed. Here the masses gathered to celebrate January 5, the anniversary of the beginning of the 2008 (<http://www.marxist.com/revolt-mining-area-gafsa-tunisia.htm>) uprising which preceded the revolution. They are still in struggle, as they are in all the towns of the Gafsa phosphates mining area, where all economic life centres around the Gafsa Phosphates Company (CPG) and the Tunisian Chemical Group (GCT).

The commemoration took place in the headquarters of the UGTT trade union. One of its leaders, jailed in 2008, Adnen Hajji, delivered a fiery speech: "There is no question of abandoning a single one of our legitimate demands! The new government has no other choice, it must listen to us! People of Redeyef! You took the first step in this Tunisian revolution! It is time you reaped the fruits of those dry, harsh and sad years of suffering and poverty!" Those gathered answered his words with the rallying cry of "loyal, loyal to the blood of the martyrs!"

In Redeyef there are still remnants of the situation of dual power which arose during the revolution, when the local mayor fled the city and the workers themselves took over the running of all affairs. There is still no

local mayor, but the people themselves organise all necessary public tasks.

In an attempt to try to appease the thousands of unemployed youth in the region, the two state enterprises in the region, CPG and GCT, have announced the creation of 3,000 new jobs. Over 17,000 applications were received. As the first results of the selection process were published, at the end of November, riots started in most of the towns in the mining basin.

Nobody was pleased with the selection methods used. Applicants that should have been given preference (those with families, sons of retired miners, those with the required university qualifications) had not been admitted. For many, this was the same as under the old regime.

Hundreds of youth came out onto the streets in protest in Mdhilla and Moularès. They set up burning barricades, burnt down buses and cars and attacked the offices of the phosphates company as well as the police headquarters. The authorities declared a curfew between 7pm and 6am in all of the localities in the governorate of Gafsa.

The government was forced to suspend any further announcements of the recruitment process and promised to listen to the demands of the unemployed. A number of them started a sit-in protest.

Finally, on January 5th, three government ministers visited the region. However, they refused to meet the sit-in protestors. One of them, a 40 year old unemployed father of three, Ammar Gharsallah, who had been part of the sit-in for weeks, in desperation, doused himself with gasoline and set himself on fire. A few days later he died. Another three people, one woman and two men committed suicide in the same way the following week, in Djerba and Sfax. It is a clear indication of the desperation facing thousands in Tunisia, when one year after a revolution which was sparked off by an act of self-immolation, more are forced to take the same desperate action to draw attention to their plight.

The protest movement spread to agricultural workers who also joined the hunger strikers in Redeyef on January 9th. This is a significant development as it shows how other sections of society are instinctively attracted and come under the leadership of the organised labour movement, in this case the local UGTT branch which has a long standing revolutionary tradition. In an ever growing movement, miners joined the protest movement on the 12th with some of them also joining the ranks of the hunger strikers. Following the UGTT appeal for a general strike, the whole of Redeyef came to a standstill on January 17 in support of the demands of the movement. Primary and secondary school teachers and high school students joined this mass movement. (SEE PICTURE <http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/images/2012/01/23/120123Feature4Photo1.jpg>)

“Workers from all sectors in Redeyef have the same basic demands for reforms and government intervention,” said local trade union leader Adnen Hajji, adding that the protest was “the product of widespread frustration with the government’s neglect of the community’s pressing needs.” He threatened that if the demands of the Redeyef workers were not met they would “close down Gafsa Phosphate Company and may escalate the protest.”

These were not empty words. After a short truce in which they gave the government a chance to answer them, the strike movement resumed, affecting Redeyef, Om Larayes, Mdhilla and Kaff Eddour in the delegation of Metlaoui. The unemployed youth were at the forefront of this movement blocking trains carrying phosphate products and clashing with the police in Mdhilla. The Gafsa governorate building has been taken over by protestors and the governor has had to seek refuge in a nearby hotel.

Meanwhile, on January 13 another social explosion erupted in the mountain village of Makhtar, with a population of 12,000, in the governorate of Siliana. Faced with a desperate economic situation, with no jobs, no running water, no gas, no healthcare facilities, the people of Makhtar declared a general strike, which took on insurrectionary dimensions. With chopped down trees and tyres they blocked all access roads. “We are rebelling because it is, quite simply, intolerable,” said Ouided Slama, a young English teacher. The protest, which lasted for 6 days, before a truce was agreed with the national government, also spread to other villages in the region, such as Kesra and Sidi Bourouis, as well as Bouarada, where the local unemployed blocked the roads. In Makhtar, the Islamist Ennahda got about 40% of the vote in the Constituent Assembly elections. Their offices in Makhtar are shut, and nobody knows where their local representative is and nobody cares much either.

A similar uprising started in Sidi Makhlof, with a population of 24,000, in the Medenine governorate in the South East, on January 23, when a general strike was declared. Once again, they demand economic development, jobs, healthcare facilities, etc. Negotiations with the regional governor were not successful and the people decided to take him hostage in the offices of the local delegation. In Jendouba, in the North West, unemployed youth also blocked the roads, as they did in Nezfa, in the neighbouring governorate of Beja. The British Gas installations in the Sfax governorate have also been blocked by local unemployed youth demanding jobs.

As well as these local and regional protest movements, which have in some cases acquired insurrectionary characteristics, the wave of strikes

that has shaken the country ever since the overthrow of Ben Ali has continued and even intensified.

Refuse collectors in La Marsa, a coastal city near Tunis, a popular resort with the middle class, have entered the third week of their strike. The workers of the National Sanitation Office have also gone on strike in the regions of Tunis, Manouba, Ben Arous and Ariana. Workers at the National Civil Aviation and Airports Authority have started a 48-hour strike affecting the airports of Tunis-Carthage, Djerba-Zarzis and Tozeur-Nafta, protesting at the refusal of the company to hire subcontracted workers into the main workforce. Workers at the SITEP El Borma oil field also resumed their strike movement on January 23.

These are just some of the strikes which have taken place since the beginning of the year. This formidable wave of strikes which has lasted for a year reflects the newly found confidence of the workers after the revolutionary movement which led to the overthrow of the hated dictator. The workers feel strong and are on the offensive demanding the removal of the old managers, better wages and working conditions, the end to subcontracting, etc. This mood was partially reflected in the UGTT congress in December which elected a new leadership more in tune with the pressure from below, including a number of militants from the trade union left.

In 2011 there were 567 strike movements, involving over 140,000 workers in 340 different companies. The number of strikes was up by 122% in relation to 2010 and the number of days lost is up by 314%.

The elections to the Constituent Assembly and the installation of the new tripartite coalition government has done nothing to stop the strikes. As we explained in an earlier article (<http://www.marxist.com/tunisian-constituent-assembly-elections.htm>), the victory of right-wing Islamist Ennahda in those elections did not represent a shift to the right on the part of the masses which had carried out the revolution. It was more a case of a lack of a serious alternative to address the social and economic problems which affect the majority of Tunisians.

On December 23, the new president Moncef Marzouki made a public appeal for the government to be granted a 6-month social truce. The speech was delivered at a meeting of the UTICA employers' organisation and was aimed at reassuring them and foreign investors. But the workers are in no mood to wait. The Minister of Social Affairs warned that strikes and protests would only further worsen the economic situation and threatened to use "the full force of the law" against protestors. Already the police have been used to remove the sit-in at the British Gas installations

in Sfax.

The government and the bourgeois media have started a propaganda campaign against strikes and protests, blaming strikers for all the problems of the economy and arguing that already 170 foreign companies have decided to close down their operations as a direct result of these movements. However, the same workers and youth who risked their lives and sacrificed dozens of martyrs in the struggle against the seemingly powerful regime of Ben Ali, are not going to be cowed by the threats of this weak government.

A trade union militant in Gafsa, Ammar Amroussia sums up the situation in this way: “Ben Ali might have fallen, but his system is still in place; and if things carry on in this way, there will be a second revolution.”

The whole situation which has developed in the last year in Tunisia is a confirmation of the position defended by the Marxists when the revolution erupted: the social and economic demands of the people cannot be separated from their democratic aspirations, and neither can they be met within the limits of capitalism.

Unfortunately, there was no-one at the time defending this perspective. It is time for the most advanced worker and youth revolutionary activists to draw the necessary conclusion. The only way to solve the pressing needs of the Tunisian masses is through the complete overthrow of the remains of the Ben Ali system, that is, the overthrow of capitalism itself.

www.marxist.com

Economic advice that can hurt the poor

Patrick Bond and Khadija Sharife (The Mercury Eye on Society column)
31 January 2011

Until 27 year-old fruit seller Mohamed Bouazizi – honoured by the London Times as 2011’s ‘person of the year’ – committed suicide by immolation in the provincial town of Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia was packaged as a success story.

In 2008, dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was embraced by International Monetary Fund (IMF) managing director Dominique Strauss-Kahn: ‘Economic policy adopted here is a sound policy and is the best model for many emerging countries.’

Ben Ali's regime was 'best model' for two other Washington institutions: the State Department just a few blocks from the IMF headquarters, and the Pentagon. From within Hillary Clinton's lair, as WikiLeaks revealed in 2010, 'The United States and Tunisia have an active schedule of joint military exercises. US security assistance historically has played an important role in cementing relations.'

(Clinton is a leading candidate for World Bank president, to be chosen in mid-2012.)

Also in 2010, the IMF celebrated Ben Ali's commitment 'to reduce tax rates on businesses and to offset those reductions by increasing the standard Value Added Tax (VAT) rate,' which hurts poor people most. The IMF advised the tyrant to 'contain subsidies of food and fuel products.'

While squeezing the poor, the IMF diplomatically turned a blind eye to widespread corruption by Ben Ali and his wife's notorious Trabelsi family, the two families' extreme level of business concentration, the regime's reliance upon murderous security forces to defend Tunisian crony capitalism, and the hedonistic lifestyle for which Ben Ali's clan had become famous.

The informal sector is vibrant in Tunisia, about half the size of the formal Gross Domestic Product, but doesn't contribute to the 18 percent VAT rate. So like in South Africa where SARS has just announced a record four million taxpayers, the pressure is intense to bring survivalist home-production businesses into the net.

Bouazizi killed himself when during a police attack, his fruit cart was overturned and his goods confiscated. He had borrowed \$200 the night before to buy the produce, and he supported a family of four. He died of the burn wounds last January 4.

Before long, another self-immolation occurred, politically, when the notorious sex pest Strauss-Kahn allegedly raped a 32-year old Guinean maid, Nafissatou Diallo, who fought back with a charge that, ultimately, could not be prosecuted.

But the legacies represented by both immolations continue: high-risk pro-dictatorial neoliberalism and courageous popular resistance. A month ago, Strauss-Kahn's successor Christine Lagarde, also a former French finance minister, visited Abuja to offer neoliberal advice to Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan on fuel subsidy cuts.

Lagarde was effusive about Jonathan. 'I was extremely impressed', she

said, 'with the energy and pace at which he wants to transform the economy.'

However, as for Nigeria's very low fuel price, as the BBC reported, 'The IMF has long urged Nigeria's government to remove the subsidy, which costs a reported \$8 billion a year.' Lagarde also emphasized this 'reform', and the result was nearly Tunisian in scale: a national popular struggle, Occupy Nigeria, that shook the country to the point of Jonathan's overthrow before civilized society – the trade unions – called off protests, agreeing to a government fuel price concession.

The preceding paragraphs are based upon leftist ideological argumentation, but this is not the only narrative about Tunisia. The Third World's most celebrated neoliberal – more so than even Trevor Manuel – is Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto. He blames the series of revolutionary uprisings in North Africa on limited access to capital.

In an interview last year, de Soto told us, 'Bouazizi immolated himself in a terrible suicide because he never got a right to the land his house was built on, which could have been used for credit to develop his business, for example, to buy a truck. He was never able to get an official right to put a stall in a public place and so, he never had a property right to it. The only way to get the police to accept it was to pay off a bribe of several dinars every day. When they take that away from him, the space, he knows he does not have much of a future anymore.'

De Soto also blames Islam for the inability of Bouazizi's mother to benefit from belated municipal recognition of his house: 'When he died, she wasn't able to pass the title from his name to her name, because the paper that recognises the property is hard to transfer and in the process, someone could do very dirty tricks. Should she wish to sell it, to rent it, to use it as a guarantee to get capital for credit, she's got a problem. The kind of papers that the Municipality dishes out are not good enough for the bank. So women are not protected because of Shariah laws of the country, where property would go to the eldest son, even if the son is not able to benefit from the asset.'

But one fatal flaw in his argument, as shenanigans at Muhammed Yunus' Grameen Bank and recent suicides by 250,000 over-indebted Andhra Pradesh farmers suggest, is that microcredit can just as easily add to the woes of ordinary people, amplifying the deeper economic contradictions.

Moreover, Tunisia's system was structured to diminish the power of citizens in order to sustain a dictatorship, with an estimated 17 percent of one major Tunisian bank in the hands of Ben Ali's son.

Thus, the poverty innate to the IMF's best model, Tunisia, cannot be solved by paper rights aiming to integrate poor people into a rotting 'formal' economy locked up by political and military elites. The same is true in Egypt, where repression by the post-Mubarak military against progressive democrats has worsened this month. The majority of parliament represented by Islamic parties is not yet sufficiently powerful to support the democrats – if that is their wont.

At the UKZN Centre for Civil Society tomorrow, we address this dilemma when one of Tunisia's main political strategists and progressive Muslim leaders, Said Ferjani, presents a seminar at 12:30pm at the top of Memorial Tower Building at Howard College. (All are welcome – send a 'Please call me' to 083 425 1401 begin_of_the_skype_highlighting 083 425 1401 end_of_the_skype_highlighting if you want more information.)

Ferjani is advisor to Tunisian prime minister Hamadi Jebali and spokesperson for the Al-Nahda party. He was arrested and tortured 25 years ago, spent time in exile, and is visiting South Africa courtesy of the Afro-Middle East Centre in Johannesburg.

The re-emergence of political Islam in the Middle East and North Africa requires new narratives given the revolutionary alliance in several countries with democratic civil society, against Washington-backed dictators.

If the likes of Lagarde continue their visits to African capitals – including Pretoria earlier this month when who knows what advice she chummily proffered to Pravin Gordhan – then we need to hear more from Tunisians, Egyptians, Nigerians and so many others about how underlying causes of revolt, especially inequality and neoliberalism, can fuse opposition from diverse traditions.

After all, no country exemplifies neoliberalism, inequality and multifaceted protest – and resulting political confusion – as acutely as ours.

Patrick Bond and Khadija Sharife are researchers at the UKZN Centre for Civil Society.

Ukwelulekwa ngezomnotho okungalimaza abampofu
NguPatrick Bond no Khadija Sharife Yahunyushwa nguFaith ka-Manzi
(The Mercury)

31 January 2011

ITunisia ibiyaziwa njengezwe eliyimpumelelo, kodwa lokho kuvele kwanyamalala ngenkathi uMohammed Bouazizi oneminyaka 27 odayisa izithelo - futhi osanda kuhlonishwa iphephandaba iLondon Times ‘njengomuntu ovelele wonyaka’ ngo2011- ezibulala njengomnikelo wokushiswa edolobheni lesifundazwe iSidi Bouzid.

Ngo 2008, umbusi oyindlovukayiphikiswa uZine El Abidine Ben Ali wayesingethwe ngumqondisi jikelele weInternational Monetary Fund (IMF)

uDominique Strauss-Kahn: ‘Umgomo wezomnotho othathwe lapha ungumgomo onesisindo futhi uyisibonelo esihle kakhulu emazweni asafufusa.’ Umbuso kaBen Ali ‘wawuyisibonelo esihle kakhuluregime’ kwezinye izizinda ezimbili zaseWashington: uMnyango Wezwe (State Department)oyibangana uma usuka kwekomkhulu lweIMF, kanye nePentagon. Lapho ngaphakathi kuyidleke sikaHilary Clinton, njengoba iWikileaks yaveza ngo2010, ‘IMelika kanye neTunisa banohlelo olumatasatasa lokuhlanganyela lezokuviliyela kwezombutho. Usizo lokuqapha lwaseMelika ngokomlando linendima ebalulekile eliyidlalile ukuqinisa ubudlelwane.’

(UClinton uhamba phambili emkhankasweni wokuba umongameli weBhange

Lomhlaba (World Bank), ozokhethwa phakathi nonyaka ka2012.) Futhi ngo2012, iIMF yajabulela ukuzinikelela kukaBen Ali ‘ukwehlisa inani lentela kumahwebi futhi wenza lokho kwehlisa ngokwenyusa inani lentengo ekhokhwa ngumphakathi (Value Added Tax – VAT),’ okulimaza kakhulu abantu abampofu. I-IMF inxusa ikhuthaza londlovukayiphikiswa ukuthi ‘ahlale elawula njalo izimali ezingaxhasa imikhiqizo yokudla kanye namafutha.’

Ngenkathi ekhama abampofu, iIMF yona ibibheka ngakwelinye uhlangothi

izibe inkohlakalo esabalele eyenziwz nguBen Ali kanye neyomndeni wakwaTrabelsi kankosikazi wakhe odume kabi kakhulu, lemindeni yomibili

iyona ehweba kakhulu, futhi lombuso uzimelele kubaqaphi abangababulali

bezombutho abavikela ubungxiwankulu bobubhululu baseTunisia, kanye nempilo yokuzibhekelela luzanelise wona uzalo lwakaBen Ali eselidume ngakho kakhulu.

Abadayisi abazimele abaphantayo bakhuthele kakhulu eTunisia, futhi ingxenye yemali eholwa izwe lonke, kodwa abangayiyisi kumaphesenti angu-18 wenani leVAT. Ngakho-ke njengaseNingizimu Afrika lapho

iSARS

isanda kubika ukuthi kunabakhokhi bentela abayizigidi ezine, ingcindezi inkulu ukuthi kulethwa imikhiqizo yasekhaya yokuziphilisa imbandakanywe nokuhweba okujwayelekile.

UBouazizi wazibulala kuketulwa inqola yakhe yezithelo nezimpahla zakhe zithathwa ngenkathi kuhlasela amaphoyisa. Wayeboleke u\$200(amadola) ebusukwini bangayizolo ukuze athenge lempahla, futhi wayondla umndeni wabantu abane. Washona ngenxa yezilonda zokusha ngoJanuwari 4 nyakenye.

Singakakdluli nje isikhathi eside, nomuye futhi wazibulala njengomnikelo wokushiswa, ngokwezombusazwe, ngenkathi isikhohlakali esidume kabi sezocansi uStrauss-Kahn kuthiwa udlwengule isisebenzi sasendlini saseGunie esineminyaka engu-32, uNafissatou Diallo, futhi owalwa ngokuthi naye abeke umangali icala, okwathi ekugcineni, wangashushiswa.

Kodwa umlando wolokhukuzibulala okubili kuyaqhubeka: ubungxiwankulu obunengozi obuxhasa umbuso wobundlovuyangena kanye nesibindi sabaningi ababhikishayo bemelene nokucindezelwa. Ngenyanga edlule, othathe indawo kaStrauss-Kahn uChristine Lagarde, naye futhi owayengungqongqoshe wezezimali eFrance, wavakashela eAbuja ukuyonkize iseluleko sokubusa ngobungxiwankulu kumongameli waseNigeria uGoodluck Jonathan mayelana nokwehlisa imali exhasa ukukhiqizwa kwamafutha. ULagarde wayejabule kakhulu ngoJonathan. 'Ngithakase kakhulu', esho, 'ngomfutho kanye negxathu afuna ngalo ukushintsha ezomnotho.' Kodwa-ke, njengoba amanani amafutha ephansi kakhulu eNigeria, njengoba kwakubika iBBC, "I-IMF kudala inxenxa ukuthi uhulumeni waseNigeria uyisuse imali yokuxhasa, okubiza u\$8 wezigidigidi ngonyaka. 'ULagarde futhi wagcizelela ukuthi 'lolushintsho', kanye nomphumela wawuthi awufane neTunisia ngokulingana: njengoba sekunomzabalazo onedumela kazwelonke, wokuthatha iNigeria(Occupy Nigeria), owanyakazisa izwe kangangoba kwaze kwacishwe kwaketulwa umbuso kaJonathana ngaphambi kokuba imiphakathi – izinhlangano zabasebenzi – zathi awuyekwe lombhikisho, kwavunyelwana nohulumeni ngokuthi kungaqedwa ukwehliswa kwamanani amafutha.

Lezizindima ezingaphambili zizimelele enkulumeni mpikiswano yemakhomanisi, kodwa lolu akulona udaba olukhona kuphela ngeTunisia.

Ungxiwankulu othandwa kakhulu Emazweni aseNingizimu (Third World)

ngaphezu kukaTrevor Manuel – umhlaziyi wezomnotho wasePeru
uHernando

de Soto. Ugxeka ukuvukelwa kwemibuso eNyakatho Afrika athi kudalwa
ukungatholakali ngokwanele kwezimali.

Kukhulunywa naye ngonyaka odlule, ude Soto wasitshela ukuthi,

‘UBouazizi wazinikela njengomnikelo wokushiswa ezibulala kabuhlungu
ngoba engazange alithole ilungelo kumhlaba ayakhe khona umuzi wakhe,
owawungasetshenziswa njengesibambiso sesikweletu ukkuthuthukisa
ibhizinisi lakhe, njengesiboniso-nje, ukuthi athenge itrucki. Akazange
athole ilungelo elisemthethweni ukuthi azakhele ixhokovana lokudayisa
endaweni esemphakathini ngakho-ke, akazange abe nelungelo londawo.

Okuyiyona ndlela eyodwa yokwenza ukuthi amaphoyisa amamukele
ukuwathenga ngamadinars ambalwa zonke izinsuku. Uma sebemphuca
lokho,

indawo, uyazi ukuthi akanalutho ngekusasa.’

UDe Soto futhi ugxeka inkolo yamaSulumane ngokuhluleka ukuthi
umama

kaBouazizi atholwe ukwaziwa ngumasipala ngendlu yendodana yakhe:
‘Ngenkathi eshona, akakwazanga ukudlulisa ubunikazi bomuzi ebususela
egameni lendodana yakhe eliyisa kwelakhe, ngoba iphepha elibhekelela
indawo kunzima ukulidlulisela ngakho-ke, kukhona ongenza inkohlakalo.

Umangase afise ukuyidayisa, noma ukuyirentisa, noma ukuyisebenzisa
njengesiqinisekiso ukuthi athole imali yokubolekisa, unenkinga.

Izinhlobo zamaphepha uMasipala awanikezayo awalilungele neze
ibhange.

Ngakho-ke abesifazane ngoba imithetho yeShariah yezwe, lapho indawo
iya kwinkosana, nmangabe inkosana ingeke ikwazi ukuzuza
kuleyondawo.’

Kodwa manje iphutha elikhulu kulenkulumo yakhe, njengabakhohlisi
ebhange iGrameen likaMuhammed Yunus kanye nokuzibulala okusanda
kwenzeka kwabalimi abangu250 000 ababekweleta kakhulu baseAndra

Pradesh kukhombisa, ukuqhubeka uboleke abantu imali abampofu
abangakwazi ukuthola imali ebolekisayo emabhange kwandisa
izinhlupheko

zabantukazana, futhi kwenze kugqame kakhulu ukwahlukana
ngezomnotho.

Futhi-ke, indlela yaseTunisia yenziwa ngendlela enciphisa amandla
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Ekugcineni phela, alikho izwe elikhombisa kakhulu ubungxiwankulu, ukungalingani kanye nezinhlobonhlobo zomibhisho – okuholela ekudidekeni ngezombusazwe – elidlula elethu.

UPatrick Bond no Khadija Sharife bangabacwaningi eUKZN eCentre for Civil Society.

Raul Zibechi 30 January 2012

Chilean students question the education system as commercial and elitist because it reproduces existing social inequities and makes them worse. But they are not just asking questions: They are practicing the kind of education they have spent years dreaming about and struggling to obtain.

“If workers can manage a factory, we can manage the school,” says Cristóbal, 17, as he flashes a smile. Cristóbal is a student at the Luis Galecio Corvera A-90 high school in the Santiago borough of San Miguel. The school is among the 200 in the city that students have occupied. But on September 26, they decided to follow the example of the workers of Cerámicas Zanón, the Argentine factory workers took over and began running 10 years ago.

“Things were getting complicated because the occupation was weakening,” Cristóbal says. “It was clear to us that it wasn’t enough to just criticize our education. We had to do something more, but we didn’t know where to start until we heard that the Zanón workers were giving a talk at the University of Chile. We went to listen to them and when we came back we started running the school ourselves.”

After the takeover, a majority of students—with the enthusiastic support of many parents—returned to school. Some of the teachers joined them. “When I saw that my children were getting up and going to school without having to wake them up, that they were excited about going, I understood that they were doing something important, something that adds up to a different kind of education,” says a mother at the basketball court, where the November sun shines brightly.

Non-teaching workers took refuge in a union resolution that authorizes them to not work without school management. “The unions don’t work if there’s no boss,” Cristóbal noted with irony, prompting bursts of laughter in the courtyard. In just a few months the secondary students have learned more than they did during years of monotonous classes. They take the initiative for their studies, propose topics, show up on time, and are delighted not to wear the government-mandated school uniform they call “penguin suits.”

The student conflict was a tremendous jolt to Chilean society, as reflected even by public opinion polls. When the newspaper *La Nación* asked a

group of poll takers to name the best thing about 2011, 63 percent answered the student and environment mobilizations, compared with just 17 percent who chose the University of Chile soccer team, which won the South American cup at the end of November. Just 3 percent chose the Cervantes Prize, the major Spanish-language literary prize, which was awarded to writer Nicanor Parra.

Chile's most prominent intellectuals agreed with the editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Victor Hugo de la Fuente, who wrote: "In five months of massive mobilizations, Chilean students have changed the face of the country." "The Manifesto of Historians [a document designed to answer some of the basic questions about the protests and signed by some of the nation's leading intellectuals and academics]," goes even further, and maintains that "we are looking at a revolutionary, anti-neoliberal movement" that is restoring politics to civil society and re-knitting the strands of history which were interrupted by the 1973 coup.

A society in motion

Chile has not seen such a vast wave of protest since the 1980s and the massive mobilizations against the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship. The year began with solid resistance in the south, around the city of Punta Arenas, and protests against increased gas prices. The movement was so strong that the government had to negotiate with the Citizens Assembly of Magallanes and eventually reversed the price hikes.

Then in May more than 30,000 people protested in Santiago against the HidroAysén project to build five mega dams in Patagonia (a project supported by both the government and the opposition) without consulting the public. Never before had an environmental action united so many people, an indication that change was underway.

Soon after, victims of the 2010 earthquake began to demonstrate. Most of them were still homeless, spending their second winter in highly precarious conditions. As they pointed out, highways used to transport goods had been repaired, but not the homes of the poor and working class.

At the end of April, students began to mobilize. On June 30, 200,000 marched along the Alameda, Santiago's most important thoroughfare. From then on, there were dozens of marches. "Young people were moved by a festive spirit," according to historian Mario Garcés. There were no political party banners or uniform signs. Above all, there were no marches to familiar state symbols—Congress and the President's Office, the usual destinations for unions and political parties.

In the following weeks, students, especially high school students, occupied the television network Chilevision to protest coverage of the

mobilizations. They also occupied political party headquarters, both the ultra-rightist UDI and the opposition Socialist Party.

The most important moment occurred on August 4th. Police repression was very strong and 874 students were detained. Throughout the country people responded to the students, with cacerolazos [beating pots and pans in protest] and massive, spontaneous demonstrations in the major cities—they even staged a national strike like they did against Pinochet. President Sebastian Piñera's popularity had fallen to 22 percent by the end of September.

But what happened in the barrios on the night of August 4th is an indication of the true strength of the movement. Camila Silva, a member of Diatriba, a “militant pedagogy” collective, lives in a lower-middle-class barrio called La Florida. “When I went out to the first caceroleo with my compañero, there were 100 people. The next time, young people from the cultural center brought their batteries and an electric guitar, soccer fans came with their Colo Colo banners and there were groups with Mapuche flags, something that you only see when there is a big win in soccer.”

Camila highlights the enthusiasm of the crowd, the way neighbors—especially women—organized spontaneously. “That organization is like a community, and it wakes up your memory. People shouting, ‘And he’s going to fall!’—the same thing they shouted during the protests against Pinochet. There was dancing until two or three in the morning, on every street corner there was a group, throughout the barrio, in many barrios of Santiago.”

“The left thought that repression had destroyed these kinds of social ties. At a certain point those relationships became invisible, but when something really big happens, they resurface, because there is still a latent memory of them. And people help each other again. The same thing happened with earthquake,” adds Cristian Olivares, another student in the Diatriba collective.

On the outskirts of the city, men and women who hadn't marched since the “return” of democracy in 1989 took to the streets again. And they did so in the ways that those who have little often do: singing, dancing, sharing food and drink and turning a protest into a party. In fact, this was a vast mobilization against social inequality in a country that the United Nations Development Programme says is among the 15 most unequal nations in the world.

Unequal Education

Ever since the neoliberal reforms of the Pinochet regime, education has been a commercial product. Contributions from students and their families

finance 75 percent of the education system; just 25 percent comes from the state. At the university level, seventy percent of students take out loans and go into debt to finance their education.

Education is also highly segmented. According to Garcés, there is one system for the rich, another for the middle class, and a third for the poor. At the secondary level (high school), 7 percent attend private schools, which cost between 300 and 500 dollars a month. The middle class (about 50 percent of all secondary students), attend semi-private or government-subsidized schools operated with a voucher system. They pay a small amount (from 40 dollars a month), and financing is shared with the state. The poorest students attend “municipal schools,” which have few resources.

The semi-private sector is dominated by a group of small businessmen who profit from state vouchers. They are authorized to have up to 45 students in a classroom, while private schools cannot have more than 35. Forty percent of those who enroll in municipal or semi-private high schools cannot comprehend what they read; 70 percent do not score high enough on entrance exams to attend university.

At the university level, social inequality translates into indebtedness; there is no free, universal access to a university education. The deregulation of the system during the military dictatorship (1973 – 1980) also led to an increase in the number of private universities. There are now 60 private institutions, where the cost of a degree varies between \$150 a month for social sciences and \$1,200 a month for engineering or medicine. To finance their educations students have to obtain bank loans and go into debt.

Faced with this situation, students are proposing that natural resources are nationalized and used to finance public education. There is a precedent: Pinochet did not privatize the Chilean state copper company, Codelco, and by law part of its profits are used to finance the armed forces. Not surprisingly the student movement has support among the middle class, even in the some of the more well-to-do neighbors of Santiago.

Student control of schools

A half hour from Santiago, the borough of San Miguel reflects the various levels of “middle class”: from those who live in high-rises along broad avenues to those who live in precarious little houses. Formerly one of the largest boroughs of the city, its poorest barrios (such as La Victoria) have been torn away in an effort to turn San Miguel into a strictly middle class neighborhood. Nevertheless, it continues to be plagued with social contrasts.

Secondary School A-90 started the year with 179 students, but a decade ago there were 4,000. Students left to go to subsidized schools, which are reputed to offer a better education, although their evaluations suggest otherwise. The borough's socialist mayor, Julio Palestro, is one of the mayors who have supported the privatization of education. In 2009 he closed a public school where 2,000 students were enrolled.

At the assembly in the gymnasium young people explain that their school ranks number 14 on the list for "academic risk." Asked what that means, they smile: "It refers to the risk that we will become criminals." Most of their parents work for little more than minimum wage (180,000 Chilean pesos, around \$350), primarily as construction laborers.

Maybe that explains why the management is obsessed with discipline. "It's as if we were locked up, this is practically a jail," says Yergo, a third-year student. Camilo, a second-year student, is happy not having to wear a uniform. "It's like a military doctrine, everyone with their crew cuts, their little ties, shirt tucked in. Don't do this, don't do that. And now [that the students run the school], you can just be who you are. You can just freely express yourself, you come here to be educated, not to be militarized."

"The assembly is the control center," Cristóbal explains. "All students participate and at times it's open to teachers. We have watch duty and volunteers come in to make meals. Teachers teach, but they also learn from the students. At the beginning we had classes subject by subject, but later we saw that parceling out knowledge wasn't the real way to learn, and we all got together for each subject. Some [students] explained to others, and the education became cooperative. That changes the way you relate to the subject and to the school."

Just as workers who take over a factory change the way work is organized, students who took over their schools changed the "curricular boundaries." Students need to know their rights, says Cristóbal, so they offer classes on the Constitution. "Philosophy, for example, lends itself to analyzing mobilizations and what is happening in the world; we begin to see that students work better if they are more interested."

Juan Francisco, a philosophy teacher, agrees with his student. "All the student discussions have led them to reflect on the structure of power in Chile." That's why they analyze the constitution in his classes. Often they hold workshops, which furthers participation. Weekly assemblies have been incorporated into the curriculum.

The relationships between students and teachers have shifted. As hierarchies melted, relationships became more cooperative and supportive.

In the classroom, they sit in a circle. The teacher is someone who helps, but is not above the rest. Eliana Lemus, a teacher of biology, chemistry, and physics, and principal of the school, maintains that discipline is much greater than it used to be, perhaps because it is not imposed and there is a desire to be together and share the experience.

One of the most notable accomplishments of the student movement is the effect it has had on the barrios, where it has increased social organization. At public school A-90, the parents association now supports the student takeover and control of the school. Cacerolazos in San Miguel led to “territorial assemblies,” where neighbors go to discuss problems in the barrio, as well as general problems such as education. Similar groups have been reported in other Santiago barrios, with up to 200 neighbors in attendance.

But not everything has been positive. Several teachers say they have been threatened and beaten by colleagues who do not agree with the takeover. The socialist mayor, a strong opponent of the movement, beat up Cristóbal Espinoza, a student and spokesman for A-90.

The future of those without a future

The 2011 student movement is the third such movement Chile has experienced in the last decade. In 2000 secondary students took to the streets to demand transportation, in what was called the “mochilazo” or the “backpackers’ movement.” In 2006 there were large demonstrations and schools were occupied, leading to the resignation of the Minister of Education and a partial modification of the education law.

The “Penguin Revolution,” named for the official school uniform of the protesting junior high students, was the first successful movement of the democracy. It was as massive as it was innovative; decisions were made in assemblies, with direct participation and a lack of hierarchy. But for Mario Garcés, “the 2006 secondary school movement was co-opted or trapped in the halls of La Moneda [the seat of the national government] and fell through institutional cracks.” President Michelle Bachelet created a commission of experts, with little student participation. They drafted a new law, but, nevertheless, did not remove the profit motive from the educational system.

This time around, however, the movement is not limited to students, nor is it exclusively focused on education. Chile is going through a crisis of legitimacy brought on by the inability of the political system inherited from the dictatorship to meet social demands. As the “Manifesto of Historians” points out, society is debating again, questioning top-down authority and enacting “forms of direct and decentralized democracy.”

This “politics of the streets” shows a “vocation for power” that questions the way the transition to democracy has taken place, a transition “alienated from social movements,” according to Garcés. Not only are people returning to the streets, they are also doing another kind of politics, broadening the movement, reaching out to the poor in ways that the movement in 2006 did not.

Finally, new practices form new people. Marcela Moya, an English teacher at A-90, points out, “the articulate fluidity the students have when they speak out, their self-discipline.” This is a personal evolution that is not all about the individual, but instead is collective and political. That suggests changes that are far more profound than what we see on the surface: “This movement has given rise to individuals who I know are going to be 100 percent committed to the society of the future, because they themselves have made that future possible.”

www.zcommunications.org

Raúl Zibechi is an international analyst for Brecha of Montevideo, Uruguay, lecturer and researcher on social movements at the Multiversidad Franciscana de América Latina, and adviser to several social groups. He is a columnist and also writes the monthly “Zibechi Report” for the Americas Program.

Upturn in class struggles across Europe

Euro-zone crisis deepens

Finghín Kelly, Socialist Party (CWI in Ireland)

27 January 2012

The International Executive Committee (IEC) of the Committee for a Workers’ International (CWI) met from 17 to 22 January 2011, in Belgium, with over 33 countries represented from Europe, Asia, Latin America and Africa.

Following our first IEC meeting report on the world situation, Finghín Kelly reports on the crucial developments in Europe.

Last year, Europe saw a sharp upturn in class struggles, with significant mobilisations and protest movements taking place. Europe also saw the Occupy and Indignados movements sweep the continent. It was in this context and the context of economic, political and social crisis, that the IEC meeting discussed European perspectives, which was introduced by Tony Saunois and summed up by Clare Doyle, both from the CWI International Secretariat.

The ruling classes across Europe have been implementing vicious austerity programmes in an attempt to make the working class pay for the crisis in capitalism. Reforms that were won after decades of struggle, such as pension rights, welfare, labour conditions and social spending, are now under fierce attack. This process is eliminating all of the reforms and conquests made by the working class in the post war period. It is an answer to the reformist ideas of the post war period at a time of economic expansion, which have given way to a turning back of the clock in terms of living standards and the welfare state. This does not mean that reformist ideas will not emerge again

The deepening of the Eurozone crisis, to which capitalism has been wholly incapable of responding, is a great illustration of the instability and fragility of the capitalists' position. In response to this, and the growing fightback which working people have inevitably mounted in the face of the banks' and markets' agenda, governments have increasingly turned to authoritarian, anti-democratic or methods of "parliamentary Bonapartism", with an increase in repression and undermining of "democratic" institutions.

Austerity attacks are evident throughout Europe; contributors to the discussion highlighted the nature of the cuts in each country and the revolt and resistance they have provoked. The austerity and the response to it were particularly acute in Greece. Contributions from Greek participants at the IEC meeting highlighted the explosive situation in the country. Greece has experienced 14 general strikes, including two 48 hour general strikes, over the last 2 years.

What austerity means for working people in Greece was vividly outlined by several speakers. Living standards have collapsed, with whole sections of society, including parts of the middle classes, ruined and facing impoverishment. There is mass unemployment, with youth unemployment now close to 50%. Surveys show that 91% of households faced a severe cut in income - the average cut being 30%. Now, 78% of household now have difficulties in meeting their needs. This has led to tragic examples of families giving up their children for adoption.

Emigration is a huge issue in many countries; Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Greece, in particular, are seeing mass youth emigration. As well as having devastating social consequences, it also creates complications for mass struggle and can act as a temporary 'safety valve' for capitalism, as often the most energetic layers are taken out of the struggle.

Social movements

The IEC heard many reports of the social movements in Greece, including the non payment movement against a new household tax, and other

campaigns against road tolls and bus and metro fares following massive hikes. The IEC also heard reports from the movement against a refuse landfill in a Greek town which is in open revolt against the authorities .

The significant movements were not confined to Greece; Portugal has experienced its biggest general strike since 1974. Britain and Northern Ireland also saw an historically large public sector strike called in opposition to coalition government attacks against pensions. Between 1.5 and 2 million workers took action, which was the largest single strike since the 1926 General Strike. Belgium also experienced large mobilisations and a public sector general strike in December and now faces a general strike on 30 January in response to austerity by the new government.

Spain was rocked by mass movements, which saw millions of workers and youth in struggle, a movement which played a key role in toppling the government of Zapatero.

As part of this, Spain saw the development of the Indignados movement, which took inspiration from the revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East and in turn spread across the world and fed into the Occupy movement. The IEC heard many reports from these movements .

These movements have been an important manifestation of radicalised youth that are suffering from high unemployment and feeling the brunt of austerity. In Spain, unemployment is at 21%, with youth unemployment now at 50%.

The “Occupy” movement has come as a first response by many young and working class people to this historical crisis. It is an extremely significant and important movement which has gone deeper and had more effect than the anti-capitalist movements of the last decade. This movement contains elements of the “social movements”, which emerged throughout Latin America during previous decades as struggles were built from below to fight in the interests of key sectors of society. As with these movements, the question of linking up of the Occupy movement with the brewing battles of the organised working class to build a force capable of changing society, is decisive. It is necessary to link the social movements to the movements of the working class. CWI comrades in Brazil have faced a similar situation and fought for the formation of the new trade union centre, Conlutas, which included the social movements while based on the organised working class.

Anti-capitalist mood

The movement represents a developing anti-system and anti-capitalist mood. In many cases, the movement has a lack of clear alternative of what

to replace capitalism with. Another significant feature of these movements is that, despite having the active participation of only a minority at the moment, there is widespread support for the movements amongst the working class.

There was some discussion about the presence of an 'anti-party' mood in these movements. This mood reflects scepticism and even hostility towards the established political parties. Marxists must have a dialogue with these movements and enter into a discussion with the movement about an alternative to capitalism, making the case for socialism and to link the movements of the organised working class and communities, defending the idea of the need for a political instrument for the working class to assist in the struggle for socialism.

The developing consciousness of different sections of society, and the working class, in particular, was discussed at the IEC. Many workers still hold out hope that reformist or Keynesian policies could overcome the crisis, while others are coming to see that capitalism is in a dead end.

The 'lesser evilism' seen in the election or success in polls of social democratic parties was also discussed. This does not reflect deep illusions in these parties but more a hope against hope that they may lessen the effect of austerity measures. The support for these parties can be eroded very quickly. This seen in Ireland, where a Fine Gael/Labour coalition was elected last February with a massive majority, in hope that they would 'burn bondholders'. But these hopes have been dashed by the cuts policies of the new coalition government.

The question of lesser evilism has been raised in a number of countries, such as France, where the "Socialist" Party may defeat Sarkozy this year (especially following the loss of France's triple A rating), and is closely bound up with the lack of mass alternatives to the left of the established parties. The failure of the NPA in France to capitalise and develop as a mass point of reference in a context of growing radicalisation was also key to this. In Spain, this same factor led to the coming to power of the PP right-wing, who despite not massively increasing their support, were turned to by many to deliver a blow to the PSOE government, which was massacred in November's elections.

Speakers outlined how a relatively low level of socialist consciousness among the mass of the working class is a key factor in limiting the mass opposition movements. This is undergoing a change and we can expect leaps forward in class understanding as struggles develop, and this will greatly widen the appeal of socialism. The idea and name of "socialism" has been stained, both by Stalinist regimes and a series of "Socialist" governments in Southern Europe which have introduced the austerity

programmes. This reinforces the importance of the role of genuine socialists and Marxists, in explaining and popularising a socialist alternative based on democratic public ownership and control of society's key resources and industries through a workers' government.

Role of unions

The role played by the tops of the trade unions and the left parties was identified as a factor in holding back the development of mass radical consciousness. Where union leaders have called strike action it has usually been done through 'gritted teeth' and only after massive pressure from below. In some cases, unions have been largely emptied out of activists and are not attractive poles of attraction for radicalised youth and the unemployed. Some of the union apparatuses have in reality become "yellow" or "corporate" organisations acting as a arm of the employers. This is a complication for the struggle. It is an essential task for militant activists to fight to build opposition groups in the unions and try to reclaim the trade unions. Socialists do not adopt an ultra left or sectarian approach to the trades unions but need also to ready for splits and the formation of new union organisations.

The failure of new left parties and formations to fully capitalise on the situation was discussed at the IEC. Many have failed to be attractive to radicalised sections of youth and have not been active in struggles. They failed to radically grow in membership, despite in some cases gaining some good electoral results and opinion poll showings .

It is clear that the economic crisis is intensifying internationally; Europe and the euro currency is at the heart of this crisis . A major rupture of the euro is posed and with it the potential reconfiguration of the EU. How this crisis could develop and the consequences of it were discussed in-depth at the IEC meeting in detail.

The downgrades by the ratings agencies show that they have no faith in the austerity programmes offering a way out of the crisis. The question of default is still very much posed, the 'markets' and many capitalist commentators indicate that default by Greece and Portugal is a distinct immediate possibility. This would be the first default by a Western country in 70 years.

Future of euro?

The breakup of the euro would have huge consequences for the European and world economy. It is estimated that 1 million jobs would be lost in Germany alone and German GDP would be lowered by 25%. The German and other ruling capitalist classes will therefore do all they can to save the euro. Eurobonds or an increased role for the ECB is put forward by many capitalist commentators as a way out of the crisis and some on the left

support these measures. This was discussed in the meeting by many contributors. The different capitalist powers will act to protect their own national interests. German capitalism does not want to see the use of Eurobonds at the current stage. However they could be driven in that direction by the pressure of events and in a desperate bid to save the European economy from disaster. But even this would not be a long term or even medium term solution to the crisis.

The increased tendency for the by-passing of 'normal' parliamentary democratic processes and the erosion of democratic rights was also highlighted and discussed by several speakers at the meeting. Last year, saw the imposition of 'technocratic' governments in Italy and in Greece, when the markets and the EU powers lost faith in the ability of the existing governments in these countries to successfully carry out huge austerity cuts. The Italian government that was installed was, in reality, a government of the bankers as every member of the cabinet has a background in or close connections to the big banks and financial institutions.

There has also been increased intervention by the European commission in many countries; this is seen very clearly in the so-called 'programme' countries, where detailed programmes of austerity are planned by the 'troika' in conjunction with the national governments. Even in non 'programme' countries we have seen this increased intervention. In Belgium, the Commission demanded that the government meet over a weekend to find more cuts when the cuts did not go far enough for the Commission.

Authoritarian measures

It is not just at a parliamentary or government level that we have seen an erosion of democracy; a general tendency for the use of more authoritarian state measures and repression and the criminalisation of protest was discussed. This was seen in the attempts in Spain and elsewhere to end the Occupy movements.

The erosion of democratic rights is very evident in Hungary, the first EU country to get IMF bailout during the economic crisis. Delegates reported how attacks have been launched on the right to strike, a new labour law eroding workers' rights has been passed and labour camps for the long term unemployed established. As in other countries, pensions and early retirement rights have been attacked. Repression against the Roma people has increased. A flat tax has also been introduced, increasing the economic burden on the poor. The freedom of the media has also been eroded, with a new 'media law' introduced. A new constitution introduced by the government is eroding many basic democratic rights.

As well as an economic crisis, the capitalist classes across Europe are facing a political crisis. The political reserves of the bourgeoisie are running out, because the traditional establishment political parties are discredited by their cuts policies . We have seen a whole series of governmental crises across Europe. All the countries in the forefront of the Euro crisis have seen political change, with Italy, Spain, Greece, Ireland and Portugal all seeing a change of government in 2011.

Even in Germany, where there has been some economic growth, this has not given any boost to the ruling parties. The FDP is in crisis , for example, and faces the prospect of losing its parliamentary representation.

Tumultuous events in coming months

Former workers' parties have moved further to the right during the crisis and have become more discredited in the eyes of workers. Labour in Britain have said they will not reverse the Con-Dem government's cuts when they return to government. In Italy, the PD voted for Monti's cuts!

In a number of countries, the political vacuum is being partially filled by far right forces. The Front National in France is cynically using anti-bank, populist rhetoric to try to increase its support. The emergence of the neo-fascist Jobbik party in Hungary was also discussed, as an example of how the far-right can attempt to fill the vacuum. The danger of the far right and racist threat must be combated by the workers' movement with a clear class programme that unifies workers against neo liberal attacks and fights for jobs and homes and a decent welfare system for all, and for real system change.

The national question will re-appear in this situation. Developments in Scotland and Spain were discussed by speakers from those countries, where the crisis has seen growing national tensions and raised the question of separatism etc. The CWI's forces while defending the right to self-determination, counterpose an alternative of united struggle and socialism to narrow bourgeois nationalism.

It is very clear from the excellent and rich discussion that Europe will face tumultuous events in the coming months and years as the economic and political crisis deepens . This will bring huge opportunities for the CWI to build support for socialist ideas.

<http://www.socialistworld.net>

Occupy Wall Street Looms Over Wins Vs. SOPA Bill, Oil Pipeline and Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker

Juan Gonzalez 23 January 2012

This nation's fast-growing populist movement against unbridled corporate power scored an astonishing trifecta this week.

In the span of just a few hours on Wednesday, three vastly different protest movements all achieved startling success the same way: by mobilizing the fury of tens of thousands of ordinary citizens.

An unprecedented one-day Internet blackout drew the most attention. Organized by free speech advocates, and backed by several major Internet companies, the protest sought to derail bills in Congress that the powerful entertainment industry has demanded against online piracy of movies and music.

If that legislation passes, its critics argue, the government will be able to shut down access to any website suspected of carrying copyrighted works, even if the website operator does so unknowingly, and even before any court hearing is held.

"These bills are very badly written," Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales told me in an interview yesterday. "It's all well and good . . . to find solutions to criminal behavior online. It's not OK to set up a censorship regime in response to that."

Wikipedia and more than 10,000 websites went dark, while firms like Tumblr, Google and Facebook directed millions of their users to flood Congress with phone calls and petitions.

By the end of the day, several stunned senators and congressmen who had originally supported the legislation — including both Democrats and Republicans — had jumped ship, and the bills in their current forms now seem dead.

The Internet blackout was just one citizen victory that day.

Environmental activists were equally elated when President Obama announced his rejection of a permit request by energy giant TransCanada to build a 1,700-mile pipeline to pump oil from Canada's tar sands through the heartland of the U.S. all the way to Texas.

Republicans in Congress had pushed through legislation requiring Obama to make a decision by February. But he faced strong opposition to the pipeline from environmentalists and midwestern farmers concerned about the potential damage to the land, especially to the country's largest aquifer in Nebraska.

Last year, more than 1,200 people were arrested in protests against the pipeline outside the White House. So despite the Republican ultimatum, and despite fierce lobbying by the oil and gas industry, Obama finally showed some backbone.

The third grassroots success was in Wisconsin, where an unprecedented coalition of labor unions and citizen groups delivered more than 1 million signatures from voters demanding a recall of Republican Gov. Scott Walker.

Remember Walker? He's the guy who pushed through a controversial law last year ending collective-bargaining rights for most public workers in Wisconsin, a law that sparked weeks of massive sit-ins in the state's capitol.

Those million signatures were nearly twice the number required for a recall. They amount to an astounding 46% of all the votes cast in last year's Wisconsin elections.

Walker's fate will likely be decided in a new vote in the spring or summer. That vote will instantly become a referendum on whether workers in this country still have a right to collectively bargain for their wages and labor conditions.

Three amazing victories in one day, for young Internet activists and civil libertarians, for environmentalists, and for union members.

Yes, the Occupy Wall Street camps are all gone now, but the populist fire they kindled still burns bright in the growing number of Americans standing up to the 1%.

www.zcommunications.org

Hungary – the new weak link

Written by our correspondent in Hungary
19 January 2012

“In the space of twenty years, in a throwback to eighty years ago, millions believe the racist, chauvinist ‘ideas’ of the 1930’s.” writes Attila Csernok in Népszava, a Hungarian liberal daily. Is the situation in present day Hungary that critical? Does the election of the Fidesz government in April 2010 by a two thirds majority mean a return to the horrors of 1930’s Hungary?

Quite uncharacteristically Hungary has been in the news a lot lately. Not

since the opening of the Western borders in 1989 or perhaps the revolution of 1956 has this small Eastern European country been so much in the limelight as in the last few months. The nature and provisions of the new Constitution, the curbing of press freedom, the threat to the independence of the judiciary and of the central bank, the falling forint, the chance of a default and first and foremost the arrogance and unpredictability of its rulers have given rise to concern by the EU, IMF, World Bank and capitalist governments the world over.

To gauge the depth and causes of this crisis one has to go back in history, at least to the fall of Stalinism, but perhaps even a bit further. The Hungarian Stalinist regime handled its own internal contradictions in a way considered quite unique at the time. Instead of the stock Stalinist reaction of clamping down and tightening its hold over society Kadar's government chose to go "liberal", allow some expression of dissent and first and foremost started taking part in the world market from the mid 1960's onwards. Western banks were only too happy to lend substantial sums to this unique little country, not out of some charitable sentiment, but in order to extend the influence of the market over what in those days was still a planned economy. Hungary's bureaucrats enjoyed the prosperity this gave them; travelling abroad was possible, studying abroad became fashionable, learning languages and mixing with the ruling class of the West was much to their liking. These were heady days when growth figures were impressive, foreign trade, both imports and exports boomed and living standards were climbing. Inevitably, when you let capitalist banks and their money in, the rules of the capitalist market start asserting their influence. The national debt started to grow and keeping up with repayments had become a headache for Hungary's bureaucrats by the 1980's. In today's economic arguments many an article prints the ill-tempered accusation thrown at the inheritors of those days for having started the indebtedness of the country that far back and they are not far off the mark.

The 1980's also produced many of today's Hungarian politicians of all colours, who held to the good old traditions of the bureaucrat – to quote Trotsky – to eat first and eat best, and they brought that mentality with them into the brave new world of capitalism. The first government after 1989 was that of the right-wing conservative MDF, which presided over the wholesale, almost Thatcherite destruction of what industry Hungary did have. Thousands of factories were closed and the rest were sold off for a song to Western interests, some say out of ideological fervour, others believe for the billions of bribes most politicians and technocrats held their hands out for.

Many commentators currently believe that the much heralded "regime change" never really happened, as the personnel remained very much the

same, just the method of robbing the country changed from one of Stalinist bureaucratic mismanagement to capitalist robbery by both native and mostly foreign owners. Considering the current populist tone the Orbán government uses, this argument grabbed the imagination of millions in the last election campaign and who can blame them for it? Watching the old bureaucratic layer turn itself into the new owners of industry, commerce, land and all the wealth over the last twenty years must have been painful and the lack of a proper socialist alternative, which the very weak and puny Hungarian left was and still is unable and unwilling to offer, made the masses prone to all sorts of voodoo theories and crackpot ideas.

Successive governments: a socialist one in 1994-98, the first Fidesz government of 1998-2002, followed by two socialist governments from 2002 to 2010 made very little difference to living standards, other than in the downward direction. None of these governments, least of all the “socialist” ones, were prepared to break with capitalism. It was in fact exactly the opposite. It was the so called socialist governments that cut the most and served their foreign masters most faithfully. None of them tried to put the interests of Hungarian workers first. Therefore the early illusions in capitalism which were characteristic in all ex-Stalinist states, disappeared quickly, but there was a vacuum, nothing replaced it. One corruption scandal after another, culminating in the infamous Gyurcsány scandal of 2006, when it was leaked that he admitted to having lied about the economic state of the country, predestined Hungary to turbulent times. The disturbances in the autumn of 2006, which were engineered by Fidesz using the newly formed, extreme right-wing and quasi-paramilitary force of the Hungarian Guard, gave a foretaste of what was to come.

It was precisely the demagogic, populist and simplistic rhetoric of Orbán and his 2010 campaign that found an echo in a population thrashing around for a hope of recouping lost benefits, lost positions, lost pride and a hope for the future that drove the voters into the voting booths for Fidesz, also known as Orbán’s “voting booth revolution”. With a pact with the KDNP, the Smallholders’ Party, they achieved their 2/3rd majority to extend their “revolution”, to put into effect their dream of a greater, royalist, catholic, patriotic, chauvinistic Hungary. Many a commentator offered the psychiatric view of this dream, much to the anger of those in power; and while psychiatry has many an interesting view to offer on Orbán’s state of mind and the quality of “thought” around him, we need a sober political and scientific analysis, which only Marxism can offer.

World capitalism is in the throes of its death agony which tends to be characterised by a period of convulsions, U-turns and all the crackpot ideology that goes with that. The old ideas, old systems and old certainties

are gone, but no capitalist will give up his power willingly, so it often produces regimes, like the one in Hungary, especially aided by the interests of international capital and built on the confusion prevalent in a population that lost the link with its own working class traditions during the long years of Stalinism and the lack of structures around which they could build these back up again. It is often the whip of the counterrevolution that is the harbinger of the shift to the left, the push towards revolutionary movements and Orbán's current government can and should be considered as one of those reactionary and counterrevolutionary movements.

From their first day in power the Fidesz government waged war against their enemies as they saw them. In the classic manner of the populist demagogue, showing aspects of early Nazi methods they offered a dream of the greater Hungary of the past. They were going to give Hungarian citizenship to all Hungarians beyond Hungary's borders, thus creating a viper's nest of trouble with practically every neighbouring country. They then slapped large punitive taxes on large multinationals, pandering to the anti-multinational sentiment in the country but angering their own cronies all over the capitalist world. The next step was to nationalise, without ever having mentioned this in their manifesto, the billions of forints private pension savings of hundreds of thousands of Hungarians, thus alienating their own middle class base, which has repaid them since with a wholesale removal of their savings into foreign banks for fear of having that nationalised as well. Finally, they moved onto attacking the working class with reducing trade union rights, sacking trade union leaders from their jobs, lengthening the working day, reducing benefits, introducing workfare schemes, etc. There were other, less likely objects in the firing line as well, like churches. They produced a list of churches that can be considered as such, the rest were outlawed. Such organisations as the Methodist Church and the Hare Krishna sect were amongst those outlawed, much to the international outrage of those organisations' foreign contacts. A lot of these measures have not made the headlines as the attitude was probably one of waiting to see if they carried on in this vein.

The international outrage only really started when what was considered as a direct attack on democratic institutions was begun. Not that international capital cares a hoot for democracy in Hungary, but they are bright enough to understand that by going too far, the Orbán government might provoke a truly revolutionary movement in Hungary. The government was very cocky to start with about foreign loans. The new, greater, independent Hungary was going to do without the IMF, only to quickly realise that economic meltdown was staring them in the face. So, after a year of splendid isolation they had to call them back. Still, the IMF and the EU found an intransigent, arrogant and to a great extent ignorant government

which was not listening and making no concessions, but just wanted a few billions to tide them over. Not even the collapse of the forint made any difference to their attitude.

There were other measures introduced in the previous year that came to the attention of the world's press and some governments. The creation of a new press law, which since its introduction has resulted in practically every opposition paper, periodical, radio and television station's closure. These were achieved by awarding their licences to others, fining them for telling the truth thus bankrupting them or sacking any journalist that is not toeing the government line and/or prepared to falsify the news to favour the government. In 2010 laws were enacted that were aimed at cementing the rule of Fidesz for many years to come by rewriting the Constitution and including in it provisions and regulations which are normally in the domain of any new government to change, i.e. the size of the national debt, the requirement of a two thirds majority for changing the tax laws and other measures bordering on insanity according to some commentators. The word "republic" has disappeared from the name of the country, giving rise to rumours that Orbán wants to be king! This might be rather funny, had it not been combined with measures that declared the years between 1948 and 1989 null and void. They did not happen; they are now officially not part of Hungarian history. Some of us have been wondering if the house we live in is really ours or are we really married if all contracts from those years are null and void!

There is also a new law which makes it possible to combine the government's bank regulatory office with the National Bank. The current head of the National Bank still has three and a half years of his contract to run and he is vehemently against combining the two organisations, so it probably will not happen for a while, but the independence of the National Bank is under attack; everybody knows that. The most prominent rumour in the country about this is that Orbán is planning to plunder the reserves to get him out of his budget deficit crisis.

There has also been a swathe of measures attacking the independence of the judiciary. Many judges have to retire way ahead of their time to make space for government appointees and early retirement tends to happen mostly to well prepared, well respected judges with a reputation for independence and an ability to withstand government interference in their judging and sentencing habits. Recently they sacked the Chief of the highest court in Hungary, who has a long standing, much respected practice in The Hague with the excuse that he has not got five years' experience in Hungarian courts. The fact that he has international standing and is therefore difficult to subdue to the government's agenda is not apparently a consideration.

All these and the inconsistent and unpredictable nature of the Orbán government resulted in a severe downgrading of Hungary's credit standing by Moody's, S&P's and Fitch's. This, in the current economic climate and coupled with the Eurozone crisis, should not be exceptional, other than Hungary was downgraded long before most European countries and one of them put Hungary into double junk status. The most telling of the reasons given for this was the unpredictability of the Hungarian government. If you analyse all their new laws and regulations, there is no doubt this is a through and through capitalist government which is working on safeguarding the interests of capital and is reducing wages and benefits to keep profits high. However, there are peculiarities in their practice, which gives them a particularly unstable character that even representatives of international capital find unsettling.

History tells us that the capitalists have burned their fingers with using the fascists as their auxiliaries in the past. They are like a genie in the bottle that can never be kept in the bottle long enough to deal with the working class and like a snake might one day not only slither out of the bottle but turn round and bite the ruling class on their high and mighty rear end. This is roughly the attitude currently of the international ruling class and its representatives to Orbán. They have their own problems and this jumped up upstart then starts having ideas above his station. The trouble is they can't really teach him a lesson, because they do not want this particular weak link to break, just in case the whole chain goes down with it.

The IMF is due back in Hungary in a few days' time. Their representatives are desperately trying to find a way to get Orbán to play ball, so that nobody has to have too public a climb down and they can save the economy of Hungary while in their pronouncements carrying on "worrying" about democracy in Hungary. Whether Orbán will oblige them is anybody's guess. That will depend on how much pressure is on him and to what extent he might be forced to listen to wiser counsel than until now.

The pressure is also coming from the streets. Hungarian politics, whether inside or outside parliament, is notoriously heterogeneous. Splintered groups infighting for positions, money or just fame is characteristic of Hungarian political life. The working class and to some extent the middle class are also tired and lack perspective and until recently most demonstrations were small, either leaderless, without goals or sometimes just paid rebel creating trouble. Not any more! Most television stations covered the demonstration outside the Hungarian Opera House on 2nd January 2012, which numbered a hundred thousand, which was still somewhat chaotic, but showed a unity that has been lacking for some time. The organisation of this demonstration was brought under an umbrella body led by a recently sacked trade union leader. The crowd was

outraged and demonstrating against the government's 13 million forint junket inside the Opera House celebrating their new Catholic, great Hungarian Constitution, while the crowd outside had to suffer the effects of public expenditure cuts of 1400 billion forints (3,5 billion pounds at current exchange rates). It is a characteristic of all early protest movements and the beginning of revolutionary movements that there is no common plan or ideology. It needs a catalyst that galvanises the crowd and its representatives around an idea, a program before their struggle can produce results. That is still lacking, but there are early signs that it will not be long before it will happen.

Such is the disillusionment with parties, politicians and all previous governments of the last twenty years that even politics is a dirty word in Hungary today, not just politicians. Interviewee after interviewee on the television demonstrating outside the Opera House stressed that he/she had never before come out onto the streets as he/she hates politics, but felt so outraged that they had to do so this time. This is how revolutions start. The direction this coming revolution in Hungary will take is still uncertain. The weakness of the left, or the weakness of socialist ideas at present, will be a factor and the process is likely to be prolonged, but it has begun.

There is already a wide ranging protest movement on the internet and after all, hasn't it been said that the Egyptian revolution was organised on Facebook? There are many pages on Facebook where debate rages about the politics, economics, ethics and morals of the protest movements and the contributors are far and wide. You can read contributions from old socialists, young hotheads, workers and intellectuals. The tone is not always tolerant or polite or even constructive. It shows the confusion, frustration and anger that are very close to spilling over into the streets. What it needs is a group, no matter how small that can steer all this justifiable fury towards the ideas of socialism, that creed that has been much degraded by the experience of Stalinism and which some of the cynics would like to keep away from the masses with lies and propaganda. We have heard that even in the United States more than 50% of people think that socialism is a good idea. Hungary is not that different. The crowds are thirsty for solutions and only Marxism can give it to them. There is plenty in Hungarian history that shows how that is true. The sign of self-organisation, a healthy mistrust of international capital as well as of the bosses within the country already exists. One successful strike, one positive example of self-determination is all that's needed to show the Hungarian people how to move forward. There is no doubt they will find it and get rid of not only the insanity of the Orbán government, but the insane, inhumane and criminal system they and all their international cronies represent.

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Widespread disappointment and anger as labour suspends strike

Peluola Adewale, Democratic Socialist Movement (CWI in Nigeria) 19 January 2012

Struggle forces Jonathan back a bit, but could have won far more with a more resolute leadership - We Condemn Repression by Police and Army

Monday, January 16, saw the Nigeria Labour Congress and Trade Union Congress call off the general strike which had paralyzed activities in Nigeria for one week. The whole country had come to a halt in anger at the surprise New Year Day's fuel price hike, the government was completely isolated during the strike's duration. If Labour had offered a clear lead this struggle could not only have forced back the price hike but also laid the basis for a complete transformation of the country. Now there is the danger that this result will lead to a temporary disappointment with the results of mass Labour struggle.

The calling off of the strike came hours after the Labour leaders suspended street protests and mass actions. This suspension of picketing, protests and rallies was then followed by President Jonathan's announcement of the reduction of the fuel price from N141 to N97 a litre and deployment of armed soldiers across the country. While the Labour leaders want Nigerians to believe that the new price was a unilateral decision of the government, the sequence of events in the 24 hours before the strike was suspended, as well as the statement jointly issued by the two trade union federations calling off the strike, indicates that they had made a rotten deal with the government.

At its height the strike and mass protests involved millions taking strike action; there were huge demonstrations across the country while tens of millions stayed at home in protest. Among the most active participants in the protests were youths and students who in places like Lagos organized street demos and rallies raising resources on their own to have public address systems powered by generators to address neighbourhood crowds. Indeed the one week general strike of January 9 to 13 and the mass protests it engendered was, no doubt, the biggest movement of such scale and depth so far in the history of Nigeria. The strike was total even in North Eastern states where state of emergencies had been declared ostensibly in response to the state of insecurity created by Boko Haram's terroristic activities. It gave a glimpse, even if so briefly, of the possibility

of revolutionary change in Nigeria.

In spite of the suspension of the street protests by the Labour leaders and the government's announcement of a cut to N97, the strike on the Monday after the reduction was still very effective with total compliance and shutdown of all activities both in formal and informal sectors of the economy as it had been in the previous days. The streets and roads were deserted and only plied by soldiers who rode in brand new vans without plate numbers. Besides, in defiance of the suspension of the street protests and mass rallies, groups like Joint Action Front (JAF) organized a number of mass activities across the country. In Lagos, there was protest march of about 100 people from Yaba which was planned to be terminated at Gani Park Ojota before the combined forces of police and soldiers dispersed them with tear gas and live ammunition half way. In Oyo and Osun states there were mass rallies of thousands which came to abruptly end when the news of the call-off filtered in. There were similar mass activities across the country including in Kano and Kaduna in the north.

All this shows the resolve of people who had trooped out in millions to actively participate in various forms of mass actions nationwide in addition to those who stayed at home in compliance with strike to continue the action until the price was reverted to N65 if provided with leadership by Labour.

Unfortunately, the Labour leadership was not prepared for a long-drawn battle as an indefinite strike ultimately poses the question of power, of who runs the country, which is not on the agenda of the Labour leaders! Indeed, on Sunday January 15 the Labour leaders shamelessly issued a statement to explicitly dissociate themselves from the call for regime change which had started gaining echo among the masses stating the strike's "objective is the reversal of the petrol prices to their pre-January 1, 2012 level. We are therefore not campaigning for 'Regime Change'." This was done not only to please the embattled government but also because the current Labour leaders do not have alternative programme to contest for power. With this kind of outlook the strike ultimately would not have been able to achieve all that was possible despite the huge support it enjoyed amongst the working masses and the utter isolation of the government.

In order to sweeten the poison of agreeing to a higher fuel price the Labour leaders highlighted the promises of Jonathan to promote accountability in oil industry, ensure that passage of petroleum industry bill and the probe of NNPC as the successes of the struggle. This however only underscores the deep-seated illusion of the Labour leaders of influencing this capitalist government to act in the interests of working people. This is not accidental, but is borne out of the Labour leaders' lack

of an alternative economic and political framework to the current neo-liberal, capitalist agenda. This also explains why the Labour leaders agree to work with Belgore Committee which was set up to work out modalities of the implementation of deregulation. Their participation in such committee is clearly suggestive of labour support for the policy of deregulation which is at the root of the price increase in the first instance. This is much like the Labour leaders' continuous participation in the National Council on Privatization (NCP).

The Democratic Socialist Movement (DSM) condemns the heavy militarization of the streets by the Goodluck Jonathan government to repress the people who have been protesting against the increase in petrol price. We call for the immediate withdrawal of soldiers who have already started, according to reports and pictures in social media, to subject ordinary Nigerians to harassment and physical assaults at various checkpoints particularly in Lagos. The strike and mass actions which drew millions of people on the streets since January 9 has so far being largely peaceful.

The only occasions of violence were the killings of over 20 people across the country, including youths taking advantage of the empty roads/streets to play football, by the armed police. This action of Jonathan government is reminiscent of military era where culture of fear and intimidation was imposed on the country and it portends serious dangers to the current civil rule as it promotes military as the only institution that could restore "law and order". It has become commonplace for the current government to rely on soldiers to intimidate those with divergent view in attempt to whip them to submission to its anti-people policies

Beyond all doubts, this movement has proved again the huge power of the working masses and that labour has the potential to lead the mass of the country in carrying through a real, genuine "regime change" and revolutionary transformation. Unfortunately instead of advancing the cause of revolution and working towards a real political alternative, the Labour leadership did everything possible to assure the ruling elite they are not fighting for regime change not to talk of a revolution.

While tens of millions of Nigerians were determined to fight for the reversion of petrol price to N65, more and more protesters were demanding that Jonathan must go. This expressed the growing appreciation of the need for a political alternative to the present gangs ruling at all levels of the government as well as the alternative economic program to the anti-poor, neo-liberal capitalist agenda. Sadly the Labour leaders stuck to the utopian idea that reversing the fuel price alone is the only prize, and then they failed to deliver on that! The lesson of this, and the other general strikes since 2000, is that striking on its own is not

enough, Labour needs to have a revolutionary programme to sweep away this rotten system. This is why the DSM has always called on workers, artisans, traders, youths, farmers, etc. to agitate for a working people political party to wrest political power in order to commit the resources of society for the benefit of the vast majority of the population as against the current order where only 1% appropriate more than 80 per cent of the collectively owned wealth of the society.

Working class activists and socialists have to continue to agitate for the formation of such mass workers party run on a socialist program as alternative to a neo-liberal capitalist agenda of privatization and deregulation. The trade unions, given their large working class membership and their strategic importance within the modern economy and society are in a key position to launch the building of this kind of alternative party.

The pro-working class platform Joint Action Front (JAF) played a commendable role before and during the strike. In the course of the strike, action committees were formed in many communities by the JAF and other left forces particularly in Lagos. While there should be efforts to sustain the committees to continue to fight against anti-people neo-liberal policies of the government especially in the communities and neighbourhoods, these action committees can also provide the basis upon which a mass, genuine working people's party can be built. This will require the JAF to immediately in the period after the suspension of strike begin activities and programs to pose this challenge boldly among trade unionists, Socialists, activists and the working masses.

Ultimately only a victorious working masses' revolution that takes political power from the hands of the capitalist ruling elite and forms a workers and poor peoples' government committed to using society's resources primarily for the benefit of the working and toiling masses can salvage Nigeria and Nigerians from the vicious cycle of fuel price increases and poverty amidst plenty. To succeed, such a government will have to implement socialist policies of public ownership of the oil sector and other commanding heights of the economy under the democratic control and management of the working masses.

The strike has also shown it is only Nigerian working people that can take concrete economic and political initiatives that can reconstruct Nigeria's polity and ultimately ensure its survival as a country. The Financial Times, the London based paper of international capitalism, correctly commented that "the protests have emboldened ordinary Nigerians and raised new awareness of wasteful expenditure. In addition, many feel let down by the unions for agreeing to call off the strike without the subsidy being fully restored." Many will be drawing lessons from the mighty

events of the past few days.

The DSM remains committed to these ideals and urges all those who are convinced of the need to intensify the struggle against all anti-poor policies of President Jonathan's capitalist government and for system change to join us so that collectively we can build a movement that can fight and win a socialist future.

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Marxism & Urban Social Movements in South Africa

Uneven and combined Marxism with and within South Africa's urban social movements

Patrick Bond, Ashwin Desai and Trevor Ngwane 17 January 2012

Introduction

The political dynamics of contemporary South Africa are rife with contradiction. On one hand, it is among the most consistently contentious places on earth, with insurgent communities capable of mounting disruptive protest on a nearly constant basis, rooted in the poor areas of the half-dozen major cities as well as neglected and multiply-oppressed black residential areas of declining towns. On the other hand, even the best-known contemporary South African social movements, for all their sound, lack a certain measure of fury.

In the face of the government's embrace of neoliberal social policies since shortly after the fall of Apartheid, what are often called 'service delivery protests' occurring many thousands of times a year according to police statistics,[1] are at once the site of poor people's demands for greater responsiveness to human needs in general, but are also intensely localized and self-limited in their politics. The upsurge of protest since the late 1990s invariably invokes images of the anti-Apartheid struggle and thus focuses analysis on continuities and breaks between the old anti-Apartheid mass action and the new mass action in post-apartheid society.[2] And yet, the majority of community protesters operate in close interconnection with parts of the Tripartite Alliance, composed of the African National Congress (ANC), the trade union movement represented by the Congress of South African Trades Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), and so the line between insurgencies and governing organizations is not always clear. Yet their geographic and political isolation from each other have contributed to their having little leverage over the Alliance, which notwithstanding some resistance by unions and communists, embraced neoliberal policies in the transition from anti-apartheid resistance to class-apartheid government in 1994.

But beyond the community protests, in many respects, the problems that have faced more traditional radical social movements in South Africa are familiar to students of social movements elsewhere: of moving from movement to governing; of cooptation and shifting roles vis-à-vis the state; of the limits of localism; and of the joining of community- and workplace-based organizing to forge a strong working-class politics. These are all the subject of considerable scholarship, both within and outside of the Marxist tradition, and within and outside of South Africa.[3] We argue here, however, that in the South African context, these can be more clearly seen as symptomatic questions of a larger problematic, what we term, following Trotsky, the problem of ‘uneven and combined Marxism.’

For Trotsky, ‘uneven and combined development’ was a fundamentally dialectical framework through which he sought first to theorize the relations among Russia’s nascent industrial base (and hence, too, Russia’s urban proletariat), and its backward, semi-feudal rural relations, and second, following this, the revolutionary potentials for Russia at the time of the Revolution. For Trotsky, this implied understanding the relationship among forms of capital both within Russia and across borders. Uneven development means that extremely different relations of production coexist within and across territory, while combined development suggests not that the ‘less developed’ are archaic and simply bound, at some point to ‘catch up’ with the more advanced, perhaps going through the same ‘stages’ of development. (The South African modernization narrative since the early 2000s, shared by former president Thabo Mbeki and current president Jacob Zuma, is that the ‘two economies’ are ‘structurally disconnected’).[4]

Instead, it means that in order to understand the revolutionary possibilities of a given moment, it is important to understand how more and less advanced relations of production are related, how they often reinforce each other, and how their contradictions may lead to revolutionary advances in developmentally ‘less-advanced’ contexts. ‘Uneven and combined Marxism’ implies a way of considering the difficulties of constructing independent left politics in the conjuncture of a long-term capitalist stagnation in a 21st century South Africa in which some sectors of the economy – construction, finance and commerce – have been booming while many other former labour-intensive sectors of manufacturing were deindustrialised (or shifted from general production for a local mass market to niche production for a global upper-class market, such as luxury autos and garments), and in which large sections of society are still peripheral – aside from serving as a reserve army of unneeded surplus labour = to the interests of capital, domestic and global. The unevenness is also geographical, with small areas of South Africa operating within a circuit of luxury consumption and new technologies,

but others such as ex-Bantustan rural areas continuing their decline. The unevenness of sector and space is no surprise, of course, since capital has always flowed to sites of higher profitability not to establish equilibrating trends, but on the contrary to exacerbate differentials and enhance inequalities. The word 'combined' is important in South Africa because of the ways capital interacts with the non-capitalist sectors and spaces, including women's reproductive sites and mutual aid systems, spaces of community commons, state services, and nature.

Unevenness is obvious across the cities and townships (and towns and dorpies or villages) where battles rage, among the sectors of capital, and across scales of struggle. The 'combined' part of anti-capitalism is an area we are yet to see fully invoked (in the spirit of, for example the Latin American mobilizations which foreground indigenous movements' struggles), because of the complexities of organizing the unorganized – especially women – in shack settlements and rural areas where the act of daily survival in the interstices of capitalist/non-capitalist articulations generates far more collisions of political self-interest than standard Marxist urban theory so far elucidates.

To speak of uneven and combined Marxism, therefore, is to invoke a political project on the South African left that cannot but begin with the contradictory totality of the country's social relations, both internal and external, at multiple geographic scales and at vastly different levels of development. And yet, the beginning cannot also be the end; the challenge for South African left politics is to create a hegemonic formation from this unevenness that is capable of moving toward fulfilling the global left's hopes in the anti-Apartheid struggle, which was, at the same time, in many respects, an anti-capitalist struggle as well. But to articulate a left politics on this uneven ground is also to enrich the typically imported Marxist analysis, in the sense that the South African experience heightens and encapsulates several otherwise familiar tensions – urban/rural; worker/poor; local/national/global; society/nature; gender; etc. – and can therefore show, perhaps more clearly than can other contexts, the essential relations among them.

In what follows, we begin by describing the contemporary contours of protest in South Africa, and then return to the problem of the hegemony of the Tripartite Alliance and its embrace of neoliberal policies, even if this has itself been somewhat uneven and the source of some tension among Alliance members. We then discuss the development of a strategic impasse among South African social movements, and present and critique several theoretically informed alternative routes out of or around the apparent cul-de-sac. We conclude by rearticulating more precisely the stakes in proposing an uneven and combined Marxism; and rather than proposing solutions, we draw upon it to pose the strategic questions for an

agency-centred South African left more sharply.

Contemporary South African Protest

Writing five years after the end of Apartheid, Andrew Nash observed: *The struggle against Apartheid became at times a focus of the hopes of the revolutionary left around the world. It represents a missed opportunity for the left not only in the more obvious sense that it did not result in a real challenge to the power of global capitalism. It was also an opportunity to transform the historical relationship of Marxist theory and working class politics, and overcome the division which allows a dialectical Marxism to flourish in the universities and journals, while working class politics are dominated by the managerialism of Soviet Marxism or social-democracy.*[5]

This sense of a lost opportunity persists in South African politics today. It is found in the widespread discontent in townships and shack-dweller communities on the urban periphery over the rising cost of living and of previously state-provided services such as water and electricity; it is found in the militant protests among the poor for redistricting so that poor areas and rich areas are not administratively separated, thereby hampering the poor's ability to gain access to resources and public services (as in the towns of Khutsong and Balfour); it is seen in the divisions within the ANC, SACP and COSATU; and it is seen in the Treatment Action Campaign's successful and well-known battle against Thabo Mbeki's AIDS denialism and against Big Pharma's price-gouging of antiretroviral medicines. And yet, in many of the successful instances of protest – e.g., the reconnection of water and electricity, the rolling-back of privatization schemes, and the reduction in the price of antiretrovirals from \$15,000 per person to zero – revolutionary Marxists played important leadership roles, suggesting, perhaps, that Nash bends the stick a bit too far.

Nevertheless, the question of how far to bend the stick remains. There is no question that anti-racial Apartheid also had within it the seeds of anti-class Apartheid. This can be seen in the Treatment Action Campaign's successful attack, not just on price-gouging by Big Pharma, but also on intellectual property rights, which were curtailed by the 2001 Doha exemption for medical emergencies. It can be seen in the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee's work since 2000 not only to fight against the electricity company's privatization, rate changes, and electricity cut-offs, but also to teach people how to illegally reconnect themselves to the grid. These are only part of what Peter Alexander calls a 'rebellion of the poor'. In the wake of the introduction of the 'Growth, Employment and Redistribution' strategy or 'GEAR' that marked the Alliance's definitive turn toward neoliberal macroeconomic policy, the most militant communities that took to the streets in protest and which formed the new urban social movements were relatively privileged. They already had

houses, but were now fighting a defensive battle just to stay on in the urban ghettos. Those who clung on to spaces in the city in shacks appeared to be more patient. The Alliance's promises to the poor included gaining access to the formal ghetto, while at the same time, its municipal officials were evicting others for non-payment as employment became increasingly precarious and unemployment increased to more than forty percent of the workforce. For a while, the enormous legitimacy of the ANC explained this patience.

But from the late 1990s, ongoing waves of protests broke across the country's formal townships and shack settlements and the 'new urban social movements' formed in Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town from 1999. Though the first waves ebbed after a national protest at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, more surges were noticed from mid-2004 in Zevenfontein north of Johannesburg and in Harrismith in the Free State (where repression was marked by shooting and death), and in Durban's Kennedy Road beginning in early 2005, shack-dweller protest coalesced into the Abahlali baseMjondolo (shack-dweller's movement).

Yet, in many cases what started out as insurgencies outside the control of the Alliance were siphoned off into calls for participation, legal challenges, and 'voice'. Furthermore, one of the striking elements of South African protest is its failure to 'scale up,' or join together either geographically or politically. With some few exceptions, the recent upsurge of service-delivery protests have taken the form of 'popcorn protests', that is, movements that fly high, move according to where the wind blows – even in xenophobic directions at times – and then fall to rest quite quickly.[6] There have been several attempts at coordination in the mid-2000s: Johannesburg's Anti-Privatization Forum brought together service-delivery protest groups, students, left political activists (including, at first, some in the municipal workers' union and the SACP), and independent-left trade unions; the Social Movements Indaba[7] which from 2002-08 combined community struggles; and since 2011, the Democratic Left Front has taken a similar initiative. Despite these efforts, and in part because of continual splintering of independent left forces and a failure to make common cause with the left of the labour movement, there have developed no common programmes and no bridging organizational strategies that can challenge neoliberalism on a national level. Three elements of this failure – reflecting the uneven and combined nature of anti-capitalism in South Africa today – are worth noting here: the importance of access, localism, and leadership.

Access

Social movements often organize around sets of demands on the state that are, at least in principle, winnable. Service-delivery protests targeting the

privatization of water supply or high charges for water use by the local water authority, the regressive kilowatt-per-hour charge on electricity, or the eviction of shack-dwellers from squatted land all imply the possibility of success. In Durban's rebellious Chatsworth community,[8] for example, in order to achieve de facto recognition and therefore the delivery of services that would keep the movement constituency close to its leadership, movement activists increasingly joined with the city council in various committees to administer and monitor the movement's success. A decade after the initial 1999 uprising, political work mainly involved technical issues and oversight over upgrading, liaison with welfare departments and a range of other interventions which pressed less for radical policy change but focused instead on merely getting existing policy implemented.[9] This also inevitably brought the movement into close working relationships with ANC local councilors and limited the autonomy of the movement, and ultimately led to enormous disappointments in Chatsworth when official promises were broken and municipal contractors engaged in fraud.

Likewise, in Durban's shack-lands, in order to get recognition from the local council, shack-dweller activists had to ensure that no more shacks were built. Activists had to also ward off competitors. This was especially so if an organization defined its role as ensuring delivery. It was paradoxical but increasingly common that movements took political positions sharply critical of neoliberal policies on the one hand, while negotiating for better delivery within those policy frameworks on the other.

Of course, this is a common feature of social movements, and of poor people's movements beyond the South African context. There is a recurring question of how to consolidate a movement's 'victories' without demobilizing it, and how to move beyond the initial 'winnable' demands to more radical ones that cannot be so easily administered. In the South African context, however, this problem is deepened by the sheer weight and presence of the ANC. Though there is a significant variety of political positions taken by local ANC branches and officials, larger matters of policy and financing are settled at the centre, while implementation – and enforcement – depend greatly on the local level. Reaching the centre, therefore, is fundamentally difficult given the fact that the service-delivery protests tend to limit their demands to locally constituted authorities, with the possible exception of Eskom, the utility providing ninety-five percent of South Africa's electricity (Eskom sells energy both to municipalities as well as to four million individual households – mainly in black townships and rural areas – who were retail customers dating to the apartheid era). Access problems therefore imply a need for protesters to 'jump scale' from local to national, and sometimes also to global, for the World Bank has been known to give 'instrumental' advice on matters such as water

pricing.[10]

Localism and the Geographic Scales of Protest Organization

Marxist urban theorists, following the geographer Henri Lefebvre, speak of social relations unfolding on multiple geographic scales. Scales combine aspects of people's own construction of the extent of their social relations, and boundaries of the arenas in which they exist. They thus, depend, too on historically accreted understandings of the spatial limitations exerted on these relations, and on the physical properties that may inscribe them. As Marston writes, they 'are the outcome of, both everyday life and macro-level social structures.' [11] Finally, the framings of scale – framings that can have both rhetorical and material consequences – are often contradictory and contested and are not necessarily enduring. To say, therefore, that contemporary South African protest – with several exceptions such as the Treatment Action Campaign and for a time, the Jubilee SA network, as well as some of the more innovative community groups in the major cities – is characteristically local in orientation is to make an observation about the scale of the protests.

There is nothing inherently wrong with the localist orientation of protest. To the extent that participants stop evictions that affect them; to the extent that they force local authorities to increase the free allowance of electricity and water and lower fees for anything above the survival allowance; to the extent that a 'residue' of protest emerges as some local institutional safeguards against further abuse; to this extent, they are better off for having protested. From a Marxist perspective, however, limiting protest to the local scale both narrows the immediate transformative potential of social movements and in the longer term, disadvantages both the movements and the people who compose them. The same can be said about sectoral-narrowness, in which the 'water sector', economic reform advocacy, gender, energy justice, climate activism, access to education, healthcare advocacy, and myriad more specific struggles fail to connect the dots between each other, both in South Africa and across the world (notwithstanding a World Social Forum movement meant – but apparently unable – to solve this problem).[12]

What does going beyond localism mean? To ask the question begs, first of all, a more precise definition of what constitutes the 'local' in the present case. Here, we propose that 'local' in South African protest denotes a focus on administrative and jurisdictional boundaries on one hand, and on the site of social reproduction, on the other. The extremely vigorous protest movements in the country focus most of their attention on the failings of local councils and governments which are themselves both the local enforcers of ANC policies formulated on the national scale – often influenced by the demands of global brokers of capital (the SA Treasury

places great stock in its international credit ratings) – and often, political machines in which allegiance to the ANC line at the time is paramount for gaining access to decision-making processes. They are also focused on the circumstances of life in communities in which many people share abysmal living conditions.

As people active in these struggles, we can confirm that these were not originally meant to be narrow and localized. We initially shared the hope that struggles at the community level – at what provisionally could be called the point of reproduction – would have a quality and depth to them that would enable radical social antagonisms to flourish in ways that were unthinkable in the world of regular wage-work, at the ‘point of production’. As an idea, it makes sense. People live in communities 24 hours a day. With a huge mass of unemployed people stuck in these ghettos, many with experience in previous struggles, including that against Apartheid, it would be easy for demands made from these sites to be backed up with the force of mass organizations. All that was needed was a focus on bread-and-butter township or shack issues and then an ideological extrapolation to broader political questions. Or so our thinking went, along with that of various segments of the independent – non-ANC, non-SACP – left.

Focusing on the site of reproduction made sense in another way. In fact, the townships, shack-dweller communities, flat-dweller communities, and dorpies of South Africa contain a vast amount of economic activity, and the unemployed are as often as not also the marginally employed, the unofficially employed, and the precariously employed, which means, as well, that they play no role in the preeminent labour organization in the country, COSATU, which has its base in the country’s heavy and extractive industries and public sector. Only the narrowest view of the working class would ignore this group.

And yet, the local community as a site of post-Apartheid resistance to neoliberalism has been much more difficult to sustain. Partly it is because of an assumption, seldom made by those actually living in townships, that there exists substantial ground for unity flowing from merely living under the same conditions. One version of this assumption, as articulated in Latin American cities by James Petras and Morris Morley, is that: *The power of these new social movements comes from the fact that they draw on the vast heterogeneous labour force that populates the main thoroughfares and the alleyways; the marketplaces and street corners; the interstices of the economy and the nerve centres of production; the exchange and finance centres; the university plazas, railway stations and the wharves – all are brought together in complex localized structures which feed into tumultuous homogenizing national movements.[13]*

But in the South African context, while localism produced militancy, it did not necessarily produce solidarity with any regularity. Indeed, shack-dwellers often face the ire of those with a tighter, but still tenuous, hold on stable tenure in the townships. Township residents can be mobilized for violence against shack-dwellers and immigrants as much as they can be mobilized for solidarity.

Another source of optimism for the fusing of proletarian and precariat identities is alluded to by John Saul, recalling arguments made nearly four decades ago:

In a capitalism in crisis the 'classic strengths of the urban working class' could become 'more evident,' with the 'the upper stratum of the workers [then] most likely to identify downward [to become] a leading force within a revolutionary alliance of exploited elements in the society.'[14]

In the South African context, therefore, the mobilization of communities could, in theory, join up with the existing organization of workers through COSATU, provided the latter could peel itself away from allegiance to the ANC and the Alliance's embrace of neoliberalism, especially in the light of clearly deteriorating conditions.

But beyond the disappointments generated by a COSATU much changed by its entry into the Alliance and the decline of the shop-steward leadership that had provided much of its strength during the anti-Apartheid struggle, local communities were themselves difficult to coalesce around consistent analyses of the problems that led to their oppression, and abstraction from the local to multiple scales proved difficult once the problem of evictions, electricity, sewerage, and potable water were addressed.

Finally, it must be said that from a strategic point of view, there is some value in being able to organize at a scale commensurate with that of one's adversary's organization. The ANC is organized at the national level and it staffs its organization by positioning cadre in local areas. This means that it centralizes power and is able to exert significant – though far from total – control over local cadre. Thus, although some local councilors, for example, are more 'trigger happy' when it comes to repressing service-delivery and shack-dweller protests (and there have been more than a dozen deaths of protesters at the hands of police and non-official enforcers), the ANC's centralized organization, which is extremely averse to criticism, has set a policy of repression while also trying to channel protest into the least threatening, least direct forms, such as marches, as opposed to land occupations. The ANC's factional violence against its own cadres is notorious, such as in Durban where in mid-2011 the party's leader was assassinated. But by December 2011 the ANC city manager

and political elites were sufficiently united to unleash thugs on Democratic Left Front activists who staged a march of more than 5000 against the United Nations climate summit and who put up signs a few days later in City Hall during a visit by Zuma.

Leadership

Another set of problems that arises from contemporary South African protest is also familiar to students of social movements and revolutionary politics, namely, the problem of leadership, and particularly, the role of intellectuals in the movement. Antonio Gramsci's analysis of intellectuals is apposite here. Gramsci argues, in essence, that intellectuals are those who give shape, through mental labour, to specific sets and sites of social relations. Those he calls 'traditional' intellectuals are those whose roles as intellectuals were formed in earlier periods, and thus appear as separate from, and above, contemporary class relations and antagonisms, such as clergy and the professional scholars and teachers. 'Organic' intellectuals, by contrast, are those whose intellectual labours shape the projects of entire groups of people, such as industrialists and union militants. Traditional intellectuals can, by virtue of their social position, make claims about universals, whereas organic intellectuals allegedly articulate particularities. But as Gramsci makes clear, traditional intellectuals are just as moored to class as are organic ones, and that in fact newly dominant groups work not only through their own organic intellectuals, such as managers and consultants, but also through traditional intellectuals.[15] In South Africa, many organic intellectuals arose out of the anti-Apartheid struggle. Many were linked to the trade union movement, others to the ANC, still others to the SACP, and others to the Trotskyist and other independent left wing formations. Even since the Apartheid period, the boundary between organizations of traditional intellectuals – e.g., the universities and NGOs – and the organizations that produced and were produced by organic intellectuals in and of social movements has been porous. Student militants were enormously important to the anti-Apartheid struggle, and post-Apartheid South African universities have been home to some academics who have aligned themselves closely with, and worked within, the social movements. The question this has raised within social movements, however, is that of vanguardism.

In some social movement efforts, significant participation by university-based and foundation-funded scholar-activists and NGOs seemed to other participants to reproduce inequalities. Accusations of 'ventriloquism' and 'substitutionism' by academics within movements have been traded.[16] Some university-based intellectuals have argued that since 'the poor are the embodiment of the truth', that the role of traditional intellectuals is to reflect their positions to the world and simply act in concert with the poor.[17] This kind of analysis sometimes results in

the romanticization of urban social movements, and also denies the complex articulations of movements and the education of their leaders. There is no doubt about the dangers of vanguardism. The question is whether a populism that homogenizes ‘the poor’ is capable of building the necessary coalitions to bring protest up to a regularly coordinated non-local scale.

The question of leadership has led, as well, to the involution of protest, especially divisions within social movements and their networks including the Anti-Privatisation Forum, Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee, Western Cape Anti-Evictions Campaign, Landless People’s Movement, Jubilee South Africa and Social Movements Indaba. These divisions are, however, more a symptom than a cause of the strategic impasse faced by South African urban movements today. Scholars of movements have noted that internal tensions often come to the fore when there is no clear way forward for externally oriented action.[18]

Together, the contradictory tendencies of access, localism, and leadership have produced a movement sector that is at once extraordinarily militant in its actions and profoundly moderate in its politics. The increasing turn away from electoral politics in poor areas in favor of protest politics signals a strong disenchantment with the apparatus of representative government and with the actual governance of the (mostly) ANC officers. On the other hand, in spite of this disenchantment, South African movements are nowhere close to articulating alternatives, and doing so would require movement leaders to engage in the sustained dialogue necessary to abstract from local concerns to national, and even international ones. The potential is there: the Treatment Action Campaign’s successful demand for decommodified and locally-made (generic) AIDS medicines, and the Campaign against Water Privatization’s fight against Johannesburg Water’s management outsourcing to Suez, took activism in these sectors out of tired social policy or NGO-delivery debates, and set them at the cutting edge of the world’s anti-neoliberal backlash.

The Tripartite Alliance’s Hegemony

Another inescapable feature of South Africa’s contemporary politics is the continued – though increasingly fragile – hegemony of the ANC. The ANC enjoys an enormous amount of legitimacy and ongoing prestige, in spite of the fact that nearly twenty years of ANC rule has resulted in deepening poverty and inequality, and in spite of the visible divisions within the ANC, as for example, in the clashes between President Jacob Zuma and his predecessor, Thabo Mbeki, and between Zuma and the ANC Youth League leader, Julius Malema. The ANC was the main organization of the international anti-Apartheid struggle, and even though it was banned within South Africa from 1963 to 1990, quickly reasserted

itself as the largest, best-organized group capable of taking the reins of power during the early 1990s transition. In establishing its hegemony at the local level, it supplanted already-existing organizations with its own (e.g., women's organizations, youth groups), and has dominated electoral politics since the first post-Apartheid elections in 1994.

The Tripartite Alliance is dominated by the ANC, which, under Mandela, began to separate the ideological strands that had undergirded the most militant elements of the anti-Apartheid movement, both in South Africa and abroad. Capital flight increased after the democratic elections of 1994, and in reaction, in early 1995 the ANC government relaxed exchange controls to prove its new loyalty to the Washington Consensus. By the mid-1990s, indeed, ANC leaders had distanced the party from the interventionist currents in the movement. In his first interview after winning the presidency in 1994, Mandela stated: 'In our economic policies...there is not a single reference to nationalization, and this is not accidental. There is not a single slogan that will connect us with any Marxist ideology.' Although he inexplicably missed the nationalization mandate he was given in the 1994 Reconstruction and Development Programme (page 80), Mandela's specific reference to Marxist ideology in many senses reflects the strong strand of anti-capitalist thinking that linked into resurgent struggles against Apartheid from the early 1970s. Through its policy and slogan of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), moreover, the ANC deracialised capitalism – albeit for a very few billionaires – and separated the profitability dynamic of South African capitalism from racial domination. The latter has remained strong, of course, but more notable is the rise of class apartheid techniques.

Mandela's avowed anti-Marxism did not, however, so alienate the SACP and COSATU that they abandoned the coalition. To the contrary, the initial redistributive promises in the ANC platform – eclipsed by GEAR in 1996 as well as by numerous White Papers starting in mid-1994 – gave the SACP and COSATU power in administering what might, in other circumstances, have been the development of a managerialist, social-democratic welfare state. The SACP chairman, after all, was Joe Slovo (prior to his death in early 1995), and his 1994 U-turn towards a fully neoliberal housing policy[19], as the World Bank explicitly recommended, was the main signal that the Reconstruction and Development Programme was finished before it had even begun. Slovo reversed nearly every major mandate he was provided.

Though centralized, corporatist bargaining was not part even of the initial coalition deal, COSATU had a prominent place at the table to represent the concerns of the organized working class. It did so with enough friction with the ANC that it could boast of putting up a fight, even while lauding the not-really-corporatist arrangements of the Alliance as corporatist,

suggesting that it in fact had codetermination powers (in sites like the National Economic Development and Labour Council), and that the working class was more institutionally powerful than it patently was. After all, in the post-apartheid era the share of profits to wages shifted to the favour of capital by nine percentage points. And the SACP gained some power over the state's redistributionist functions, with the Mandela era witnessing central committee members in positions that included the ministers or deputy ministers of trade and industry, public works, housing, transport, public services and even defense. At once, this meant that the SACP had something to lose from challenging the ANC within the coalition too strongly, and it was consistent with the party's longstanding line that racial democracy had to precede the larger economic project of socialism. It also meant that the party would be at the front lines of managing a rapidly changing urban landscape as the lifting of residency laws under Apartheid resulted in the vast growth of shack communities both on the urban periphery and in already urbanized township areas. That the party endorsed GEAR and the neoliberal Africa strategy (the New Partnership for Africa's Development) and supported a platform that put private investment at the center of its housing strategy – in a period characterized by capital flight – suggests that it was a comfortable member of the publicly anti-Marxist ANC-led Coalition, and that its constant support for the Coalition's neoliberal macroeconomic initiatives at multiple scales in 1996, 2001 and 2010 should not surprise.[20]

Nevertheless, the Alliance's cohesion and hegemony has not been rock-solid. There have, from the start, been tensions both between COSATU and the ANC and within COSATU about the ANC and the union federation's role in the Alliance and what it gets out of it. These tensions extend backwards in time to before COSATU's founding in 1985 and speak both to the shop-floor militancy of 1970s unionism in South Africa and to the tensions around the integration of the union movement into the nationalist project. But these tensions were raised with GEAR's introduction by the ruling party's neoliberal bloc, and ultimately resulted in COSATU's support for Jacob Zuma's successful bid for ANC leadership against Thabo Mbeki in the 2007 ANC National Conference, and Mbeki's humiliating firing by the ANC as president in September 2008.

And yet Zuma's government has done little better than Mbeki's, and has not changed the country's neoliberal macroeconomic course. A three-week strike of public-sector workers in 2010, most of whom were members of COSATU, and which both imposed real hardship and threatened to spread to other sectors of the economy signaled the ripening of the contradictions of COSATU's continued alliance with the ANC. COSATU's membership has become older and more skilled as neoliberalism has resulted in segmented labour markets and the

proliferation of informal work, and a growing proportion of its members are employees of the state. For this – and for the access to a different lifestyle for leaders who move into government positions – COSATU depends on the ANC-dominated state. On the other hand, continued austerity and attempts to squeeze public workers – visible from Johannesburg to Wisconsin, from Durban to Athens – in the face of already desperately inadequate services and a massive and visible gap between rich and poor (even among Africans), has led at least one COSATU leader to criticize Zuma's government as becoming a 'predator state.' [21]

The fraying hegemony of the ANC with respect to its Alliance partners, and the simple refusal of many township and shack-dweller communities to engage any more in the formal political process, signify South Africa's deep crisis. Nevertheless, the protests raise the questions of whether dissent is solely about the delivery of services, or whether it signifies a bigger dissatisfaction with the social order as such? Do protesters see continuity between the anti-Apartheid struggle and the struggle today? Even in extreme cases of struggle (such as the disputes over district boundaries in Khutsong), the lead activists retained connections to the Alliance that through its legitimacy from the anti-Apartheid struggle and its patronage networks, were more durable than the centrifugal pressure to disconnect. And if a crisis consists in the fact that 'the old is dying, but the new cannot yet be born' [22], it begs the question of what 'the new' is and what its birthing process could look like.

Theorizing the Strategic Impasse

The question of how to move out of the crisis to a renewed revolutionary politics that separates the nationalist project from the politics of neoliberal development has garnered several answers. Each is partial, and each, as we will argue, is inadequate to the task. In this section of the chapter, we will examine three that have particular currency: the expansion of rights through litigation; the claim for 'the right to the city', which is distinct from juridical rights-talk; and the creation of spaces for 'participation'. In the following section, we will revisit the question of the impasse with reference to a reformulated Marxist account of uneven and combined development.

Rights

Community-based social movements have repeatedly gone to court to enforce their rights. And actual 'victory' in court is beyond our quibbling, and indeed some offensive victories (nevirapine to halt HIV transmission during birth) and defensive successes (halting evictions) are occasionally recorded. Nevertheless, we consider insidious the constitutionalist discourse that envelops individual cases in an overall strategy: the idea that 'the turn to law' is a good or beneficial thing to do with the energies,

affinities, possibilities and power of a movement.

The 'turn to law' discourse bears the unmistakable scent of reform without a strategic sense of how to make more fundamental demands that bring into question barriers as large as property relations. The result is the kind of 'reformist-reform' (as Gorz put it)[23] that entrenches the status quo. (In contrast, nonreformist reforms work against the internal logic of the dominant system, and strengthen rather than coopt the counterhegemonic challengers.) In this sense, the illegal occupation of land is far more powerful than a court's ultimate granting of tenure to the occupiers. The turn to constitutionalism also has consequences for movement leadership; it is based on the conception that a certain professional legal caste among us can secure in the constitutional court meaningful precedents (and consequent compliance by the executive) that advance the struggle of the poor in a fundamental way..

To be clear, we are not opposed to going to court. This may be useful from time to time. But as a strategy – rather than as a tactic – it is limited, and unable to compensate for weaknesses in protest organization and militancy. For example, the Treatment Action Campaign's victory against Mbeki in late 2003 was spurred, to some extent, by a mid-2001 Constitutional ruling that compelled his government to provide nevirapine to HIV+ pregnant women to prevent mother-to-child transmission. In general, it is fair to say that the rights narrative was important to reducing stigmatization and providing 'dignity' to those claiming their health rights. Also successful in the Constitutional Court was Durban's Abahlali baseMjondolo shack-dwellers movement, which in 2009 won a major victory against a provincial housing ordinance justifying forced removals. Such removals continue unhindered, unfortunately, and at nearly the same moment that Abahlali baseMjondolo won the court victory they were violently uprooted from their base in Kennedy Road.

Thus, as Rosenberg indicates, writing in the critical legal studies tradition, rights depend on their enforcement, and courts cannot compel this.[24] Further, court judgments can be reversed: a crucial rights narrative test came in the struggle to expand water provision to low-income Sowetans. A victory had been claimed by the Anti-Privatisation Forum in 2006 because after community struggles, water in Johannesburg is now produced and distributed by public agencies (the multinational firm with Soweto's water contract Suez was sent back to Paris after its controversial 2001-06 protest-ridden management of municipal water). In April 2008, a major constitutional lawsuit in the High Court resulted in a doubling of free water to 50 litres per person per day and the prohibition of pre-payment water meters. But the Constitutional Court reversed this decision in October 2009 on grounds that judges should not make such detailed policy, and that the prevailing amounts of water and the

self-disconnection delivery system were perfectly reasonable within the ambit of the South African Bill of Rights. Once again, this meant that activists were thrown back to understanding the limits of constitutionalism: they recommitted to illegal reconnections if required.[25]

We therefore object simply to the subordination of a political discourse to a legal discourse – even if superficially an empowering one, in terms of ‘rights’ narratives – and therefore to the subordination of a radical discourse to a liberal one. As Alan Hunt and Gary Wickham argue, discourse ‘structures the possibility of what gets included and excluded and what gets done and what remains undone. Discourses authorize some to speak, some views to be taken seriously, while others are marginalized, derided, excluded and even prohibited.’[26] By flirting with legalism and the rights discourse, movements have seen their demands watered down into court pleadings. Heartfelt pleas are offered but for the observance of the purely procedural: consult us before you evict us. Demands for housing that could be generalized and spread, become demands for ‘in situ upgrading’ and ‘reasonable government action’ and hence feed the politics of local solutions to the exclusion of demands that can be ‘scaled up’.

Right to the City

An alternative formulation of ‘rights’ is given by Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey’s ‘right to the city’ argument. Harvey is clear that the ‘right to the city’ is a collective right, rather than a liberal-individualist one, and is based on the idea that ‘the freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is...the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.’ Because Harvey links urbanization, and therefore, the way of life of an increasing majority of humanity, to the absorption of capitalist surplus, the ‘right to the city’ implies empowering the mass of people to take the power from capitalists to produce their way of life and learn to wield it themselves. The current crisis of global capital has led to some of the uneven developments to which we have already referred in South Africa. The explosive price of real estate (nearly 400 percent from 1997 through to a 2007 peak) was facilitated by not only local overaccumulation but by the inflows of surplus global capital, thus contributing to the boom-bust dynamic in the construction trades even as the rest of the economy stagnates or worse. ‘The results,’ Harvey writes, ‘are indelibly etched on the spatial forms of our cities, which increasingly consist of fortified fragments, gated communities, and privatized public spaces kept under constant surveillance.’ He continues, quoting Marcello Balbo: *[The city] is splitting into different separated parts, with the apparent formation of many ‘microstates’. Wealthy neighbourhoods provided with all kinds of services, such as exclusive schools, golf courses, tennis courts and private police patrolling the area around the clock intertwine with illegal settlements where water is available only at public fountains, no*

sanitation system exists, electricity is pirated by a privileged few, the roads become mud streams whenever it rains, and where house-sharing is the norm...

Harvey sees the 'right to the city' as a 'both a working slogan and political ideal' to democratize the 'necessary connection between urbanization and surplus production and use.' [27] However, in the South African context, the slogan has been taken up both by proponents of legalistic means of struggle and by the more autonomist-oriented shack-dweller campaigns, and so the 'right to the city' can be seen as a kind of ambiguous hinge that joins quite different political orientations. For example, Marie Huchzermeyer argues that the South African Constitution mandates "an equal right to the city," and that this requires movements to pursue marginal gains through the courts: 'Urban Reform in this sense is a pragmatic commitment to gradual but radical change towards grassroots autonomy as a basis for equal rights.' After all, she argues, 'three components of the right to the city – equal participation in decision-making, equal access to and use of the city and equal access to basic services – have all been brought before the Constitutional Court through a coalition between grassroots social movements and a sympathetic middle class network'. Nevertheless, she also argues that human-rights 'language is fast being usurped by the mainstream within the UN, UN-Habitat, NGOs, think tanks, consultants etc., in something of an empty buzz word, where the concept of grassroots autonomy and meaningful convergence is completely forgotten'. [28]

Unfortunately, given the power imbalances, Huchzermeyer and others who make the 'right to the city' claim run the risk of merely extending a slogan, rather than a strategic vision, to the question of the current impasse in South African social movements. The danger here is particularly felt in the ways in which 'the city' can be taken to mean 'particular cities' (which, on one level, they must) and therefore to privilege local politics and local solutions, without a larger-scale analysis that could provide a kind of standard by which locally generated choices and strategies could be subjected to criticism. One result is that like groups often accept each other's political stances while discounting the possibilities of coalition across types of community: hence, for example, 'Abahlalibane' – 'shack-dwellerism' – arises as a kind of autonomistic-populist practice in which the deep suspicion of non-shack-dwellers, even if sometimes merited, finds its mirror image in the idea that political ideas are invalidated or validated simply by virtue of their issuing from 'the poor.' [29]

'Participation'

A clause in the Constitution as well as various laws compel municipalities to involve residents in 'community participation' processes to enable

people to directly influence decisions that affect them.[30] John Williams, reporting on research in the Western Cape finds that ‘Most community participation exercises in post-Apartheid South Africa are largely spectator politics, where ordinary people have mostly become endorsees of pre-designed planning programmes, [and] are often the objects of administrative manipulation.’ As a result, formal municipal governance processes are ‘a limited form of democracy [that] give[s] rise to an administered society rather than a democratic society’ since there is no real debate of policy or of social programmes by the working class electorate and government officials.[31] In Durban, a study of community participation in local economic development processes by Richard Ballard and his colleagues reveals that such processes allow ordinary people ‘to demand accountability’ from ‘elected representatives and sometimes quite senior officials.’ However, they are ‘consultative rather than participatory’ and ‘invariably become conspicuous for the issues they leave out, and for the voices they did not hear.’[32]

This was particularly apparent in the way that the Durban ‘Citizen’s Voice’ process was handled by the city and the main water NGO (Mvula Trust), invoking participation by what might be termed ‘civilised society’ as a way of encouraging poor communities to consume less water just after the municipal prices had doubled in real terms over a period of six years.[33] The ward committee system as a mechanism to involve people in local government participatory democracy has similar shortcomings, according to John Mavuso.[34]

In a different vein, David Hemson concludes that ‘community participation in South Africa is informed by the memory of community struggle – a radical form of participation – against the racist Apartheid State’ and that this must be harnessed. ‘It is precisely this repertoire of radical strategies that can and should be revisited and adapted, to advance the interests of the materially marginalized communities at the local level.’[35] Luke Sinwell applies a theoretical approach first developed in the South African context by Faranak Miraftab,[36] based on a distinction between ‘invited’ versus ‘invented’ spaces of popular participation. The ward committees, imbizos (government-initiated public forums) and integrated development plans of invited participation contrast with invented spaces through ‘self-activity’ such as community self-organization, direct action and other non-official mechanisms of exerting pressure. Based on extensive research conducted in Alexandra, one of the country’s oldest and poorest black working class townships, he concludes that progressive change is more likely to emanate from the use of invented rather than invited spaces. However, Sinwell laments that community activism in the invented spaces also fails to question power relations and social structures in a fundamental way. Community organisations tend to work within budgetary constraints set by the state

and as a result community groups end up competing among themselves for limited resources rather than questioning the neoliberal framework and its ideological underpinnings.[37]

Combined and Uneven Development, Combined and Uneven Marxism

The importance of Marxist criticism is to uncover, in particular situations, what is 'systematic' and what is 'conjunctural', as Gramsci put it.[38] This, in turn, helps to distinguish – and therefore, to both facilitate and structure discussion about – short- and longer-term demands. The 'pure militancy' of an immediate politics of the poor does not do this easily. It is rather through dialogue, not just among 'the poor' but among the several sectors of society caught at various points in the contradictions of neoliberalism that a larger political formation capable of a sustained revolt against capital, and the creation of a new order, can be built.

Here, Trotsky's understanding of 'combined and uneven development' is useful. Though it can be read somewhat more broadly, most interpretations of Trotsky understand him to have meant 'combined' development to refer to the relations among different levels of development within a given nation.[39] In South Africa, the logical corollary is to 'articulations of modes of production,' a concept promoted by Harold Wolpe to explain race-class politics linking sites of surplus value extraction to bantustans (where impoverished women provided cheap-labour's reproduction at a vast distance), but which is even more relevant in post-apartheid South Africa given enhanced migrancy, xenophobia and adverse gender power relations.[40] Geographers such as David Harvey and Neil Smith have emphasized that even within nations, the combined unevenness of development is given spatial expression. Apartheid was, in its nature, both a racial order and a spatial one, and it enforced uneven and combined development in almost caricatured forms. The systematic separation of racial groups, the profound underdevelopment of black areas, and the racial segmentation of labour markets suggested to many on the left (including us) as we noted earlier, that the fight against Apartheid was coterminous with the fight against capitalism. Though we were correct that capitalism and racism were mutually reinforcing during the 20th century, the conventional mistake by radicals was in thinking that the defeat of one durable but ultimately conjunctural manifestation of racism, Apartheid, would bring the capitalist system to its knees.

Accordingly, we found that Apartheid was conjunctural, but uneven and combined development is systematic. The particular spatial manifestations of uneven and combined development are also conjunctural, though, again, they can be extremely durable. Hence, fights against eviction or for clean and affordable water, even while encountering the severe power of

state coercion, and sometimes taking years to resolve, do little to change the systematic dynamics of uneven and combined development that are deepened in new ways in neoliberal South Africa.

Trotsky also marshaled the theory of uneven and combined development to argue against 'stageism' or the idea that revolutionary politics depended on a given country's going through the specific, drawn-out processes of capitalist development found in other countries. What this meant, however, was that coalitions among workers across space and across situations in the process of capital accumulation (e.g., industrial workers, peasants) were central to revolutionary potentials, but that these potentials were realizable, even if with difficulty. The contemporary conjuncture in South Africa, beset by entrenched neoliberalism imposed by a weakening-but-still-present ruling Alliance dominated by the ANC, has seen the accumulation of protests by township residents over services, shack-dwellers over evictions and services, and the relatively 'privileged' public-sector workers over pay and the quality of services they provide. Though the public workers' strike was suspended without winning the union's key demands, it came close to bringing out private-sector workers – all in the formal sector – as well.

The question for an 'uneven, combined Marxism' is how to take advantage of the unevenness and particular conjunctural combinations of social relations in South Africa and beyond. The present period in South Africa exemplifies the dynamics of uneven and combined development and its spatial and social consequences. Within South Africa, it is important to think about how, for example, shack-dwellers' struggles and public workers' struggles could be linked up, even as the latter's relative privilege and operation in the formal labour market may make them wary of such an alliance, and as the former's distrust of cooptation creates an equal hesitancy. The Durban climate summit –the Conference of the Parties 17 – illustrated how very difficult it is to conjoin labour, community and environmental considerations, especially in the context of a set-piece 'Global Day of Action' march (3 December 2012) when distances between constituencies, political traditions and issue areas remain debilitating.[41]

How could a joined-up movement respond to the conjunctural pressures upon it, such as the apparent advantages to the unemployed of labour-market flexibilization schemes or to the quality of life of township residents of evicting shack-dweller settlements? What kind of ways can – or should – Marxists talk about taking on the systemic problems of uneven and combined development with people who are located in different, and even sometimes opposed, areas of this combination? What organizational forms might be applied to start this conversation and yet keep it focused on the systematic elements of the present? How do we move beyond the

concern for access, the localism, the constitutionalism, and the anti-political populism of contemporary protest – even as these sometimes yield concrete results – while also moving beyond the ambiguity of a simple slogan? To us, the protests represent a profound critique of neoliberalism by working class communities. But are protesters aware of the greater significance of their protests? And to what extent do protesters' demands require solutions that challenge neoliberal policy and even entail a challenge to the capitalist mode of production? Or is it the case that the overarching neoliberal economic framework constrains the realization of not only the people's aspirations, but their ability to think beyond capitalism?

We agree with Andrew Nash[42] that the answers to these questions will not come through the elaboration of a new, 'proper' Marxist line by mainly university-based, white intellectuals, and that the great task of a renewal of South African Marxism will depend on the elaboration of a new stratum of organic intellectuals from the movements (though not necessarily bypassing the universities) who can, perhaps, move among them in ways that enable them to abstract from the local without abandoning the reality of it. Being able to do this partly depends on the ability of South African movements to look beyond themselves, to a world increasingly resistant to neoliberalism and to contribute to, and take from, a growing global movement. The successes of the Treatment Action Campaign were one such contribution, although this movement also teaches the dangers of self-liquidation into state-conjoined service-delivery and narrow sectoral politics as well as a seeming over reliance on foreign funding.

In encountering similar-but-different movements and contexts, movement intellectuals gain new perspectives on the possibilities of coalitions and on the similar-but-different permutations of combined and uneven development elsewhere; these can enhance their capacity to reinterpret local conditions by denaturalizing existing political categories and divisions. Indeed, in calling for a 'combined and uneven Marxism', we intend to suggest that the way forward cannot lie in the search for the pure revolutionary subject, whether the worker, the township 'poors', the shack-dweller, the organic feminist, the red-green social environmentalist, or anyone else; and it cannot lie in the search for the perfect location, whether the household, community, farm, benefits office, oil refinery or factory. Combined and uneven development makes clear that if the Marxist view that people are a 'nexus of social relations' holds, a combined and uneven Marxism must draw on the interdependence of locations in these relations in order to reinforce our interdependence rather than accept the capitalist combination of unevenness and mutual social antagonisms among those from whom capital is extracted. Of course this is to state a problem rather than to proclaim a new strategy. However,

consistent with the argument above that it is the development of organic intellectuals from within the movements, and their discussions and alliances with one another as well as with 'traditional' Marxist intellectuals, it is only here that a way forward will be found.

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Imibhikisho enedumela isekude ikuba yingozi yangempela

NguPatrick Bond, noAshwini Desai benoTrevor Ngwane. Yahunyushwa nguFaith ka-Manzi

Njengoba sesingenile kunyaka ka2010 obekelwe yiqembu lezombusazwe iKhongolose eliqeda iminyaka eyiKhulu lasungulwa ngoJanuwari kanye nokubukusa – kodwa okungahehi- ngengqungqthela yabaholi ngoDisemba, akesiqale sibheke ukuthi umphakathi wethu uyindawo enezigigaba kakhulu emhlabeni, nemibhikisho ephazamisayo cishe njalo-nje.

Ngenxa yeminyaka engamashumi amabili kufike ukubuswa ngemigomo yongxiwankulu okwenze umphakathi wangalingana okwedlula isikhathi Sobandlululo, lokhu esihlala sikubiza 'ngemibhikisho yokulethwa kwezidingo emphakathini' kwenzeka izinkulungwane onyakeni, njengokusho kwezibalo zamaphoyisa. Kodwa-ke lokhu kwenzeka ezigcemeni zalapho kusuke kunenkinga khona kuphela futhi kungasabalele ngezombusazwe.

Abaningi abasuke bebhikisha basuke bekwenza lokhu bebe besondelene kakhulu neNhlanganyela eNtathu phecelezi iTripartite Alliance, futhi ukwahlukana phakathi kwezinhlangano kanye namaqembu abusayo kungabe kusagqama. Futhi banenkinga yokwehlukana ngokwakhelana kude nangokuhlukana ngezombusazwe.

Njengomphumela-ke, izizinda zezwe zongxiwankulu – Ezokugcinwa Kwamafa (Treasury) kanye nezinqumo zoNgqongqoshe – zibe zingachaphazeleki. Okwamanje isethembiso esisekude seMshuwalense Wezempilo kaZwelonke phecelezi iNational Health Insurance, ukwenyuka kwesibalo

sabaxhwaswa

ngemali yezenhlalakahle enganele, ‘ukulethelwa kwezidingo zamahala’
ezingenzi mehluko kanye nezigidi ezintathu zezindlu ezakhiwe kambi,
ezibekwe ezindaweni ezingasizi, ezincane ezenza abaholi
bakaKhongolose
baqhoshe ngokuthi kukhona abakwenzela abantu.

Inggakambi ibalulekile, ngoba ukuhlakazeka kwabantu abasebenzayo
kanye
nabampofu kuveza ‘abantu abangumphumela wokubuswa
ngongxiwankulu’
emphakathini. Esikhundleni sabasebenzi abanokuhlanganyela
okwabonanakala ngesikhathi sezizinda sezimboni zamafektri kanye
zezezimayini zeminyaka edlule, ezomnotho zethu ezingasenakho
ukuqiniseka sezisabalele, ziyashabalala futhi nezimboni ziyaphela.

Ezinye izingxenye – ezikwakha, ezezimali kanye nohwebo – zachuma
kakhulu kodwa izizinda eziningi zokukhiqiza ezizimelele kubasebenzi
zaphela, noma kwasekuvela ukuqashwa ngetoho, futhi kwathi imishini
yenza imisebenzi ebiyenziwa abantu, futhi kwashenxwa ekukhiqizelweni
uwonkewonke ezimaketheni zezwe ukuzwe kuqhakambiswe imakethe
yomhlaba
ekhiqizela abacebile, njengezimo ezibizayo kanye nokokugqoka.

Kusukela ekwakhiweni kwezinkundla zemidlalo kuya kwezokuthutha
ngemikhumbi/nangezindiza kuya kokuncibilikisayo, ukufakwa kwezimali
kakhulu oklusandwa kwenziwa kuze nemisebenzi emincane kakhulu,
ikakhulukazi eThekwini. Ipayipi elisha lamafuthu elisuka eThekwini
liya eGoli elibiza uR24 wezigidigidi (billion), ngokwesiboniso-nje,
udale imisebenzi engewona atoho engu100 kuphela.

Ukungalingana kwezentuthuko futhi kuya ngezindawo, ngeziceme
ezincane
zaseNingizimu Afrika zisebenzisa izinsiza ezintsha zetechnology kanye
nokuthenga imikhiqizo ebizayo, kodwa emaphakhathi amadolobha,
izindawo
zasemaphandleni kanye namadolobha amancane zibe ziqhubeka nokubola.

UThabo Mbeki kanye noJacob Zuma bahlanganyele enkohlisweni
‘yemonitho
emibili’ (two economies), ukuthi ukwakha izakhiwo zikanokusho
ezibheke phjezulu ezindaweni ezifana noSandton, kanye nezinxanxathele
zezitolo kanye nezakhiwo zamawovivi kungenzeka kwehlise ingcebo
isuke
phezulu iya phansi. UMbeki wayekhala ‘ngokuhlukana kwezakhiwo’
zamampofu kwezabacebili.

Noma ngumuphi umfundi woBandlululo angakuqinisekisa ukuthi, esikhundleni, ngaphezulu kweminyaka eyikhulu. Indlela yethu yezomnotho

yayenziwe yakhiwa ukuze idale ubuphofu kwenye ingxenye – ikakhulukazi

kumaBanstustans – ngengomgomo wokuqheka kwenye ingxenye: izimboni zabamhlophe, izinkundla ikakhulukazi izimayini. Laba ababeqasha abasebenzi ababesuka emaphandleni beza emadolobheni babethola ukunakhuliselwa izingane, kwezempilo kanye nokuguga ngaphandle kokuxhsa ngezimali futhi lokhu kwakwenziwa ngabesifazane basemaphandleni.

Amaholo abasebenzi, ezempesheni kanye nezimali zezehlalakahle zabantwana akuzange kusenze gcono lesisimo, futhi loluxhasa olwenzeke emva kukahulumeni wobandlululo alufiki eNingizimu Matebeleland kanye

naseMozambique lapho abasebenzi abaningi babeqhamuka khona.

Inselelo kwezombusazwe enentuthukoi ukudala iprojekti kulokhu kungalingani, ozokwazi ukubhekana nemidonsiswano ejwayelekile – kwabasemadolobheni/emaphandleni; abasebenzi/abampofu; okwasekhaya/okwezwelonke/kanye nomhlaba wonke; umphakathi/nezemvelo; ubulili; njalonzalo. – engxenye ngokuhlanganisa ubuhlobo phakathi kwalokhu kungqubuzana.

Kweminye imibhikisho ebe nempumelelo – nisiboniso-nje ukuphinde kuxhunye kwamanzi nogesi, ukungenziwa kwenzhlelo zokwenziwa ngasese

ezinye izidingo (njengempi enkulu yango2010 yomgwaqo okhokhelwayo eGauteng), noma ukwekhilswa kwamanani onyaka emishanguzo yengculazi

kusukela ku\$15 000 umuntu emunye kuya kuzero – amalokishi angconywa

njengeChatsworth kanye neSoweto ayeyizigceme zokunganeliseki kwabasemadolobheni. Isizhozhovu ezihamba phambili zziqhamuke kwizakhamizi ebezivele zinezindlu, kodwa manje sebelwa impi yokuzivikela ukuze bahlale emalokishini.

Ekuqaleni, labo abekade behlala emijondolo impilo yabo isengcupheni bebebonakala benesineke. Izethembiso Zenhlanganyela Entathu kwabampofu

zazimbandakanya ukungenelela edolobheni, kodwa futhi ngesikhathi esisodwa, omasipala bebe bexosha abanye ngokungakhokheli ngenkathi kwanda ukungabikhona kwemisebenzi kubantu abangamaphesenti

angamashumi
abane abasebenzi.

Emepeleni, udumo lomlando omuhle kaaKhongolose ilona olwenza kubekhona lokhukubekezela. Kodwa imibhikisho eqhubekayo ivele ezweni lonke emalokishini kanye nasemijondolo, kusukela ngo1999 ngenkathi ukugxekwa ngokubuswa okunhlakanhlaka kweTheku nguFatima Meer kusiza kuholela 'kwizinhlangano ezintsha zokuhlalakahle zasemadolobheni'.

Imibhikisho yokuqala yaqhamuka emva kombhikisho omkhulu kazwelonke eJohannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Deveelopment ngo2002, okunye okuningi kwalandela maphakathi no-2004 eZeervontein ahlala abantu abahlupheka kakhulu enyakatho neGoli, nasemadolobheni amancane njengeHarrismith eFree State, ezakhiweni zasemijondolo kuKennedy Road eThekwini kuqala ngo2005, kanye nasemadolobheni amancane asemigceleni njengaseKhutsing kuliwa nesinqumo sesifundazwe obusayo sishintshelwe kwesinye isifundazwe.

Kodwa akuzange-nje kulandele ingcindezi yenziwa nguhulumeni, kwizikhalo eziningi okwaqala njengokuvukela umbuso okwakungalawulwa Inhanganyela eNtathu kwabizelwa ekutheni kuhlanyelwe, kubhekwane nezinsalelo zomthetho, kanye 'nezwi'.

Elinye iphuzu eligqamila ngalemibhikisho ukwehluleka kwayo 'ukunyukela', noma ukuhlanganyela ndawonye ngezindawo noma ngezombusazwe. Ngaphandle kwezinqinamba ezimbalwa, ukwenyuka kwamaduze kwemibhikisho efuna ukulethwa kwezidingo zomphakathi sekufana 'njengemibhikisho eqhamuka isigubhukane', okusho ukuthi ubushoshovu bomphakathi obundiza kakhulu, buye lapho bufuna ukuya khona – okuze kuthinte ngisho ukucwaswa kwabokufika baseAfrika (xenophobia), okubuswa ngamadoda noma okucwasa ongqingili ngezinye iziwombe – bese futhi kuyashabalala ngokukhulu ukushesha.

Imizamo yokwenza inhlanyela kusukela ngeminyaka kuqala u2002 – njengeJohannesburg Anti-Privatization Forum kanye ne Social Movement Indaba kazwelonke – kwabangaphansi kokuhlaselwa ubuqembukelana kanye nokuhluleka ukuba nesikhalo esifanayo kanye nenhlango yabasebenzi,

inkinga esaqhubeka kwiDemocratic Left Front. Ngakho-ke akukho luhlelo oluvelile elifananyo futhi akukho zinhlelo zenhlangano eziyinselelo ukubhekana nokubuswa ngongxiwankulu kuzwelonke.

Kumbhalo omude waloludaba [<http://ccs.ukzn.ac.za>], sibhekana nezimo ezintathu zalokukuhluleka: ukubaluleka kokutholakala kwezinsiza, ukwakhelana, kanye nobuholi. Ngethemba sigcine ngokuthi okubonakala kuyimibandela ehlukanisayo kuyinkomba kunesizathu sikangqingetshe okubhekene nezinhlangano zasemadolobheni ezilwela inhlalakahle yemiphakathi yaseNingizimu Afrika.

Kodwa-ke uma sesilahla ithemba, sibonile futhi ukuthi izinhlangano zasemadolobheni zinamandla ngokwenza kodwa zihudule izinyawo kwezombusazwe, okuyikona okubabuyisela emuva – ngenkathi belelwa ukwenziwa kwamanye amalungelo nokuchitha isikhathi kushushiswa futhi bedala izikhala zokunganyelwa ngesingakubiza ‘ngokuhlanganyela ngaphakathi (nabezombusazwe)’

Ngesikhathi iphalamende linxenxa umthetho ozofihla okwenzeka ngaphakathi (secrecy legislation) – futhi lelula ukumemezela okumelana nokukhohlakala kanye nokuvimbela ukuveza obala abangcolisa umoya njengeSouth Durban Community Alliance – kubalulekile ukuthi izishoshovu ezilwela inhlalakahle ziqhubeke nokuphonsela inselelo iqembu elibusayo mayelana nokuthi kuqhakambiswe ukukhohlakala kwalo, okubonakala sengathi ngeke kujike futhi okuzimelele.

Kodwa umangabe inkinga iseqinisweni lokuthi ‘okudala kuyafa kodwa okusha ngeke kuzalwe okwamanje’, kwenza sibuze ukuthi ngabe ‘okusha’ kuyobukeka kanjani masekuzalwa. Cha asinazo izimpendulo ezicacile, kodwa uma ukugqubuzana kuqhubeka, u2012 uzoza nokuthi abezindaba badlule ekubhekeni ukwahlukana okuphakathi kweqembu lababusayo bese belalela ngokuqikelela emphakathini omkhulu wabantu ongenalutho.

(UBond owaseUKZN, uDesai useUniversity of Johannesburg kanti uNgwane owaseSoweto Electricity Crisis Committee babhale ngokuhlanganyela kwincwadi ezayo, iMarxism and Social Movements.)

Boris Kagarlitsky on the Russian left

Boris Kagarlitsky 16 January 2012

The global political crisis -- a natural outcome of the continuing economic crisis -- finally made it to Russia in December before getting derailed by the country's traditional hibernation in early January. Nothing ever happens in Russia between December 31 and January 13 -- and particularly not a revolution. While the organisers of the protest demonstrations headed for swanky resorts in Mexico and other sunny spots, their grassroots supporters were stuck in cold, dreary Russia. They retired to their cramped apartments to drink vodka and discuss the country's uncertain fate.

The two-week vacation turned out to be a gift for both the authorities and the opposition. The authorities were quite happy because the holiday brought a lull in the opposition's passions and drained the protest movement of the momentum it had only begun to build. And even though Russians made a psychological shift from passivity to active protest in December, that momentum will have to be generated anew if the demonstrations are to resume in early February as planned.

The holidays have also given the Kremlin time to reflect and work out a strategy for handling future protests and protesters' demands. Rather than altering policy, however, leaders have focused on staffing changes.

President Dmitry Medvedev proposed a couple of political reforms in December, but they would be implemented only in early 2013. Thus, it is clear that Medvedev's proposals are little more than an imitation of concessions to the protesters.

Most disturbing of all, Russia may not have the luxury to wait until 2013 to make even these cosmetic changes. The looming recession and the possible failure of the euro zone in the West could lead to falling oil prices and, thus, serious economic and political consequences for Russia.

The opposition is not in a much better situation. The liberal politicians who set the tone for the Moscow demonstrations understand that people responded to their call only because they are fed up with the lies, corruption and lawlessness of the government. Disgust with the government by no means indicates that protesters have a deep trust or admiration of the opposition leaders. Recall how nearly half the speakers at the rally on Prospekt Akademika Sakharova on December 24 were met with catcalls by various groups.

Moreover, the leaders of the opposition risk losing their only trump card. Either the protesting masses will become more radicalised, uncontrollable and prone to violence, or the reverse will happen: they will grow tired, divided, demoralised and increasingly difficult to mobilise. Either outcome would be catastrophic for the liberals. Of course, the authorities

would prefer the latter scenario, but there is no guarantee it will be the one to play out.

Both sides have an interest in reaching a mutual agreement as soon as possible. The liberals must exact at least a few concessions from the Kremlin before the next round of demonstrations -- their only bargaining chip with the authorities -- slip out from under their control. For its part, the Kremlin would do better to reach agreement with the opposition now than to face unpredictable and perhaps violent protests later.

Several opposition figures leaked the information that secret negotiations with the authorities began in December. The question now is: What are the two sides discussing and have they reached an agreement?

Despite calls for compromise from such disparate groups as the business community and the Russian Orthodox Church, it is not at all clear that the parties will manage to reach an agreement. The opposition might demand a postponement of the presidential election scheduled for March to allow for real opposition candidates -- and not the soft ones who were handpicked by Vladimir Putin -- to be registered so they can run against Prime Minister Putin. Note that nobody is calling for the replacement of liberals within the economic ministries who are themselves supporters of former finance minister Alexei Kudrin and his economic course.

The real problem is Putin. For the ruling elite, Putin's additional six- or 12-year hold on power is their guarantee of stability, and they will not sacrifice him to satisfy protesters.

As a result, the authorities and the opposition might find themselves drawn into a new round of confrontation, and neither side would be prepared for it.

The liberals have a sincere and deep desire to achieve their goals peacefully, constitutionally and without a revolution. But if they are guided by their fears, they could very well push the situation toward an impasse in which violence is the only option available.

<http://links.org.au/node/2693>

[Boris Kagarlitsky is the director of the Institute of Globalisation Studies.]

Haiti 2 years after the earthquake

2 Years After Devastating Earthquake, Haiti's Rebuilding Weighed Down by Legacy of Foreign Meddling

http://www.democracynow.org/2012/1/13/2_years_after_devastating_earthquake_haiti

Democracy Now 13 January 2011

On the second anniversary of the devastating earthquake in Haiti that killed roughly 300,000 people and left more than 1.5 million homeless, we speak with Randall Robinson, author of "An Unbroken Agony: Haiti, from Revolution to the Kidnapping of a President." The United Nations estimates international donors gave Haiti over \$1.6 billion in relief aid since the earthquake and more than \$2 billion in recovery aid over the last two years. But critics say little of the funding made it directly to the Haitian people, instead going to international non-governmental organizations and private companies involved in the relief effort. "I'm not surprised that the reconstruction efforts are not going well," Robinson says, "because I don't think the United States, officially, ever wanted anything to go well in Haiti." [includes rush transcript]

JUAN GONZALEZ: Memorials are being held in Haiti to mark the second anniversary of the devastating earthquake that killed roughly 300,000 people and left more than 1.5 million homeless. Two years later, the recovery process is just beginning in parts of Haiti. Half-a-million people are still living in crowded camps. According to the United Nations, of the \$4.5 billion pledged after the earthquake, only about \$2.4 billion has been delivered. Only half of the debris littering the capital of Port-au-Prince and its surrounding areas has been cleared.

Yesterday, President Michel Martelly led a solemn ceremony that paid homage to the dead at Titanyen, a mass burial grave north of Port-au-Prince.

PRESIDENT MICHEL MARTELLY: [translated] Ladies and gentlemen, today, on January 12, 2012, we are inspired by the passage to the other side of those who died in the tragedy. They inspire us, not to lament them and to cry, but as an example, as we manage and build a Haitian habitat and construct in accordance with our nature's security, rules and regulations. It is in this spirit that my presidency will lead the reconstruction of our country. Ladies and gentlemen, in this space of memory, I extend, on my behalf, on that of my spouse and my family and of the entire government, public institutions, my deepest sympathy to the families of all the victims of the earthquake of January 12, 2010, sympathy to those who are still alive to this tragedy, one in which we recall the responsibility of Haiti to invent another destiny.

JUAN GONZALEZ: That was President Michel Martelly of Haiti.

The United Nations estimates international donors gave Haiti over \$1.6 billion in relief since the earthquake and more than \$2 billion in recovery

aid over the last two years. But critics say little of the funding made it directly to the Haitian people, instead going to international non-governmental organizations and private companies involved in the relief effort. Meanwhile, Haitian residents say entire neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince have been ignored during the recovery process.

OTELIER HERMAN: [translated] Two years after, nothing has been done in the poorest neighborhoods. As a citizen within the poor neighborhoods, we have found that there was not a policy for housing, and that's why so many people have died.

AMY GOODMAN: For more on the second anniversary of the earthquake in Haiti, we're joined by Randall Robinson, law professor at Pennsylvania State University, author of a number of books, including *An Unbroken Agony: Haiti, from Revolution to the Kidnapping of a President*. Randall Robinson is the founder and past president of TransAfrica. He joins us discuss his most recent book, as well, his second novel. It's called *Makeda*. Set at the dawn of the civil rights era, it follows a young man coming of age in segregated Richmond, Virginia. Through his blind grandmother and her visions, he discovers his roots in Africa.

Randall Robinson, welcome to Democracy Now!

RANDALL ROBINSON: Thank you. Very nice to be here.

AMY GOODMAN: It's great to have you back with us. Let's talk first, briefly, about Haiti and what it faces on this second anniversary. I was with you on the journey back from the Central African Republic, when you and Congress Member Maxine Waters and others took a small plane to the Central African Republic to try to retrieve President Aristide after the coup of 2004. It is, what, seven years later. A horrific earthquake kills more than 300,000 Haitians, and we hear about the billions that perhaps never made it to the people of Haiti to relieve their suffering.

RANDALL ROBINSON: Well, we can't trust what we're being told by official Washington. We have every reason not to. We were on that plane to the Central African Republic to rescue the Aristides, because the president and his wife had been abducted by American Army people, personnel, and taken there against their will. That was never reported. The New York Times reported that he fled to South Africa, as if that never happened. And so, you were on the plane, and you knew what happened, but it was not reported in the United States. When we look at the WikiLeaks cables, it's stunning evidence of the collaboration between the United States and the U.N. to first slander President Aristide, to collaborate with the Haitian police in contaminating the new police force by infusing it with hundreds of paramilitaries who had preyed upon the

Haitian people belief—just terrible things that the U.S. was doing behind the scenes, and presumably continues to do. And so, I'm not surprised that the reconstruction efforts are not going well, because I don't think the United States, officially, ever wanted anything to go well in Haiti, and more recently, of course, tried vigorously to obstruct President Aristide's return to his country, which is a violation of international human rights law.

AMY GOODMAN: By the way, speaking of his return, in March of last year, we covered ousted Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide when he ultimately did return to Haiti from South Africa, seven-and-a-half years after he had been ousted in 2004. When he landed in Port-au-Prince, he was greeted by thousands of supporters. He addressed the crowd in a number of languages. When he spoke English, he said, "Exclusion is the problem, inclusion is the solution," indirectly referencing his party, Fanmi Lavalas, which was excluded from the latest presidential election. But when he addressed the Haitians in Creole, in their language, he was much more explicit.

JEAN-BERTRAND ARISTIDE: [translated] You are right. If we don't salvage our dignity, our dignity will be gone. Yes, you are right, because the problem is exclusion, and the solution is inclusion. The exclusion of Fanmi Lavalas is the exclusion of the majority. The exclusion of the majority means that you are cutting off exactly the branch that we are all sitting on. The problem is exclusion. The solution is inclusion of all Haitians, without discrimination, because everybody is a person.

AMY GOODMAN: That was President Aristide upon landing on Haitian soil with his wife and two girls, his children, after seven-and-a-half years in exile, talking about how the majority party of Haiti had been excluded from the presidential election.

RANDALL ROBINSON: Well, one has to wonder how the United States, including of course President Obama, can embrace an election that excludes the largest party in the country and then to call it democracy. It is not democracy. And no democracy should be supporting that kind of exclusion. It's unthinkable that the U.S. would embrace and endorse and validate something as terrible an outcome and as unfair an outcome as that one has been.

JUAN GONZALEZ: What do you make of this long history now of the United States, on the one hand, seeking to want to meddle and control the political life of Haiti at the same time that you hear our leaders here complaining about how Haiti is always having instability and poverty and that all the United States can do is provide assistance or humanitarian assistance, but yet this long history of insistence on meddling in the affairs

of the Haitian people?

RANDALL ROBINSON: It's gone on for 200 years, virtually since the Haitian revolution, when freed slaves, under the leadership of Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Toussaint Louverture, with 40,000 revolting ex-slaves, turned back a French army twice, a British army and a Spanish army, and committed and produced the first successful revolution in this hemisphere, making possible the American purchase of the Louisiana Territory, because Napoleon said he was done with empire with that defeat. But it was humiliating to the West. It was humiliating to Europe. It was humiliating to Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. And it is something that has stayed in the American craw. These people fought and died for their freedom. And we did everything possible to suppress it. And that has been an unrelieved, implacable American opposition for 200 years since. What we have done to Haiti is unforgivable.

AMY GOODMAN: We're going to break and then come back to talk about, on this eve of Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday, the federal holiday, that in itself was so difficult to get passed in the United States, your new book, your second novel called *Makeda*, which is set on the eve of the civil rights era in your home town of Richmond, Virginia. We're talking to Randall Robinson, law professor at Pennsylvania State University, author of a number of books, including *An Unbroken Agony: Haiti, from Revolution to the Kidnapping of a President*, past president and founder of TransAfrica. This is Democracy Now! Back in a minute. www.democracynow.org

Greece New round of austerity announced

Niall Mulholland, CWI 13 January 2012

Yesterday, the German and French governments put pressure on Greece to "find a solution" to its debt crisis, threatening to deny its government another 130bn euro bailout unless it reaches agreement with its bondholders. Investors are being urged to 'write down' 50% of the value of their holdings of Greek government bonds. This action is being encouraged because of the desperate situation facing the euro, which French President Nicolas Sarkozy called "tense, more so than ever in the euro-zone's history".

But it is the majority of Greek people who are still asked to take all the real pain to satisfy the markets. Last week, the unelected Greek Prime Minister, Lucas Papademos, announced a new round of deep austerity cuts. Amongst other things, Papademos declared new cuts to social and

welfare benefits, including health, a slashing of the minimum wage, an assault on public sector workers' wages and pensions and changes to labour legislation that will be used to attack workers rights and conditions.

All this is preparing the ground for more large-scale confrontations with between the government and the Greek working class and youth.

Below, NIALL MULHOLLAND, who visited Athens last month to attend a national meeting of Xekinima (CWI in Greece), reports on the general situation in Greece after a year of major class struggle, and discusses perspectives for a fight-back by workers and young people in the coming months.

Greece's struggling families tried to make the best they could of Christmas. But with the country set for a fifth year of deep recession/slump, the coalition government's announcement of another 5 billion euro in spending cuts and another 3.6 billion in new punishing taxes, and with unemployment at an official figure of 18% (in reality much higher), there was, not surprisingly, a noticeable lack of festive cheer.

This winter, Athens is darker than usual, as many residents forgo decorating the outside walls of their apartments with customary Christmas lights because they cannot afford the electricity bills. Many more homeless people are on the streets. The country has the highest suicide rates in Europe, according to the British press. There is a mass exodus of a new generation of Greek migrants out of the country, involving many tens of thousands. The Greek press estimates that 30,000 new 'illegal' Greek immigrants are in Australia, alone.

Two years of deep spending cuts on healthcare, from around €15 billion to €13 billion, is directly affecting the lives of millions, sometimes fatally. The poor and jobless cannot afford new fees and 'co-payments' imposed at public hospitals. Nurses are handling four times the number of patients as previous and waiting times for operations have grown longer. Public health facilities have seen a 25 to 30 per cent increase in patients because so many Greeks can no longer afford to visit private clinics.

This desperate situation – a collapse into the dire social and living conditions usually associated with the poorest parts of the world - comes after another year of titanic struggles by the Greek working class against austerity policies, including two 48 hour general strikes. The determination of the working masses to force the previous PASOK ('Panhellenic Socialist Movement') government to stop its cuts was never in doubt. But they did not have a leadership equally determined to inflict a defeat on the government or with a viable alternative to the cuts agenda –

a socialist perspective and socialist policies.

Last November, the new unelected government of Greek Prime Minister Lucas Papademos was imposed on the Greek people at the behest of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Union (EU) and the European Central Bank (ECB) - the infamous 'Troika'. The administration is made up of PASOK, the right wing New Democracy and the far-right LAOS party.

During a visit to Athens, last December, the Troika demanded 2 billion euro more spending cuts, to be carried out by January. The IMF, EU and ECB want more austerity to be carried out by the Papademos administration before the 'uncertainty' of new parliamentary elections which are due to be held in February 2012.

But the ruling parties fear that imposing more heavy cuts will prove disastrous for them in the polls next year, even if they agree to postpone the elections (there is speculation elections may be moved back to March or later). They have very good reason to be concerned. The Greek Left – including the KKE (communist party) and SYN (Synaspismos – Coalition of the Left of Movements and Ecology), are gaining in the polls, sometimes reaching around 30% of the total vote.

This was the background to an excellent meeting of over 125 members of Xekinima (CWI in Greece) who travelled from all over the country, including from Salonika, Volvos and Corfu and Crete, to discuss in Athens on 18-19 December.

Although Greece has been the centre of class struggles in Europe this year, the Athens meeting aptly started with a discussion on the international situation. Greece's deep economic crisis is inextricably linked to the global capitalist crisis, as speaker after speaker outlined. While intensely involved in the major social and industrial struggles throughout Greece's year of protests, Xekinima members also closely followed events across the world, including the process of revolution and counter revolution in the Middle East and North Africa, the movements of the 'indignatos', the strikes in Spain and Portugal, the public sector strike in Britain, the occupy movements in the US and the recent mass protests against Putin in Russia.

The main discussion on Greece heard in detail the experiences of members and supporters of Xekinima who participated in all the major industrial struggles of Greek workers over the last year, as well as taking part in the weeks-long occupations of city squares by radicalised youth fighting cuts.

Deep economic, social and political crisis

Greek society faces deep economic, social and political crisis. But just a few years ago, there was much fanfare from the media and Establishment, especially from PASOK, when Greece joined the euro-zone in 2001. The country's hosting of the Olympic Games in 2004 encouraged illusions that society was going forward and Greeks could expect ever rising living standards. Yet within a few years, Greece was hit by deep economic crisis and the working class and middle class were asked to pay for the crisis of the capitalist system with enormous cuts. Now the younger generation face a future of worse living conditions than their parents. According to official figures, it will take up to the year 2057 before the country's debt will be fully paid off!

The Greek ruling class is under immense pressure from the working class, on the one side, which is resolutely opposed to having to pay for the crisis of the system, and also from the Troika, on the other side, which demands ever more cuts. But the Greek ruling circles are also aware of the weakness of the leadership of the working class, which allows them room to manoeuvre and to carry out brutal austerity cuts.

2011 was a trial of strength between the Greek bosses and the country's working people and youth. The summer occupation movement in city and town squares was largely made up of youth and was not in the control of the union leaderships. Its development played an important role in pushing back the far right – an expression of counter revolution – which had mounted vicious attacks against immigrants in previous weeks.

The class struggle reached its highest point in October, when the second 48 hour general strike had the potential to immediately remove the hugely unpopular and isolated PASOK government and to pose the question of an alternative government based on the interests of working people and the poor. There were “revolutionary elements” in the situation but the key missing factor was a revolutionary party with mass support to lead the struggle successfully.

The huge general strikes showed how little support the PASOK government had in Greek society. Public sector workers occupied government ministry buildings, kicking top bureaucrats out of their offices. This left visiting officials from the Troika, who act like arrogant colonialists, unable to communicate with Greek ministries. There were also significant moves towards local neighbourhood struggles. Annual World War Two commemorations became the focus for unprecedented open defiance of politicians and Establishment figures.

October movement

But the two main left parties, Syriza and the KKE, did not lead the mass

movements. Rather, they were compelled by the militant mood of the working class to come in behind the struggles. The KKE called for “people’s power” to deal with sovereign debt crisis, as “first stage” to resolve the situation. They argued there was “not a revolutionary situation” in Greece and therefore it was not their duty to fight for system change and socialism.

Yet the October mass struggle was a mighty blow against the PASOK government and, in effect, played a key role in eventually bringing down the PASOK government. With a bold working class leadership, the October movement could have pushed on to fight for a government representing the interests of the mass of working people. But in the absence of a far-sighted, revolutionary socialist leadership for the working class, the ruling classes in Greece and Europe were able to manoeuvre and a new pro-capitalist “government of bankers” was imposed on the Greek people.

Not surprisingly, after months of major strikes and continuous social struggles, but without achieving their main aims, many workers and youth are now tired and some are exhausted and pessimistic. But these moods will not last for long. New major struggles are on the agenda. Working people and youth will have no choice but to fight back against the new raft of cuts. Many will have learnt the lessons of 2011 and will fight to take democratic control of the unions from the bureaucracy, so that unions are fully representative of the views and aims of the working class.

There are crucial industrial disputes taking place now, despite the general downturn in class struggle. Steel workers have been on strike for three months. Journalists are taking strike action in various parts of the media. Workers in the mental health sector, which is fundamentally government financed but ran privately, face big job losses and wage cuts. They were told in the run up to Christmas that they could either take a 50% wage cut or face 50% job losses! More assaults on public sector jobs and working conditions are set for the months ahead, which can result in new industrial resistance. Sections of the pro-PASOK unions have announced they are no longer linked to the party due to its vicious cuts record.

The ruling parties are divided on how to pass the latest ‘reforms’ (i.e. deep austerity cuts). When in opposition, the New Democracy and far right LAOS party opportunistically opposed some cuts but now in a coalition government with PASOK they are increasingly exposed in the eyes of the masses as standing for yet more austerity misery.

Left gaining in polls

In this situation, the left parties are picking up support in polls. Between them, Syriza and the KKE are getting up to 30%, according to most polls over the last couple of months. In one survey, 60% who vote for the KKE

want a “coalition with Syriza”. In recent months, joint activities have taken place between the two parties, mainly due to the pressure of the objective needs of the workers’ movement and despite the unwillingness of the KKE leadership.

In the political situation that will open up, the parties of the left will have a unique and historic opportunity to grow and to play a decisive role. But to bring about the kind of fundamental changes that are required to provide real and lasting solutions to the deep problems faced by the Greek workers and the whole of society, requires the left adopting a socialist programme and to fight decisively for system change. Up until now, the main parties of the Greek Left, like KKE and Synaspismos, refused to move in this direction. The need to build and develop the mass movements, and to build new forces of the left, with radical, socialist policies, is more starkly posed than ever.

Xekinima supporters argue for a ‘united left’ to contest the elections, to fight for a majority left government. The left must reject the trap of going into any ‘coalition’ with pro-capitalist parties, which would mean aiding the anti-working class cuts agenda. This requires the left adopting a bold socialist programme, including calling for no cuts, non-payment of the debt, huge investment in jobs, housing, health and welfare, and for the major planks of the economy to be taken into democratic public ownership and management.

Although more on the left now call for ‘nationalisations’, there is still a paucity of socialist perspectives and policies coming from the larger left parties. The Syriza leadership calls for a “freezing of the debt” rather than non payment of the monstrous burden that has been imposed on the Greek people. The KKE only offers abstract slogans, calling for a ‘people’s government’ and it does not advocate any practical alternative.

Exit the euro-zone?

The lack of a viable socialist perspective from the main left parties partly explains why more commentators and sections of the left are now calling for Greece to exit the euro-zone as a way to ‘solve’ the crisis. It is true that leaving the euro-zone would probably lead to the fast devaluation of a Greek national currency and allow for cheap exports from Greece. Those supporting this move claim that Greece would then be able to export its way out of recession and pay off its national debt. But a devalued currency will also mean more expensive imports and a hike in inflation. What is this but austerity for the Greek people by another name? And where would Greece export to? The EU is facing a ‘double dip’ recession and even Germany’s economy is slowing down. China and the other ‘BRICs’ are also heading towards slowed growth, even a ‘hard landing’ in some cases. Greece leaving the euro would also likely trigger a flight of

capital from the country and a 'strike' of foreign investment into Greece.

At the moment, the majority of Greeks do not want to leave the euro, fearing it means even worse economic crisis and a shredding of their living standards. But as the crisis deepens and prolongs and as cuts continue, the demand to leave may grow amongst working people and the middle classes to even become a majority.

Staying in the euro-zone or leaving it is not a principled issue for socialists. Remaining with the euro has meant Greek workers facing the draconian dictates of the Troika, which has ruined so many livelihoods and lives. But, as explained above, Xekinima points out that exiting the euro, while staying within the framework of capitalism, is no 'solution' for working people. Xekinima calls for a socialist, internationalist solution, which would see the major parts of the Greek economy taken into democratic workers' control and management. This would be linked to solidarity with the struggles of European workers fighting their own austerity cuts, as part of a common fight to transform society - for a socialist federation of Europe.

Fascists exploit mood of despondency

As well as a new surge in class struggles, Xekinima members also expect other issues to increasingly come to the fore in 2012, such as environmental questions, which are always important in Greece. Xekinima supporters are involved in local campaigns against the building of huge polluting and wasteful refuse incinerators. A mass non-payment campaign against a new unjust household tax has already taken root in many areas.

But fascist groups, like the 'Golden Dawn', are again trying to exploit the mood of despondency and alienation amongst sections of the most downtrodden in society. They have stepped up attacks on immigrants and launched a so-called "Youth should fight for a future" campaign in poorer areas of Athens. Some of the left, particularly the two main parties, Synaspismos and the KKE, decided to "ignore" the neo-fascists. But this only gave the far right confidence to build unhindered from serious opposition. The Golden Dawn even managed to recruit bus drivers in Athens. However, Xekinima supporters and other workers, led by a Xekinima comrade who is a member of the executive committee of the bus driver's union, campaigned against the far right poison. The fascists were successfully exposed and their influence seriously weekend in the course of the past few months.

Public sector strike in Cyprus

The island of Cyprus was also represented at the Athens meeting. Comrades from the New Internationalist Left (CWI Cyprus) reported on

the economic crisis hitting Greek Cyprus and cuts being carried out by the 'communist' AKEL government. This led to a recent three hour public sector workers' strike – the first such industrial action for decades. Angry workers at the national parliament also struck, leaving MPs without lighting, working microphones or secretaries to take minutes (the MPs had to therefore record their own minutes). Humiliated MPs had to break down a door to enter the parliament hall, as the workers who normally open and close the building were also on strike! A New Internationalist Left leaflet, outlining how to develop the industrial action, was eagerly grabbed by Cypriot workers during their rally outside the parliament building.

Greek workers face more of the same disastrous austerity measures in 2012, without respite. The troika demands that more cuts are agreed before further loan instalments are given to Greece. These cuts will again reduce the living standards of the working class, hitting the poorest and most vulnerable hardest. Women are worst effected. One in five women is unemployed. On average, female workers get 20% less in salaries than men. Domestic violence is rising, which experts link to a sharp surge in drug and alcohol abuse that is a result of joblessness and a collapse in living standards.

At the same time as new cuts rain down on the heads of the working class and poor, the government takes a timid approach to the tax evasion of the elite in society. Yet workers earning just a paltry 5,000 euro a year are now eligible to pay income tax.

The government's plans for privatisations will be stepped up, including the sell off of Athens International Airport.

All this marks a clear intent by the bosses' and big bankers' government to carry out yet more assaults on public sector jobs, pay and conditions and against the working class and poor, as a whole.

The apparent 'quiet' in Greek society is an illusion. The new government of Greek Prime Minister Lucas Papademos is not enjoying a prolonged 'honeymoon'. The mood beneath the surface is "boiling" and political polarisation increasing. The conditions for more class conflicts are maturing.

2012 promises to be another tumultuous year in Greece.

The support and influence of Xekinima has grown significantly in 2011, attracting scores of worker-militants and youth. This growth and Xekinima's excellent December national meeting, shows the CWI in Greece in well placed for the big class battles looming.

<http://www.socialistworld.net/doc/5523>

Removal of Oil Subsidy Protest in Nigeria

Conflicting roles by NLC, TUC and Civil Society

[Fidelis Allen](#) 11 January 2011

"Labour has been bought. They have compromised. As civil society in Rivers State we thought we could work with labour, but they have compromised in Rivers State. How can you be having a protest and you just

sluggishly work in. There is lack of seriousness. It is so glaring," notes Celestine Akpobari, of Ogoni Civil Society Platform, in his response to my question on protest against removal of oil subsidy by the federal government which started on 9 January. Cracks between the civil society and the Nigerian Labour Congress and the Trade Union Congress over strategies in current struggles against fuel price increase arising from the removal of oil subsidy is already being noticed. Lagos, Kaduna, Abuja and so on had huge turn-out of protesters, but the same story cannot be told of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, where presently, the NLC and TUC are being accused of compromising.

Nigeria currently produces 2.6 million barrels of oil daily, but is mostly refined abroad as its four refineries are sick of corruption, underutilisation and technical shortcomings, leaving the unhealthy option of highly subsidized importation of fuel. Nigerians have waited long for government to fix her refineries, even as licenses have been granted a number of investors to operate private refineries for refining crude locally in order to meet local consumption which now stands at 300,000 barrels/day. With this daily consumption level, and installed capacity of 445 thousand barrels/day at the refineries in Nigeria, one would certainly expect that 3.5 million barrels per day should be generated. Local consumption needs would certainly have been met at minimal cost if the refineries were operating at full capacity. Instead, the Nigerian government has been involved in subsidizing importation of fuel, a process which the government claims has been afflicted with corruption. The federal government insists on saving money for the welfare of Nigerians and on need to address the problem of corruption in the marketing of fuel in the country by removing the subsidy. The result is the high-pitched price of fuel per litre from N65 to somewhere between N140 and N180/litre as at the time of writing. This means a lot for the poor as transportation, access to food, and so on are now clearly linked with this rise in the price of fuel. Unable to cope with meagre income, having to part with twice or three times more in prices of

commodities, Nigerians are in the streets protesting.

NLC and TUC, leading the protests in various states in alliance with the civil society, seems not to have, in a sense, been quite successful in some states, according to some activists. In this case---Rivers State---civil society groups have problems working with NLC and TUC, simply on grounds of perceived sell-out to the government of the state. According to one civil society activist, 'leaders of official labour unions in this protest' have allowed themselves to be influenced by political interest and forces by failing to work directly with the civil society and by agreeing to disperse from the protest on 10 January after being addressed by the governor of the state at the Government House in Port Harcourt. 'One journalist in the city of Port Harcourt, Steve Obodkwe, while interacting with me on the issue, argues a contrary view as he says, suspension of work and closure of offices of well-established government and private organisations clearly point to the impact that the protest is already making.

Failure by NLC and TUC members and leaders to turn up early for protest on the first and second days of the protests in the city infuriated some of the civil society actors. As they mentioned, this lack of seriousness on the part of labour is not in the best interest of the masses of poor Rivers people. In Bayelsa State, NLC and TUC members were absent from the streets as they merely discussed in a hall and dispersed. As it was disclosed in a strategy meeting of civil society activist at Social Actions office at the Orominike Close, D-Line Port Harcourt, on 10 January after their protests and rally, the president and governor of Rivers State seem to have utilised co-optation to frustrate the protests in Bayelsa and Rivers State. It would appear that the unions are unable to provide a voice for the people in some parts of the country. Meanwhile, protests in many parts of the country have been quite successful, although with many records of police brutality and death of protesters.

The issue of increase in fuel price resulting from the removal of oil subsidy is serious enough to attract the anger of Nigerians, including the country's Nigerian Bar Association, who have promised to offer free legal services to all who suffer unjustly from the nation-wide protest. For the poor, it means a big leap to the abyss of poverty. The protest is a struggle for survival, and means much more than mere response to a government policy.

In any case, while the civil society in some states like Lagos, Ibadan and so on seem to have done substantial well in planning, lack of resources and effective mobilisation seem to have affected the momentum

for sustained protests by groups after the first day of protests in the case of Rivers State. Local communities and the informal sector are rather lukewarm to the protest. Some simply prefer to sit at home watching developments on television --only if there is electricity. Electricity is a huge luxury in many parts of the city of Port Harcourt, including where I live with my family. It is either one powers his/her house with a mini- power-generating set, or stay in darkness for weeks before the power supply authorities comes with at most two to five hours supply. Increase in the price of fuel now means that citizens would have to go, most of the time without electricity. Food, transportation, payment of children's school fees and leisure have now become very expensive to come-by. For example, transport fare within the city of Port Harcourt which was on the average N50 for every drop is now between N100-N200, a development that is already spelling doom and disaster in the days to come.

Removal of oil subsidy that produces more pain for the people may be as bad as the many years of subsidizing a damaging product like oil. Not only is the issue seriously part of a neoliberal World Bank project to further integrate the developing countries into the global capitalist order, the underlying interests of the developed countries which this serves orchestrates a zero-sum negative result for the poor, who are completely neglected in this project. What is even completely left out is the logic of several years of subsidizing a very damaging product like oil, although some actually believe petrol has never been subsidized in Nigeria. Oil is responsible for current global climate crisis and has been responsible for severe damage to the immediate environment or ecosystem in the Niger Delta.

In any case, a section of the civil society says that removal of oil subsidy is not the same as rise in fuel price. At least, Celestine Akpobari of Social Action, made this point clear as he suggests that the issue of removal oil subsidy could have been handled differently with regards to timing if the government consulted widely with stakeholders. Meanwhile, leaders of the two major labour unions driving the strike and protests nationally failed to come to an agreement with the federal government in a meeting that took place yesterday in Abuja. The strike continues today.

Celebration and Criticism as the ANC Turns 100

Danny Schechter 11 January 2012

The invitation came by email, inviting "CDE Danny Schechter" to the ceremony marking the 100th anniversary of South Africa's African National Congress in the Orange Free State. Unfortunately, in these depressing financial times, I had to beg off because it didn't come with an air ticket.

For the uninitiated, CDE stands for comrade, a term over-associated in this country with Communist movements, and a word that is often used by members of the US military and even by activists of Occupy Wall Street. The dictionary I consulted pigeonholes it as a subversive leftist phrase, which of course it isn't. comrade |?käm?rad; ?käm?d| - noun - a companion who shares one's activities or is a fellow member of an organisation

- (also comrade-in-arms) a fellow soldier or serviceman
- a fellow socialist or communist (often as a form of address) : [as title] Comrade Lenin.

ANC members, and members liberation movements the world over, use comrade as a term of identity and endearment. In that sense, I was proud that the ANC had me on the guest list - no doubt because of the 30 years I spent crusading against apartheid, as an activist in South Africa and America, writer, filmmaker, and part of the team that produced Sun City, the anti-apartheid multi-artist hit and related educational material.

I was consumed with the South Africa struggle since my days in the civil rights movement in the early 1960s, my graduate student days in London in the mid-sixties when I visited the land of apartheid on an ANC-backed "mission", as a founder of the Africa Research group in Cambridge, MA, as a freelance writer and then as a network producer and independent filmmaker.

I made five films with and about South Africa, working with a South African company, and produced the South Africa Now TV series with my company Globalvision for 156 weeks between 1987 and 1991.

That's a long immersion, and as the late South African writer and poet laureate, Mazisi Kunene told me, I earned the right to speak out about my concerns even if I wasn't born in the "beloved country".

A history of activism

The ANC, formed in 1912 (around the same time that the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People [NAACP] was born) fought a long freedom struggle, one of the longest in Africa.

It went through several stages, first, as a church-based elite lobbying force, a non-violent nationalist movement, and then, as part of an alliance with Indians, Coloureds, and progressive Whites, including Afrikaners

and Communists.

It morphed into a violent struggle of resistance and armed combat when the doors to non-violent change were brutally shut by white nationalists who built on British colonial racism to impose apartheid, a practice of physically relocating communities, regulating labour with passes, and violent repression.

In response, the ANC evolved a four-pole strategy built around armed struggle led by exiles, urban insurrection in the townships to make the country ungovernable there, worldwide anti-apartheid activism and aggressive lobbying at the United Nations, in sports federations and other international bodies.

Its committed and impressive advocates and representatives criss-crossed the globe raising money and awareness.

Outside the country, the movement was led by Oliver Tambo, Nelson Mandela's law partner. It had alliances with the "frontline states" of Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Zambia and worked alongside liberation fighters in Angola and Namibia.

Inside South Africa, many top leaders such as Mandela were arrested and sent to the draconian Robben Island prison where they were expected to die. Thousands more were arrested in bitter battles with the police and army. Scores sacrificed their lives - such as the murdered black consciousness fighter, Steve Biko, or rivals in the PAC and Unity Movement.

Many died or were killed, endured torture, the separation of families, and very tough times.

Finally, as South Africa's economy came under external sanctions and pressure, and after their army suffered a major defeat in Angola at the hands of Cuban and African solidarity fighters, Pretoria had no choice but to free Mandela and his comrades, and start a negotiating process that led to the country's first democratic elections four years later. Nelson Mandela became president in 1994.

A new challenge

That was nearly 20 years ago. While the ANC which promised a "better life for all" faced a new and even more problematic struggle - delivering on its promises by providing services, building houses, creating jobs and transforming a country with the deepest divisions between wealth and poverty in the world. There, the 99.9 per cent were held captive by the 0.01 per cent.

A group that fought against power had now become the power, and in some cases was seduced by power's seductions and corruption. The result has been predictable - and a lesson for revolutionaries the world over.

Some in the ANC believed "it is now our turn" to enjoy the country's riches. "If we get mesmerised by the 'fleshpots'," ANC leader Joe Slovo warned me in an interview on the first Election Day, "we will be through". Had he lived, he would have not been a happy man to see the co-option and compromises of many of his comrades.

Sadly, many sold out while others bought in. The country that wanted to be known as "the Rainbow Nation" revealed a dark side alongside all the impressive and undeniable progress that had been made.

Still, the ANC lost its beneficent aura, and, in some cases, its moral standing as a handful of high profile leaders became millionaires and more, while "black empowerment" schemes were riddled with nepotism and self-dealing as in the phrase that goes back to the apartheid days: "Let's make a plan!"

There seem to be new scandals every day. At the same time there are many ANC stalwarts that stay true to the movement's values. To its credit, much of the South African press tells it like it is. Some of this is reversible. Many activists demonstrate for reforms of what they call a "new apartheid". The ANC's traditions are still alive - although not always within the ANC. A new crusade against corruption, demagoguery and hypocrisy is needed.

Hopefully, this anniversary can become a time of reflection. It has to start by the movement admitting it did not bring about what's called the "new dispensation" all by itself. It has to credit religious leaders such as Desmond Tutu and civic leaders in every community. It has to salute the solidarity movements that helped delegitimise apartheid and its apologists, including US politicians and corporations.

Happy 100th Birthday ANC. A big Viva to all your leaders and supporters and a sincere thank you for allowing me, an opinionated American who cared, access to your internal processes, and profound lessons about what it takes to make change.

I learned so much more than I was able to give and am proud to have stood with you when I could.

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News Dissector and blogger Danny Schechter called for protests in his

film Plunder: The Crime Of Our Time, exposing financial crimes on Wall Street. Comments to dissector@mediachannel.org.

Why Libertarians Must Deny Climate Change

George Monbiot (The Guardian) 8 January 2012

Over the Christmas break I read what I believe is the most important environmental essay of the past 12 months. Though it begins with a mildly unfair criticism of a column of mine, I won't hold it against the author. In a simple and very short tract, Matt Bruenig presents a devastating challenge to those who call themselves libertarians, and explains why they have no choice but to deny climate change and other environmental problems.

Bruenig explains what is now the core argument used by conservatives and libertarians: the procedural justice account of property rights. In brief, this means that if the process by which property was acquired was just, those who have acquired it should be free to use it as they wish, without social restraints or obligations to other people. Their property rights are absolute and cannot be intruded upon by the state or by anyone else. Any interference with, or damage to, the value of their property without their consent – even by taxation – is an unwarranted infringement. This, with local variations, is the basic philosophy of the Republican candidates, the Tea Party movement, the lobby groups that call themselves "free market thinktanks" and much of the new right in the UK.

It is a pitiless, one-sided, mechanical view of the world, which elevates the rights of property over everything else, meaning that those who possess the most property end up with great power over others. Dressed up as freedom, it is a formula for oppression and bondage. It does nothing to address inequality, hardship or social exclusion. A transparently self-serving vision, it seeks to justify the greedy and selfish behaviour of those with wealth and power.

But, for the sake of argument, Bruenig says, let us accept it. Let us accept the idea that damage to the value of property without the owner's consent is an unwarranted intrusion upon the owner's freedoms. What this means is that as soon as libertarians encounter environmental issues, they're stuffed.

Climate change, industrial pollution, ozone depletion, damage to the physical beauty of the area surrounding people's homes (and therefore

their value) – all these, if libertarians did not possess a shocking set of double standards, would be denounced by them as infringements on other people's property.

The owners of coal-burning power stations in the UK have not obtained the consent of everyone who owns a lake or a forest in Sweden to deposit acid rain there. So their emissions, in the libertarian worldview, should be regarded as a form of trespass on the property of Swedish landowners.

Nor have they received the consent of the people of this country to allow mercury and other heavy metals to enter our bloodstreams, which means that they are intruding upon our property in the form of our bodies.

Nor have they – or airports, oil companies or car manufacturers – obtained the consent of all those it will affect to release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, altering global temperatures and – through rising sea levels, droughts, storms and other impacts – damaging the property of many people. As Bruenig says:

"Almost all uses of land will entail some infringement on some other piece of land that is owned by someone else. So how can that ever be permitted? No story about freedom and property rights can ever justify the pollution of the air or the burning of fuels, because those things affect the freedom and property rights of others. Those actions ultimately cause damage to surrounding property and people without getting any consent from those affected. They are the ethical equivalent – for honest libertarians – of punching someone in the face or breaking someone else's window."

So here we have a simple and coherent explanation of why libertarianism is so often associated with climate change denial, and the playing down or dismissal of other environmental issues. It would be impossible for the owner of a power station, steel plant, quarry, farm or any large enterprise to obtain consent for all the trespasses he commits against other people's property – including their bodies.

This is the point at which libertarianism smacks into the wall of gritty reality and crumples like a Coke can. Any honest and thorough application of this philosophy would run counter to its aim: which is to allow the owners of capital to expand their interests without taxation, regulation or recognition of the rights of other people.

Libertarianism becomes self-defeating as soon as it recognises the existence of environmental issues. So they must be denied.

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Nigeria: Not a Kobo increase in Fuel Price!

Workers' Alternative Editorial Board, Lagos, Nigeria 7 January 2012

Police has fired tear gas at protestors in Nigeria angry at the latest increase in the price of fuel. In the northern town of Kano around 300 people were wounded in the attack and 19 were arrested. Tension has been mounting as protesters have clashed with riot police in different parts of Nigeria for the past three days and the trade unions have called for a nationwide indefinite strike to start Monday. More protests are expected across the country in the coming days. Here we provide the Editorial statement of the Workers' Alternative on this key issue affecting the Nigerian masses.

Nothing can testify to man's bestiality towards fellow man as the current attempt by the Goodluck Jonathan's regime attempt to further increase the price of petrol. Nothing is as wicked as this program and it has fully exposed the true face of the regime to the overwhelming majority.

Coming at a time when the overwhelming majority are living in abject poverty with no hope in sight, with large numbers living on less than \$2 a day, this will no doubt be a death blow to many in Nigeria. Unemployment has reached record levels, factories are closing down by the day, mass migration is taking place from the rural areas, that are now poverty centres, to the cities, all infrastructure is collapsing – roads, schools, etc. A regime of poverty wages and terrible working conditions now reigns in the factories and workplaces round the country.

The gap between the rich and the poor is now so huge to the extent that it was recently confirmed that less than 6 % of bank depositors own 88% of all bank deposits in Nigeria. The remaining 94% of depositors, mainly the working people and poor, own about 12% of bank deposits in Nigeria.

Why would this not be when senators, governors, reps, etc., in Nigeria are earning much more than the president of the USA; when so-called elected men in Nigeria consume a large and growing part of the overall income of the country.

Despite the poverty in the land, Nigeria is said to have recorded over \$247 billion in GDP, with over \$36 billion in foreign reserves, and an estimated \$180 billion expected from total sale of oil this year. In essence, there is poverty in the midst of abundance. This reflects the extreme callousness of the ruling class.

We have witnessed over 18 fuel price increases in Nigeria and the arguments of the proponents have remained the same since the 1970s. This confirms the extreme shallowness of the various regimes representing the interests of the Nigerian elites and their imperialist masters.

No subsidy on fuel!

The claim of subsidy is topmost on the lips of the agents of government calling for an increment in fuel prices. They claim that an unnamed cabal is milking the country via the subsidy. They come up with all sorts of figures to justify their claims. However, in their desperation, they put forward arguments that are totally illogical; they lie with ease and put forward figures that never add up whenever they are subjected to independent investigation.

They raise the alarm that if the “subsidy” is not withdrawn the country will collapse. However, there are so many facts available to debunk all these shallow and illogical arguments.

In 1978, they claimed there was a subsidy when petrol was sold at 15 kobo; today, in 2011, they still claim there is a subsidy after an over 4,300 % increment; how come? When will there be no subsidy? By how many times have the wages of Nigerian workers been increased since then? How can there be a subsidy when the funds used to pay for the fuel is coming from the sale of fuel both locally and internationally?

One of the most guarded secrets in Nigeria today is the actual price of fuel from the foreign refineries it is acquired from and the internal workings of the entire oil sector, both upstream and downstream. The reason for this is that if the truth were known there would be a revolt.

The government agents have been giving conflicting figures of the cost of the subsidy, varying between N1 trillion to N3 trillion for last year. However, the National Assembly declared that it was actually to the tune of N450 billion for last year. The question is what was the source of that fund? The N450 billion came from oil sales, so how can that be a subsidy?

In spite of the conscious attempt to cover up the workings of the entire oil sector and confuse the public, we can still see the realities of the situation. These realities further confirm that the various regimes are out to milk the masses to their bones for profit. They continue to tax fuel in order to make money.

Nigeria produces oil via the oil multinationals for both internal and external consumption. 445,000 barrels per day are allocated to internal consumption and it is to be forwarded to the domestic refineries. This is not part of the country’s OPEC oil quota of over 2.5 million barrels per day.

However, the national refineries have all been sabotaged. Since 2003, this quota is being sold on the international market with the initial understanding that its proceeds will be used to pay for the country’s fuel importation.

Prior to 2003, the 445,000 barrels per day was sold to the NNPC at near production price and if the Nigerian refineries were down it was exported to foreign refineries and the country just paid for the cost of refining. The refined products are thus brought back.

However, in order to make much more money this method was abandoned in the interests of the multinationals and the very rich in Nigeria. All the Nigerian refineries have since been grounded and the government is planning on selling them off cheaply.

The total sale of the 445,000 barrels per day for this year alone amounts to about \$14 billion at \$90 per barrel. This is more than enough to pay for the importation of all the country's fuel. Petrol is currently sold at N65 per litre and this price actually covers the cost of importation and still gives a profit to both the government and the oil giants doing the importation.

The claims of the government agents, PPPRA, that the landing cost of petrol is N128 per litre is extremely fraudulent. As at October 2011, when the figures they put on their web site were added, the result was less than N15 per litre. They have recently edited the web site. However, just recently, another government agency, the DPR, made a slip by revealing that the landing cost of petrol is actually N48 per litre.

A lot of fraudulent figures and processes are added in order to inflate figures to give the impression that there is a subsidy. For instance, fuel ship tankers are always to berth in Nigerian ports for two weeks after arrival at the port in order to increase the demurrage charge. This is in spite of the fact that demurrage charges for tankers of fuel in Nigeria start from the day the ship is loaded with fuel in the foreign refinery.

Fuel importers (the fuel cabal) pay these dubious and inflated government charges per importation. These funds are then refunded back to them after the entire importation process, all this to give the impression that there is a fuel subsidy.

Hells of a lot of corrupt practices go on within this highly fraudulent process. For instance, the fuel importers do a lot of over-invoicing. They inflate the volume of fuel they plan to import; pay the charges for that volume of fuel but import less than what they declared. They paid back the funds for the government charges for the inflated volume. They make money from both ends, from the government and from selling the fuel to Nigerians. This is an open secret which the PPPRA also acknowledges but refused to act on in spite of the fact that it is supposed to have power to bring the crooks to book.

Any way we consider the issue, there are no subsidies on fuel in Nigeria; fuel is paid for from the sale of the 445,000 barrels per day domestic allocation to the international market and the direct sale of fuel to the public at a direct price currently higher than its actual cost.

Workers' Wages, Devaluation and Fuel prices

The whole essence of the fuel price increment is to shift the burden of the crisis created by the elites onto the heads of the working people. It is to suck more blood from the veins of the working masses and has nothing to do with subsidies.

The Nigerian government has been taxing fuel over the years as a means of making money. They do not call it a tax in public; that is why they prefer the term "subsidy" in order to deceive the working people.

The government over the years has imposed a series of IMF/World Bank economic policies, part of which is the fuel price increment. They devalue the naira as a means of cutting the actual wages of workers. Devaluation is usually followed by increases in the prices of goods and services above their corresponding value. This is why in spite of the higher quantity of naira notes that workers earn today, Nigerian workers in the 70s and 80s actually earned more than the workers of today.

The current attempt to increase fuel prices is coming some few months after the increase in the national minimum wage to N18,000 and 140% across the board. This is yet to be implemented nationally; many state governments, government corporations and private companies are still resisting its implementation. However, the naira has been devalued and they are already increasing the prices of various commodities and services. That is giving with the right hand and taking it back with the left. Devaluation of the Naira increases the rate of inflation and therefore increases the rate of exploitation because the actual wages of the workers have been cut due to devaluation.

What has been changing since the late 70s till date has been the value of the naira. The value of the naira has massively depreciated since the mid 80s till date. As at 2007, when the last increment in petrol prices took place the value of the naira was about N118 to the dollar; it is now at about N160 at the official market rate and much more on the black market. It is said that it could go to as low as N200 to the dollar.

As at the time the minimum wage was approved the naira exchanged for about N150 to a dollar; N18,000 was equivalent to about \$120. At N200 to the dollar, the current minimum wage would be equivalent to \$90. In essence, wages of the Nigerian workers have been reduced by 30%.

The workers' minimum wage in the early 80s was N125, which was equivalent to \$250 then, as the naira was exchanged at N5 to the dollar. This implies that the wages then were actually equivalent to more than N31,000 today. \$250 in the 80s is equivalent to more than \$560.00 today.

As at the time the minimum wage was N125 in the 80s, the price of a brand new Volkswagen car was about N5,000. All this changed in 1986 when the IBB regime started the implementation of structural adjustment policies, SAPs.

The government devalues the naira and increased the prices of goods and services and held down the wages of workers. The prices were actually increased to the level above the corresponding prices before the devaluation. The same applied to fuel prices. The money they made from this crime was then used to pay fictitious local and foreign debts, and went into private pockets of the elites.

If they are really concerned about the subsidy why can't they increase the value of the naira to the level it was before devaluation? They would not do so because that would mean more money for the workers. They actually want to pay workers less in order to make more profit.

Today, over N3 trillion has been used to bail out Nigerian distressed private banks and more billions are still expected to go to the banks. These banks mismanaged trillions of naira but they were rescued with public funds. Of course, they don't call this a "subsidy"; they call it a "bail out".

Throughout the period of the global oil boom, the Nigerian masses did not see any improvement in their lives; they only saw pain and more poverty. The enormous wealth was shared by the Nigerian ruling elites and their imperialist masters who own the oil multinationals. As the global economy is now stagnating, it will have a negative effect on countries like Nigeria as the price of oil is bound to fall.

In the face of any shortfall, the elites are bound to try to shift the burden on to the heads of the masses. They are never ready to pay for the crisis they have created. They always push it onto the heads of the masses.

Corruption and Failed Promises

To say the government and the Nigerian elites are corrupt is to say the most obvious fact. The fact that the so-called cabal profiting from the subsidy cannot be named today reflects this reality.

Since 1999, when the civilian regime started increasing fuel prices, an estimated over N30 trillion had been made and there is nothing to show for it. The roads are bad, there are no hospitals, no power, etc. The country

has been moving more backwards.

The Nigerian masses have lived through years of failed promises. This is why the promises being made by Goodluck have no hearing whatsoever among the masses.

In the past the NNPC was solely responsible for the importation of fuel. Today, it is big multinationals, associates of top government officials, etc. Billions of dollars are involved. These are the reasons why the refineries are not working.

Deregulation a Failure!

The price of kerosene and diesel has been deregulated since 2007 and today diesel in Nigeria ranks among one of the most expensive in Africa. The same goes for kerosene which has currently disappeared from the pumps. The real intention of the government is to totally deregulate the price of petrol too. Therefore, its price can change without notice. This is the land of paradise the exploiters are hoping for. Only the multinationals and big time dealers benefit from this process. The masses are the big time losers.

Today, most of the fuel related infrastructures built in the past have collapsed – pipelines, storage depots, refineries, etc. The country is now totally dependent on fuel importation. Since the deregulation of diesel no ‘investor’ has deemed it fit to build a refinery. It is on record that over 18 refinery licenses have been issued but none have been built since 1999. The contrary is the situation when compared with Venezuela. Further deregulation would spell more disaster.

Fight Back!

No fuel price increase was implemented in the past without resistance from the working class; close to nine general strikes have been called on this issue since 1999. It is, however, unfortunate that the leadership of labour undermined these strikes. These strikes were the result of pressure from the rank and file workers in Nigeria.

There have been several protest marches round the country against fuel price increases and currently it is clear that the mass majority are opposed to further increments. It may be the straw that breaks the camel’s back.

The past strikes were usually called off by top labour leaders undemocratically without serious concessions granted by the regimes; however, the next fight back may not be that easy to call off undemocratically by the top union leaders. This is why many are quite critical of the leadership of the trade unions, both the NLC and TUC.

Independent protest groups are already being set up across the country. The global protest movements and revolutions will also have an influence in the impending movement in Nigeria. Top labour leaders will definitely be under much more pressure this time around. More unions are bound to experience internal conflicts as workers are bound to make attempts to remove corrupt and compromised union leaders.

The government and bosses over the years have invested heavily in corrupting labour leaders. However, in spite of this, the workers have embarked on struggles for a better life and on many occasions they have forced the leaders to act.

Labour leaders in the past refused to involve the rank and file workers fully in decision-making; they did not set up committees of action around the country with powers to coordinate the strikes. These are tasks that must be taken up in the coming movement.

Workers' Party and Socialism the way forward

The bulk of the problems facing Nigerian workers are political. But unfortunately the Nigerian workers do not yet have their own serious political party that can take power and start addressing all these problems. This lack of a political alternative will make the fight back fruitless as those responsible for the crisis will remain in power and they will continue to impose their extremely exploitative policies on the masses. These are programs designed to make the poor pay for the crimes of the rich minority and multinationals.

The NLC set up a Labour Party that it abandoned in the hands of corrupt politicians who have converted the party into a platform for all forms of opportunism. The party excludes workers and it has totally been taken over by bourgeois politicians of various extractions. The party went so far as to declare support for Goodluck Jonathan at the last elections.

A workers' political party still needs to be built. Labour must reclaim its political platform from the hands of the opportunists and open it to workers, youth and other poor strata of society.

The crisis facing society today can only be solved by the class responsible for the production of the wealth of society, the working class. Without the working people taking political power in Nigeria, the problems will continue and get much worse.

The crisis in the oil sector can only be solved by the nationalization of the sector and putting it under the democratic management of the workers. This is the very opposite to deregulation. In essence, socialism is the only way forward.

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Looting Durban

Can Durban Recover From City-scale Neoliberal Nationalism?

Patrick Bond 2 January 2012

This is the South African city of Durban's first week since 2002 without City Manager Michael Sutcliffe. He became well known across the world as a target of community and environmental activism, for catalyzing a \$400 million stadium for the soccer World Cup in 2010, and for hosting the COP17 climate summit last month, in a city of 3.5 million of whom a third are dirt-poor and another third struggle as underpaid workers.

Why did they put up with Sutcliffe's mainly malevolent rule? Alongside constituencies of fisherfolk, streetchildren and informal traders, many grassroots groups like the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, the Chatsworth Westcliff Flatdwellers, Abahlali base Mjondolo shackdwellers and Clairwood Ratepayers and Residents Association have long condemned race- and class-biased municipal policy and Sutcliffe's viciousness. But the prestige of the African National Congress (ANC) liberation movement means the ruling party has been comfortably re-elected since the days of Mandela (1994-99). Until the leading trade unions break their alliance with the ANC, that won't change, and ruthless men like Sutcliffe will stay at the top of government.

With ambitions of urban restructuring akin to Haussmann of Paris and Moses of New York, Sutcliffe was a most divisive leader. Raised in Durban and granted a PhD in geography from Ohio State University, he was a very rare white technocrat who wielded enormous political power through skilled manipulation of factions within the ruling party. To the surprise of many, he amplified his power by making a quick loyalty shift in 2007 from former president Thabo Mbeki to local favourite Jacob Zuma.

Sutcliffe's one-man reign terrorized many poor and working people, and also irritated the white petit-bourgeoisie who saw him as a rabid Stalinist, especially when without consultation, he changed more than a hundred colonial-era street names (such as Moore Rd to Che Guevara Rd). But shifts in appearance matter little, when with Sutcliffe's facilitation, the city's apartheid structures also evolved into even more discriminatory and exclusionary zones, like the new edge city of Umhlanga – with the

southern hemisphere's largest shopping mall – and nearby 'gated communities' such as Mount Edgecombe.

Sutcliffe's departure interview with the Financial Mail last week was revealing: "As far as the decisions go, there are no regrets; we did what was necessary and had to be done."

No regrets? Wikipedia's entry on Sutcliffe lists his legacy as "street renamings, the loss of the city's Blue Flag beach status, illegally banning protests, banning posters, serious human rights abuses in the city's housing program, the failed privatization of the city's bus system, allegations of spin-doctoring, the failed uShaka Marine World, threats to withdraw advertising from newspapers employing journalists critical of the municipality, lack of action against environmental destruction, favouritism toward ANC-aligned individuals and businesses, unlawful and at times violent violations of the basic rights of street traders and shack dwellers and corruption."

Speaking to Durban's Daily News (the largest English newspaper) last week, Sutcliffe was adamant: "I have never been and will never be involved in fraud and corruption." Yet even the provincial ANC requested a forensic investigation after the national auditor-general's 2009-10 report on the city identified "irregular expenditure" of \$65 million that year and "irregular housing contracts" of more than \$400 million during Sutcliffe's reign. Three other municipal officials were also implicated.

For example, contracts for building more than 3000 houses (at more than \$25 million) involved Durban's notoriously ostentatious Mpisane family, which faces multiple prosecutions for tax fraud and corruption. In 2010, Sutcliffe told The Daily News, "The reports that these houses were built to sub-standard levels are absolute nonsense and part of media frenzy. I challenge anyone to visit every single one of those houses and they will see that the houses are not falling apart."

The National Home Builders' Registration Council then found defects in more than 1000 Mpisane-built houses, with more than a third requiring structural rehabilitation.

The closest to a confession by Sutcliffe was last week in The Daily News: "We have not followed every single supply chain mechanism in the book because we needed to ensure service delivery took place efficiently. We have been able to build more than 22,000 houses in one year because we fast-tracked procedures."

But many thousands more houses should have been built, much more quickly and with much better quality and less cronyism. By the time of the

World Cup, Durban's housing backlog stood at 234,000, yet as the Academy for Science in South Africa determined last May, the annual addition to the city's low-income housing stock had dropped from 16,000 to 9,500 by 2009, and "given the current budget the backlog will only be cleared by 2040."

In mid-2008, Sutcliffe had told the Mail&Guardian newspaper, "We can address the housing backlog in the city within seven or eight years".

One reason for a worsening housing crisis was that Sutcliffe diverted city reserves into building the Moses Mabhida Stadium in 2008-10, notwithstanding a next-door world-class rugby stadium (Kings Park) available for upgrading. Cost overruns skyrocketed the prestige project's price from \$240 to \$400 million, with the usual tiny set of ANC-supporting tycoons winning construction contracts.

The combination of incompetence and arrogance proved hugely expensive, for as opposition city councilor Dean Macpherson complained a year ago, Sutcliffe "didn't see fit to consult with the [popular rugby-playing] Sharks before Mabhida was built and now we have a stadium that the Sharks won't move to, basically stands empty and will cost the ratepayers of Durban billions to fund in the future." Sutcliffe's hope for justifying Mabhida Stadium by hosting the 2020 Olympics was dashed in mid-2011 by rare national budgetary common sense.

Last year featured many such allegations against Sutcliffe, as an open feud with former city mayor Obed Mlaba left blood dripping from knives in both their backs. Last January, Sutcliffe publicly announced that he wanted another five-year contract. But he had made too many mistakes and enemies, and his ally leading the provincial ANC, John Mchunu, had died the year before.

Other complaints mounted: Sutcliffe's supersized salary and bonuses (higher than Zuma's); brutality against street children removed prior to major events and against fisherfolk trying to use beach piers; the celebrated 2010 beachfront rehab's still-empty storefronts and dead palm trees; and the unprocedural street renaming, culminating in November with a Supreme Court decision against Sutcliffe on the first nine changes.

Sutcliffe's last month on the job must have been even more frustrating, beginning on December 2 with yet another defeat in court against activists demanding the right to march in central Durban. Opposed to the COP17 UN climate summit, their desired route passed the US Consulate, City Hall and the International Convention Centre. This was approved by a local judge who made Sutcliffe pay court costs.

Then came revenge. “Obviously smarting from his failure to impose his will on our right to assembly and protest, he hired 150-200 ‘Host City Volunteers’,” explained Rehad Desai of the Democratic Left Front. “Paid R180 for their services,” these “Green Bomber goons” – as Desai called them to remind of Robert Mugabe’s Zimbabwe paramilitary – wore distinctive green tracksuits with Durban and COP17 logos.

After seeing critical posters at the December 3 march of around 8000 people, Sutcliffe’s volunteers began “singing pro-Zuma and pro-COP17 slogans. Their presence on a climate justice demonstration remains a mystery. [Climate activists were] denied water, beaten with fists and had their banners torn down. The rural women, representing countries from all over Africa, were taunted by certain Green Bombers with crude sexist abuse.”

Five days later at City Hall, Desai and two other activists from Greenpeace and ActionAid were attacked by the Green Bombers, simply for holding up posters: “Zuma stand with the poor not the corporations.” Remarked Sutcliffe in *The Witness* newspaper the next day, “They deserved that reaction from people. People were outraged, especially after what happened at the weekend. Why vent when they had the opportunity when the president had come to listen? Surely that’s not right.”

To ‘vent’ by silently holding up a poster in City Hall deserves a beating?

Critical academics label this thuggish ideology ‘neoliberal nationalism’: a vindictive, anti-poor deployment of state power and resources, combined with revolutionary-sounding bombast, reviving Mbeki’s ‘talk-left, walk-right’ moves. We saw this most vividly in Sutcliffe’s 2009 attempt to evict low-income informal traders from the century-old Warwick Early Morning Fruit/Vegetable Market on behalf of a crony’s shopping mall project, which only mass community protests reversed following a late-night police attack.

But ironically, the year before, the American Association of Geographers (AAG) awarded Sutcliffe the Gilbert F. White Distinguished Public Service Honors and the James R. Anderson Medal of Honor in Applied Geography. Sutcliffe’s sponsor for the award, Kevin Cox (a faraway Marxist who supervised Sutcliffe’s doctoral thesis), described these awards as “among the most prestigious recognitions in geography... Over a lengthy career as political activist and trusted member of the ANC government, Mike has proven himself to be an applied geographer par excellence and with a strong pro-people bent.”

According to the AAG website, the Anderson Medal of Honor reflects “the most distinguished service to the profession of geography” and “A

medal is so distinctive an honor that it is bestowed only if the accomplishments are truly outstanding,” while ‘Public Service’ means the awardees “gained more than usual recognition by co-workers, public officials and fellow citizens, and have clearly influenced the progress of the community.”

No doubt, Sutcliffe gained more than usual recognition and until last Friday he enjoyed huge influence. But by any reasonable measure these were of mainly negative consequence. For example, prior to managing Durban, his role leading the country’s Municipal Demarcation Board led to repeated protests by poor people against boundaries. And by generating vast geographic distances within most rural municipalities, he sharply curtailed local democracy.

While expanding Durban’s highways in a manner Engels described in 1844 Manchester – so that rich people could drive more quickly through poor areas – Sutcliffe oversaw other infrastructure disasters. Public transport declined, water systems failed and his shipping/petrochemical-centric urban industrial project threatens South Durban’s 200,000 residents with forced relocation and more pollution. And Sutcliffe’s promotion of the World Bank’s Clean Development Mechanism for Durban’s Bisasar Road landfill cemented environmental racism.

It could well be argued that Sutcliffe’s municipal version of neoliberal nationalism was structurally ordained, and that by focusing too much on his personal foibles we distract from a larger, more general problem.

That structural problem, sometimes termed ‘interurban entrepreneurialism’, bests many power-hungry officials. As City University of New York professor David Harvey noted 23 years ago in a seminal article, “To the degree that interurban competition becomes more potent, it will almost certainly operate as an ‘external coercive power’ over individual cities to bring them closer into line with the discipline and logic of capitalist development. It may even force repetitive and serial reproduction of certain patterns of development such as ‘world trade centers’ or new cultural and entertainment centers, waterfront development, postmodern shopping malls, and the like.”

Bearing that in mind, is it time for Geography (the discipline in which I also hold a PhD) to reject unequal and uncaring municipal rule? It’s opportune to ask, now, as the Occupy movement in so many cities insists on transferring power from the 1% to everyone else. Vainly, I might also hope that the AAG will rethink and revoke its two idiotic awards to Sutcliffe, perhaps as early as at the annual meetings in New York next

month, so as to avoid acute embarrassment in the event the ongoing Durban corruption investigation leads to criminal charges.

Many of us here anxiously await Sutcliffe's promised autobiographical account of his nine years in power, because the vast extent of his misrule needs book-length consideration. At the very least, the ubiquitous political potholes dug by Sutcliffe across Durban provide his successor, Sibusiso Sithole, an excellent road map of where to make ideological, policy, management and attitude U-turns.

www.counterpunch.org

Ukuxhashazwa kwezimali ngobudedengu bezimali zabakhokhintela baseThekwini

NguPatrick Bond

Yahunyushwa nguFaith ka-Manzi

Isonto lokuqala leli kusukela ngonyaka ka2002 lapho uMichael Sutcliffe angesezukuba nguMphathi wedolobha laseNingizimu Afrika iTheku. Waziwe kakhulu emhlabeni wonke njengesitha sezishosho zomphakathi kanye nezemvelo, esegcina ngokwakha inkundla yeNdebe Yomhlaba ngo2010, kanye nokwamukela izihambeli zengqungquthela yesimo sezulu ebiseThekwini iCOP17 ngenyanga edlule, edolobheni lapho kubahlali bakhona abangu3.5wesigidi, cishe iningi lihlopheka kakhulu kanti abanye behola abaholo aphansi kakhulu.

Babebubekezelelani lokubusa ngobubi kanje kukaSutcliffe? Kanye nabavoti abangabavoti, izingane ezihlala emgaqweni kanye nabadayisi basemgaqweni, amaqembu amaningi ezinhlangu zabantu njengeSouth Durban Community Environmental Alliance, iChatsworth Westcliff Flatdwellers, Abahlali base Mjondolo kanye neClairwood Ratepayers neSosesheni Wabahlali (Residents Association) kade babegxeka imigomo kamasipala kaSutcliffe enonya ehambisana nobuhlanga kanye nesimo sempilo somnotho somuntu. Kodwa isithunzi sikaKhongolose(ANC) inhlangu yenkululeko isho ukuthi iqembu elibusayo belilokhu likhlale likhethwa ngokukhululeka kusukela ezinsukwini zikaMandela (1994-1999). Umangase inhlanguyela yamaqembu aholayo abasebenzi ingase izihlukanise ukuzimbandakanya kwayo neANC, lokho ngeke kushintshe, futhi amadoda anesihluku njengoSutcliffe ayohlala ephezulu ezikhundleni zikahulumeni.

Enamaphupho okwakha kabusha okufana nokukaHausmann waseParis kanye noMoses waseNew York, uSutcliffe wayengumholi onezinxushunxushu. Ekhulele eThekwini futhi wathola ijazi lobudokotela (PhD) kwiGeography eNyuvesi yaseOhio State, wayewangumbusi omhlophe ongajwayelekile obenamandla okubusa amakhulu

ezombusazwe ngenxa yokuxabanisa ngokukhulu ukuhlakanipha ukwahlukana okuyingqayizivele kwiqembu elibusayo. Okwamanga abaningi, ingenkathi esekhombisa kakhulu amandla akhe ngenkathi ngokukhulu ukushesha esintsha ukuxhasa kwakhe owayengumengameli uThabo Mbeki ngo2007 esezenza okhonzwe kakhulu uJacob Zuma.

Ukubusa kukaSutcliffe ngayedwana kwahlukumeza abaning abahluphekayo nabangasebenzi, futhi kwacasula nabamhlophe abasuthayo abambona ngengongalawuleki ongenakuphikiswa njengoStalin, ikakhukazi ngokungafuni ukuboniswa, washintshwa amagama emigwaqo ebikhona kusuka kudala kusabusa amaNgisi (njengoMoore Road waba iChe Guevara Road). Kodwa ushintsho olubonakalayo lusho okuncane, umangabe ngenxa yokungenelela kukaSutcliffe, izakhiwo zobandlululo zedolobha zaqhubeka ngokucwasa kanye nokukhipha inyumbazana, njengonqenqema lwedolobha olusha eMhlanga – lapho kunenxanxathela yezitolo enkulukazi eningizimu neAfrika yonkana – kanye nezinye izindawo zezakhamizi ‘ezivalwe ngamasango’ njengaseMount Edgecombe.

Kwingxoxo yakhe esehamba uSutcliffe kanye nephaphandaba iFinancial Mail kukhona okwaphumela obala: “Uma ngibheka izinqumo engazenza, akukho ukuzisola; senza okwakubalulekile futhi okwakufanele kwenziwe.”

Akukho ukuzisola? Okubhalwe iWikipedia ngoSutcliffe kubala umlando wakhe njengoku “biza kabusha imigwaqo, ukulahlekelwa idolobha iBlue Flag kulwandle elalaziwa njengelihlanzekile, ukuvimbela ngokungemthetho ukubhikisha, ukuvimbela izingqwembe, ukuhlukunyezwa kakhulu kwamalungelo esintu ohlelweni lwedolobha lokwaxhiwa kwezindlu, ukwahluleka ukwenza ngasese ezokuthutha umphakathi ngamabhasi, ukusolwa ngomkhonyovu, ukungaohumeleli kweuShaka Marine World, ukusabisa ngokususa ukuadverthiza emaphephandabeni aqashe izintatheli ezigxeka umasipala , ukuhudula izinyawo ngokucekeleka phansi kwezemvelo, ukubhekelela abantu abasondelene noKhongolose kanye nezohwebo, ukungabikhona emthethweni kanye ngezinye izikhathi ukuphulwa kodlame kwamalungelo abadayisi basemgaqweni kanye nabahlali basemjondolo kanye nenkohlakalo.”

Kwiphephandaba iThe Daily News (okuyiphephandaba elikhulukazi lesiNgisi) ngesonto eledlule, uSutcliffe wayeqinisa ikhanda, “Angikaze futhi angisoze ngizibandakanyise nokukhwabanisa kanye nenkohlakalo.” Kodwa uKhongolose wesifunda wacela ukuseshwa ngokujulile emva kokuba umbiko womcwaningi –mabhuku jikelele (auditor-general) ka2009 -2010 wagagula “ukusetshenziswa ngokungajwayelekile kukaR535 million”(\$65 million) kulowonyaka

kanye “nezinkontileka ezingajwayelekile zezindlu ezibize uR3.5 billion (\$400 million) eminyakeni engu10.” USutcliffe kanye nezinye izikhulu ezintathu bayathinteka kulokhu.

Izinkontileka zezindlu ezingaphezulu kuka3000 houses ezibiza uR220 million (more than \$25 million) zazibandakanya umndeni wakwaMpisane, okumanje babhekene nokushushiswa. Ngo2010, uSutcliffe watshela iphephandaba iDaily News ukuthi, "Imibiko yokuthi lezindlu azakhekanga zaba sezingeni elingcono umbhedo kanye nokuhlanya kwabezindaba. Ngibiza noma ubani ukuthi ayobona lezizindlu futhi bayobona ukuthi lezizindlu azibhidliki nokuthi empeleni zakhiwe zaba sezingeni eliphezulu kakhulu kunezinye izindlu zeRDP kwezinye izindawo.”

INational Home Builders' Registration Council yathola ukuthi kunamaphutha ezindlini ezingaphezulu kuka1000 ezakhiwe nguMpisane. Okucishe kusondele ekuvumeni lelicala okwashiwo nguSutcliffe ngusonto eledlule kwiphephandaba iDaily News: “Asilandelanga zonke izindlela zokuthekelela ezibhalwe phansi ngoba sasidinga ukuqinisekisa ukuthi izidingo zifika ngokugculisayo. Sikwazile ukwakha izindlu ezingaphezu kuka22 000 ngonyaka owodwa ngoba sihambele phambili imigomo.”

Kodwa izinkulungwane zezindlu kufanele ngabe zakhiwe, ngokukhulu ukushesha futhi ngeqophelo eliphezulu kanye nokuncipha ukusebenzisa obhululu. Ngesikhathi seNdebe Yomhlaba, kwakufanele kwakhiwe izindlu ezingu234 000 eThekwini, kodwa iAcademy for Science in South Africa yabika ukuthi ngenyanga kaMeyi ngonyaka odlule, ukwandiswa kwezimpahla yokwakhiwa kwezindlu zabahola imali encane kwehla kusukela ku16 000 kuya ku9 500 ngo2009, futhi “uma sibheka ezezimali zamanje lokukusalela emuva koze kuxazululwe ngo2040.”

Maphakathi no-2008, uSutcliffe watshela iMail&Guardian ukuthi, “singabhekana nokusalela emuva mayelana nezezindlu edolobheni eminyakeni eyisikhombisa noma eyisishagalolunye.” Isizathu esenza inkinga yezindlu iqhubekele phambili ukuthi uSutcliffe wasusa izimali ezazigciniwe idolobha wakha inkundla iMoses Mabhida, kodwa kukhona kwamakhelwane inkundla yebhola lombhoxo eseqophelweni lomhlaba eyayilungele ukulungiswa. Ukwakhiwa kwenkundla entsha kwadla izizumbulu zezimali kusukel kwinani elinguR1.8 kuya kuR3.1 billion (\$240 million to \$400 million), futhi obhululu bethola izinkontileka zokwakha: inkampani yangasese iRemant Alton ukuthutha umphakathi kanye nokuthuthukiswa kwePhoyinti iDolphin Whispers nayo eyahluleka, imboni yamaBroederbond iBruinette Kruger Stoffberg, iGroup 5/WBHO ihlangene with neqembu loMvelaphanda likaTokyo Sexwale benoBulelani Ngcuka’s Mvelaphanda, kanye noVivian Reddy weEdison Power.

Lenhlanganyela engenzisisi kanye nokwedelela yenze kwaxhashazwa izimali ezinkulu ngesikhathi sokuphatha kukaSutcliffe, njengo ikhansela leqembu lezombusazwe eliphikisayo edolobheni uDean Macpherson asho onyakeno odlule, wathi, “akazange abone kubalulekile ukuthi akhulume namaSharks ngaphambi kokwakha iMabhida manje sesinenkundla iSharks engafuni ukuya kuyona, futhi ehlala ingasebenzi futhi ezobiza abakhokhi bentela bedolobha laseThekwini izizumbulu zamabhiliyoni amarandi ukuyixhasa ngesikhathi esizayo.” Ithemba likaSutcliffe ngokuzivikela ngokwakha inkundla iMabhida wukuthi iphathe imidlalo yango2020 yamaOlympics livele lashabalala ngo2011 ngesikhathi sokuhlelwa kwezimali kanye nuthi idolobha lizicabangele.

Ngonyaka odlule beziningi izinsolo ezibhekene noSutcliffe, njengengxabano eyaziwayo phakathi kwakhe nowayenguSobaba wedolobha uObed Mlaba bezingwaze ngeyabo. NgoJanuwari wonyaka odlule, uSutcliffe waphumela obala emphakathini wathi ufuna enye inkontileka yeminyaka eyisihlanu. Kodwa waba namaphutha amaningi kanye nezitha, kanye nomngani wakhe omkhulu wesifunda sikaKhongolose, uJohn Mchunu, washona ngaloyanyaka.

Ukungagculiseki kwabakuningi: iholo eliphezulu kakhulu likaSutcliffe kanye namabhonasi: isihluku ezinganeni ezihlala emgaqweni kanye nakubadobi ababezama ukusebenzisa ulwandle; ukuhlelwa kabusha kwezindawo zokudayisa olwandle ezingasetshenziswa kanye nezizihlahla ezitshalwa kwimigwaqo yothelawayeka ezifayo; ukunikwa kwamagama a,asha kwemigwaqo okungekho emthethweni, okwagcina ngokuthi ngoNovemba30 eNkantolo eNkulu kwenziwe isinqumo esasimelene noSutcliffe mayelana nokushintshwa kwamagama emigwaqo.

Inyanga yokugcina kaSutcliffe emsebenzini kufanele ukuthi ibimphathe kabi, kuqala-nje ngoDisemba2 ngokwehlulwa futhi enkantolo izishosho vuzifuna ilungelo lokumasha maphakathi neTheku. Zemelene nengqungquthela yokushintsha kwesimo sezulu iUN COP 17, indlela ezazifuna ukumasha ngayo yayidlula ezindlini zeNxusa laseMelika, eCity Hall kanye naseInternational Convention Centre, okwakuvunywe yimantshi.

Nango-ke uSutcliffe eseziphindiselela. “kubonakala-nje ukuthi uthukuthele uthelwe ngamanzi ngokungaphumeleli kwenhloso yakhe yokugcindeza ilungelo lethu lokuhlanganyela futhi sibhikishe, waqasha cishe uR150-200 ‘Wabamukeli bedolobha Bamavolontiya’,” kuchaza uRehad Desai weDemocratic Left Front. “Wayebakhokhela uR180 ngalomsebenzi,” lezizigcwelegcwele ezazibizwa ngokuthi ama “Green Bomber” – njengoba uDesai bewabiza ngalokho esikhumbuza abezombutho ababhekelele uRobert Mugabe –ngoba nabo babegqoka

amatracksuits aluhlaza namalogo eTheku kanye neCOP17.

Emva kokubona izingqwembe ezazigxeka ngemasho yangoDisemba3, amavolontiya kaSutcliffe aqala “acula izisho ezivuna uZuma kanye neCOP17. Ukuba khona kwabo kwimashi eyayilwela ubulungiswa kwisimo sezulu kwabayinsumsumane. [Izishosho vesimo sezulu] zangqatshelwa amanzi, zashywa ngezibhakela futhi izingqwembe zazo zahleshulwelwa phansi. Abesifazane basemaphandleni, ababemele amazwe ayeqhamuka eAfrika yonke, babechukuluzwa ngabanye bamaGreen Bombers ngezisho eziyinhamba zobulili.”

Emva kwezinsuku eziyisihlanu eCity Hall, uDesai kanye nezinye izishosho zeGreenpeace kanyeneActionAid bahlaselwa ngamaGreen Bombers, ngoba bephethe izingqwembe ezithi : “Zuma ima kanye namahlwempu hayi izimboni.” Echaza uSutcliffe kwiphephandaba iWitness ngosuku olulandelayo wathi, “Bakuthola abakufunayo kubantu. Abantu babethukuthele, emva kokwenzeka ngempelasonto. Yini bangathukutheli ngesikhathi benethuba ngenkathi umongameli wayezile ezolalela? Lokho akukho kuhle.”

‘Ukuthukuthela’ ngokuphatha unqwembe eCity Hall lokho kusho ukuthi usungaze ushaye umuntu?

Izifundiswa ezifana nami zingathi lendlela yokuziphatha ubugcwelegcwele bokubuswa ‘ngobungxiwankulu’: bokuziphindiselela, ukuphatha nhlakanhlaka amandla ombuso kanyenezidingongqangi, kuhlanganisa nokuzwakala sengathi bayizishosho, bevuselela isikhathi sika Thabo Mbeki ‘sokukhuluma kahle sengathi unendabe nabantu abahlwempu kanti uthi lala lulaza sikwengule’. Sakubona kakhulu lokhu ngesikhathi uSutcliffe ezama ukususa iMakete Yezimfino (Early Morning Market) ngo2009 kuWarwick Junction efuna ukuthi abangani bakhe benze inxanxathela yezitolo, lapho-ke ukubhikisha okukhulu komphakathi kwenza lelicebo lingaphumeleli emva kokuba amaphoyisa ehlasele abantu ezinzulwini zobusuku.

Kodwa-ke ngokuxakile, ngaloyanyaka, uSosesheni waseMelika wamaGeographers (American Association of Geographers AAG) bahlomulisa uSutcliffe ngeGilbert F. White Distinguished Public Service Honors kanye neJames R. Anderson Medal of Honor in Applied Geography. Owaxhasa lomhlomulo kaSutcliffe, uKevin Cox owemhlola ngenkathi ebhalela izifundo zobudokotela, wachaza lemihlomulo “njengehlonipheke kakhulu kwi-geography . . . Emva kwesikhathi eside njengesishosho sezombusazwe kanye nelunga eliyisethenjwa likahulumeni kaKhongolose, uMike uziveze eyigeographer engungqaphambili futhi ebhekelela abantu.”

Njengokusho kwewebsite yeAAG, iAnderson Medal of Honor ikhombisa “ukuzimisela kakhulu emsebenzini wamageographers” kanye “Nomhlomulo ohlukile futhi okuhlonishwa ngawo umuntu ovelele,” ngenkathi kuchaza ukuthi abahlonyulisiwe “bahlonishwe kakhulu ngozakwabo emsebenzini, izikhulu zasemphakathini kanye nezakhamizi, futhi babe negalelo kwintuthuko yomphakathi.”

Ngaphandle kokungabaza, uSutcliffe ubaziwa kakhulu futhi kuze kube ngoLwesihlanu olwedlule enedumela kakhulu. Kodwa isikhathi esiningi bekunguduma kwemiphumela emibi. Njengesiboni-nje, ngaphambi kophatha iTheku, indima ayidlala eholo iMunicipal Demarcation Board yasezweni kwaholela ekubhikisheni okuningi ngabantu abahluphekayo ngemingcele. Futhi ngokwahlukanisa kakhulu abantu nomasipala, wehlisa izinga lentando yombuso wezindawo ezakhelene.

Ngenkathi andisa othelawayeka baseThekwini ngendlela echazwa nguEngels ngo1844 ngeManchester – ukuze abantu abacebile bashayela kalula ezindaweni zabampofu - uSutcliffe wengamela umonakalo ezakhiweni. Kwancipha ezokuthutha umphakathi, kwalimala indlela amanzi abehamba ngayo kanti namaprojekti akhe ezokuthutha ngemikhumbi nezimboni zamafutha bezibeka engcupheni izimpilo zezakhamizi ezingu200,000 zeNingizimu neTheku ukuthi ziphoqwe ukuthi zisuswe emakhaya azo kanye nokungcolisa kakhulu umoya. Futhi nokugqugquzela kukaSutcliffe iClean Development Mechanism yeBhange Lomhlaba emgodini wezibi waseThekwini okuBisasar Road kwaqinisekisa ukucwaswa ngezemvelo.

Kungashiwo nje ukuthi ukuphatha kukaSutcliffe kukamasipala ngendlela yobungxwankulu kwakuyinto ayetshelwe yona, nokuthi uma sesibheka kakhulu amaphutha akhe kusenza singabe sisagxila, enkingeni enkulu futhi esabalele kakhulu.

Lenkinga eyayihleliwe, kwesinye isikhathi ibizwa ‘ukuhwebelana kwangaphakathi’, njengoba sibona kwenza izikhulu eziningi ezilambele ukuphatha. Njengoba uSolwazi waseNyuvesi yaseCity University of New York uDavid Harvey aqaphela eminyakeni engu23 edlule komunye umbhalo wakhe, “Kangangokuthi ukuqhudelana phakathi nedolobha kuya kunyuke, kuye kwenzeke, ‘njengamandla ayinqubo aqhamuka ngaphandle’ kumadolobha ngokwehlukana kwawo ukuze asondelane nentuthuko kanye nomqondo wongxwankulu. Kungaze kuphoqe izindlela ezithile zokuthuthukisa nezokukhiqiza ezifanayo ‘njengoworld trade centers’ noma izindawo ezintsha zokungcebeleka, ukuthuthukisa ezasolwandle, kanye nezinxanxathela zezitolo zesimanjemanje, nokunye okufana nakho.”

Ngaphandle-nje kokukhohlwa ukuthi, sekuyisikhathi lapho iGeography (isifundo nami enginejazi lobudokotela kuso) ukuthi inqabe umthetho kamasipala oobusa ngokungalinganwa kanye nokunganakekeli? Ngabe akusona isikhathi sokubuza ukuthi, manje njengoba inhlango iOccupy movement emadolobheni amaningi ifuna ukuthi amandla okubusa asuswe kwindlanzana eliyiphesenti elilodwa aye kubantu abaningi.

Mhlawumbe ngokungazi, ngingethemba ukuthi iAAG izocabanga kabusha ibuyisele emuva lemihlomulo emibili ewubulima ewanike uSutcliffe, mhlawumbe ngokushesha ngenyanga ezayo yonyohlangana yonyaka eNew York, ukuze bangahlangabezani nokuphoxeka uma sekwenzeka lokukushushisa okuqhubekayo eThekwini okumelene nenkohlakalo sekwenziwa amacala.

Kodwa-ke, iningi lethu lilindele ngokukhathazeka umlando ngokuphatha kukaSutcliffe exoxa ngeminyaka eyisikhombisa ebusa, ngoba ukuphatha kwakhe ngobudedengu budinga umqingo wencwadi. Ikakhulukazi, ngoba lemigodi yezombusazwe njengenhlayenza embiwe uSutcliffe iTheku lonke lakhela uSithole ibalazwe lokwenza imigomo yombusazwe, yokuphatha kanye nesimilo esishintshile.

Izincwadi ezintsha zikaPatrick Bond iDurban's Climate Gamble (Unisa Press) kanye nePolitics of Climate Justice (UKZN Press).