



International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV446 march 2012



International Womens' Day
 Indonesia
 China
 USA
 Syria
 Environment

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

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INTERNATIONAL VIEWPOINT

EU Crisis - Europe Gets Shock Therapy like Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s”

Eric Toussaint, Doctor of Political Science and President of the Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt (CADTM), is a member of the Commission for an Integral Auditing of Public Debt in Ecuador (CAIC) whose findings resulted in Ecuador stopping its repayment of part of its debt. He claims that Greece must stop paying its debt and must rise up against the Troika (the European Central Bank, the IMF and the European Commission) otherwise it will sink into the doldrums of permanent recession.

How would you define the predicament of those EU countries which, like Greece, have huge public debts? Their situation can be compared to that in Latin America during the latter 1980s.

In what ways?

The debt crisis in Latin America erupted in 1982. The crisis of the private banking sector started in the US and in Europe in 2007-2008 and by 2010 had turned into a crisis of the sovereign debt triggered (among other things) by the socializing of private banks' losses [The cost of rescuing banks has been taken on by European governments. Countries in which the debt impact has been most acute are Ireland, the UK, Spain, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Other bailouts are in the offing.] and by lower tax revenues as a consequence of the crisis. In Europe, as in Latin America, several years after the beginning of the crisis private creditors and their representatives have managed to impose conditionalities onto all governments. They force them to implement brutal adjustment policies that result in cuts in public expenditure and a fall in purchasing power for most people. This in turn means that economies sink into permanent recession.

And yet, even at the worst moments of the crisis, Latin America never reached levels of indebtedness comparable to what we are now seeing in most eurozone countries (over 100% of their GDP). The levels European debt has reached are indeed impressive. In Greece it amounts to 160% of its GDP and several other countries in the European Union face public debt that amounts to or exceeds 100% of their production. Clearly there are differences between the two crises but they are not fundamental to my comparison.

You mean that your comparison focuses on the political consequences of the two crises?

Yes, indeed. When I compare the current situation in Europe with the situation in Latin America in the second half of the 1980s, I wish to point out that creditors — in the case of Europe, European banks and the Troika — impose measures on Greece (and no doubt on other countries soon) that are strongly reminiscent of the Brady Plan in Latin America at the end of the 1980s.

Could you explain in more detail?

At the end of the 1980s the creditors of Latin America, i.e. the World Bank, the IMF and the Paris Club as well as the US Treasury and the London Club for bankers, succeeded in imposing their agenda and their conditions. Private creditors transferred part of their loans to the multilateral institutions and to the States via securitization, i.e. through turning bank loans into securities. Other bank loans were downgraded and were turned into new fixed-rate securities. So the Brady Plan played a significant role, both in defending bankers' interests and in imposing permanent austerity. The rescue plan for Greece does the same thing: it reduces the value of debt stocks, which will then be swapped for new bonds, as in the Brady Plan. Private banks thus reduce their exposure to Greece (Portugal, Ireland...) as they did with Latin America. Gradually but massively, public creditors take over and exert enormous pressure to ensure that the new bonds held by banks be fully repaid (interest and capital). Every cent of the loans to Greece will be used to repay its debts. Meanwhile its public creditors (the Troika) demand permanent austerity in terms of

social expenditure cuts, massive privatizations, regression in terms of economic and social rights, the like of which has not been seen since the end of the Second World War 65 years ago, and a significant surrender of sovereignty in those countries unfortunate enough to have recourse to their loans. In Latin America this period was called "the long neoliberal night".

Creditors also forced Latin American countries to reduce wages, retirement benefits and social spending, and to comply with the absolute demand that debts had to be repaid.

This is why I am saying that we are in a similar situation. Not all European countries are yet involved; only the weaker links such as Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Hungary, Romania, the Baltic Republics and Bulgaria are. However, these countries together account for about 170 million inhabitants out of the total EU population of 500 million. Most other European countries also implement conservative social policies, though in a less brutal way: the United Kingdom (62 million inhabitants), Germany (82 million inhab.), Belgium (10 million inhab.) and France (65 million inhab.), for example.

The political consequence of the debt crisis in Latin America was the creation of the neoliberal state. Is this what we are heading towards in Europe?

This is nothing new. For the past three decades neoliberal policies have been implemented in Europe. It is obvious that the response to the crisis that is formulated by the IMF, governments that defend the interests of the ruling classes, big banks and large companies, consists in implementing a shock therapy of the kind described by Naomi Klein. Their aim is to finalize the neoliberal project as it was launched by Margaret Thatcher in the UK in 1979-1980 and spread through the rest of Europe in the 1980s. For Central and East European countries that used to be part of the Soviet block, it is actually the second shock therapy in 25 years.

But in Europe there is still some social welfare.

As I've just said, governments have started destroying the Social Pact and doing away with social rights acquired between 1945 and 1970. This is what Thatcher started. After the Second World War, and for thirty to thirty-five years, peoples had won a number of victories and obtained a fairly solid system of social protection: collective conventions, labour laws, etc. that protected workers and prevented the abuse of casual labour. Thatcher wanted to do away with it all, but after thirty years of neoliberal policies they still haven't completed the destructive work they set out to do: some things remain.

And the debt crisis provides the opportunity to consolidate what Thatcher had started.

The crisis allows for a shock therapy of the kind creditors and the ruling classes enforced in Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s.

In Peru it was implemented in August 1990.

We have entered a stage of new privatizations of public companies. In Europe they intend to privatize the significant public companies that still subsist.

Will Europe also have to face the security doctrine that was implemented in Latin America, where the trade unions were defined as terrorist?

A trend towards more authoritarian forms of power is clearly present in Europe. Over the past decade, anti-terrorist laws that criminalize social movements have been voted in. Repression is on the increase but does not involve the physical elimination of activists as was the case in Latin America at the end of the 1970s and in the early 1980s. In this, too, the European situation is similar to that of Latin America countries. After the bloody dictatorships (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Brazil), transition regimes (Chile, Brazil) or democracies implementing harsh neoliberal policies were set up. In Europe we are going through a period when legislative power is pushed aside, business people become heads of state as in Italy, social dialogue is abandoned while the right to go on strike is restricted, picketing forbidden and demonstrations repressed.

How do European national parliaments respond to these austerity measures?

They are pushed aside, since the Troika tells governments: 'If you want to get loans, you have to implement adjustment measures and there is no time for parliamentary debate'. Some plans have to be adopted within a few days, sometimes even within 24 hours.

As can be seen in Greece.

Yes, this is what has just happened in Greece. The Troika demanded a new plan. It eventually received the parliament's assent on Sunday 12 February late at night. But on the next day the European Commissioner for Economic Affairs said that 325 million euros of additional cuts were needed which were to be decided by the Greek government within the next 48 hours. This shows that the Greek parliament has no power to decide and the government is actually run by the Troika.

This led to huge demonstrations.

Not only in Greece actually, but also in Portugal, Spain, France and Italy, with less intensity so far, but they are bound to become more massive. There are mobilizations in several European countries, including in the UK. In Belgium we had the first general strike for 18 years at the end of January 2012. It paralyzed the Belgian economy and transport for 24 hours.

What should Greece do to get out of this quandary?

Greece must stop obeying the diktats of the Troika by unilaterally suspending repayment of its debts, to force its creditors to negotiate in unfavourable conditions. If Greece stops repaying as Ecuador did in November 2008, all bondholders will sell them off at 30% (at most) of their face value. This will jeopardize the position of security holders and give more purchasing power to the Greek government, even in this precarious predicament.

Ecuador stopped paying for securities in November 2008 after an audit of its debt, though it was not as badly off as Greece today. Argentina stopped paying in 2001 in a situation that was similar to that of Greece. Indeed the comparison works better with Argentina which was short of money to pay. It suspended payment and did not resume paying for three years (from December 2001 to March 2005) as regards financial markets; as for the Paris club (i.e. over 10 years) it hasn't started repaying yet. As it did that it relaunched economic growth and imposed on creditors a debt rescheduling at 60% below its initial value.

The consequence of which is that Argentina has been excluded from financial markets up to this day.

This is correct, but Argentina, while excluded from the financial markets for the past ten years and not repaying anything to the Paris Club over the same period, enjoys an average yearly growth rate of 8%. It shows that a country can find alternative financing sources outside the financial markets. Ecuador does not float any new securities on the markets either and its growth rate was 6% in 2011, while Greece's GDP fell by 7%.

But Ecuador borrows from China at very high rates

True. It will have to find a way of protecting its sovereignty as regards these new financing sources. This is why it is so urgent to get the Bank of the South functioning.

Let us get back to Greece. Many analysts, including yourself, claim that most of the Greek debt is illegitimate.

Of course.

But surely, this can only be determined through an audit.

Part of the European social movement has drawn the lessons of the Latin American experience. Our proposal to set up a citizens' audit of the debt has been widely taken up. Citizens' audits are either currently under way, or about to be, in seven European countries (Greece, France, Portugal, Spain, Ireland, Italy, and Belgium), without any government backing.

Do you think this will lead to an official audit of the debt, particularly in Greece?

We shall see. This would require a change of government, which means that the social movement needs to be strong enough to put an end to governmental solutions that favour creditors and to bring an alternative government to power. Latin America needed 20 years to begin to achieve this.

A lot still needs to be done, then, before we see a change in the orientation of European governments such as that of Greece. Indeed the current crisis may last for ten to fifteen years. This is only the first stage of resistance. It is going to be a long hard struggle. It is of the utmost urgency for European social movements to join forces to express their active solidarity with the Greek people and to set up a common European platform of resistance to austerity so as to get illegitimate debts cancelled.

Interview by Carlos Alonso Bedoya published in the Peruvian daily paper La Primera and revised by Eric Toussaint

Translated from the Spanish into French by Virginie de Romanet and Eric Toussaint and from French into English by Christine Pagnouille and Vicki Briault

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International Women's Day - Indonesia: a struggle for liberation

This year International Women's Day in Indonesia is marked by an increase of attacks on women. The increasing frequency of violence against women, particularly sexual violence, and the recent government plan to raise the fuel price threatens and burdens all women, especially poor women. Perempuan Mahardhika (Free Women) is a women's organization that has been trying to build a women's movement against all forms of oppression and exploitation caused by capitalism, patriarchy, and militarism. Fighting sexual harassment and economic policies which would further feminize poverty are parts of the important struggle for women's liberation in Indonesia.

Violence against women, particularly sexual violence, is not a new phenomenon. According to Vivi Widyawati, one of the leaders of National Committee of Perempuan Mahardhika, it is a "silent violence" that is rarely addressed by the Left and social movements in Indonesia – with the exception of women's organizations. It can happen every day, in every part and in every aspect of women's life: from home to the street to the workplace, including state institutions. Sexual violence is also used as a political instrument as happened many times in conflict-ridden areas such as Aceh [1] and Papua [2], the victimization and stigmatization of the (Communist Party aligned) Indonesian Women Movement (Gerwani) by the Indonesian military government since 1965 [3], and the sexual violence against ethnic Chinese women during the 1998 riots in Jakarta [4], and as a tool of war, like in the case of East Timor's independence struggle against the Indonesian state [5]

At the same time women benefit the least from the average 6 per cent growth rate of the Indonesian economy. This growth has little impact on the rate of maternal mortality of about 320 per 100,000 births (still the highest in Asia) which remains steady, or on the illiteracy of 10,5 million women below the age of 15 years. There are 118,048,783 women from 237,556,363 of Indonesian total population. In general, the economic growth had little impact on the participation of women in school which increased with a little over one fifth in 29 years. Eleven per cent of women above 10 years old have never been to school at all [6].

That is why women are the most trafficked in sex industry as "comfort women" and prostitutes and women also dominate the lowest skilled jobs, working in very precarious, insecure, and exploited circumstances, for instance as domestic helpers (inside and outside the country) or in manufacture industry (mostly garment, textile and electronic).

This article tries to locate a red thread connecting these two pressing issues of women's oppression in Indonesia, on the occasion of international women's day this year.

The politics of blaming the victims

Since 1998 to 2010 The National Commission on Violence against Women (KOMNAS PEREMPUAN) has documented rape as the most reported form of sexual violence. From 8784 verified reports, 4845 concern rape cases, and from 93,960 unverified reports, 70,115 are sexual violence cases committed by close family or acquaintances such as fathers, husbands, brothers, uncles, boyfriends, grandfathers, etc.

The rape cases have been highlighted recently since the number of rapes in public transportation has significantly increasing [7]. But those numbers seem 'small' compared with the total number of women. This is because violence against women remains poorly documented by the government. Nationwide figures are unavailable [8]. This is understandable since the only state supported institution for monitoring gender-based violence, KOMNAS PEREMPUAN, has only one office, in the capital city, Jakarta. And we also know that under a patriarchal system and society gender based violence, particularly sexual, is often hidden, discussion of it suppressed.

Indonesia has no legal provision which criminalizes sexual harassment [9]. Until today no fair trials of the ones responsible or attempts to look into the politically motivated cases of rape and other sexual violence in conflict area, have taken place. This violence has not even been made a political issue. Instead of locating the cause of this violence in the patriarchal and capitalist structure of society, and issuing a new criminal code for sexual harassment cases that is free of gender bias, the state supported at least 154 regional bylaws in 2009, and an additional 35 by September 2010, that further give legitimacy for the patriarchal policy of blaming the victims. Examples of those laws are the Sharia Law in Aceh and several cities in West Java that tell women how to dress and how to behave [10] and the 'Anti Pornography Bill No 44' of 2008, and different 'Anti Prostitution' and 'Anti-Alcoholic' laws in different cities. These laws have put women into an even more precarious condition and made it easier for them to be blamed and become victims of sexual harassment.

That is why a political movement to resist rape and denounce the tendency of blaming the victims is very important. Perempuan Mahardhika is one of the leading organizations that specifically campaigns

against the blaming of victims of rapes and other forms of sexual violence. We aim to uncover the true motives for these acts, rooted in a patriarchal culture that is maintained by capitalism. Sexual violence is rooted in patriarchal conditions that place women in the position of inferior, secondary people and as sexual objects. Capitalism maintains and even provokes these attitudes by the commodification of women's body. For example, sexist advertisements flood our mass media. It openly exploits women and brings more profit to industries like cosmetics, clothing, household goods, furniture, and electronics. The sex industry, which degrades women even more, is also a capitalist industry.

On Sunday, March 4th 2012, Perempuan Mahardhika held a campaign action to protest rape and other forms of sexual violence. The banners read: "From Home to the State women are raped; State ignores many sexual harassment cases; Don't Blame the victims, resist, arrest and jail the Rapists." This action was part of a series of activities in the run up International Women's Day March 8th 2012. Together with different groups of women and LGBT's, the 'Women Justice Forum' was established carry this campaign forward.

Perempuan Mahardhika recently printed a pocket book called "A-Z Sexual Harassment, Resist and Report" as a kind of guideline book to understand the definition and locus of sexual harassment, help build the confidence to resist it, and know the existing legal mechanism to make a report. It also organized a series of discussions on sexual harassment together with Across Factory Labor Forum (FBLP) union, which has a majority female membership, in the Cakung Industrial Zone. According to a survey made by FBLP and Mahardhika last year, many women workers experienced different forms of sexual harassment in the zone. This not something that comes from 'the outside'; Mahardhika members and supporters also experienced sexual violence by men in many social and political organizations.

Building the bridge

Some leftwing labor unions recently called for a political response toward 8 March International Women's Day. Initially they wanted to organize a mobilization to campaign for a wage raise, following strikes of thousands of workers in several economic zones in Bekasi, West Java [11] and Tangerang, Banten Province. But after the government announced its plan to raise the fuel price [12] on April 1st 2012, the alliance of workers agreed to prioritize this issue on the 8th of March.

It seemed there was nothing wrong with the plan, until Jumisih, a member of Across Factory Labor Forum (FBLP) and a member of Perempuan Mahardhika, suggested to the alliance to emphasize the specific aspects of women within those issues – after all, the mobilization itself is set on International Women's Day. But this simple suggestion was not taken up - the importance of such an emphasis is so far not understood by most of the (male) leaders of the labor organizations who often remain ignorant of, or indifferent to other aspects of women's rights.

Of course, at least, 38 per cent of the labor force is female [13] and these women would also benefit from any wage raise. But this raise will not automatically be equal for men and women, nor will it contribute to a decrease of work for women at home. Until now, women are not considered the primary wage-earners in families since men are supposed 'the head of the family'. Seen as only secondary wage-earners, women are always paid less and laid off more easily than men. The fuel price hike will provoke inflation and put heavier burdens women because they are the ones who take care of the family and manage the household expenses. In many cases the husband don't really know or even care how women manage the family's economy and cope with inflation. Demands for wage raises and an affordable fuel price in themselves don't contain specific aspects of women's liberation. They only give a basis for women to struggle for more rights and liberate themselves. In the economic struggles specific women's demands should also be raised – otherwise, women's oppression, which takes specific forms, will be neglected.

In this context, what Jumisih was trying to put forward was a very important issue for the women's struggle, especially since it is their internationally acknowledged day. One hundred FBLP members is trying to give an example of how to combine the struggle for economic rights and against the specific oppression of women by organizing a protest in front of PT. Woojen Busana on 14th February 2012. The activists demanded a wage raise, overtime pay, a reduction of working hours, and called for a fight against verbal and physical sexual harassment in the factory [14].

It is still very small contribution in the struggle for the rights and liberation of the millions of women in Indonesia, but by doing this, at least, FBLP has contributed to the education of its members and giving a feminist color to the trade union struggle. Of course it's still a long way to a feminist revolution.... But, if revolution is a way to liberate people from all kinds of oppression and exploitation, ignoring or postponed the women's demand is the same like postponing the revolution.

Happy International Women's Day: more struggle, more equality, more happiness.

, Zely Ariane is a member of the National Committee of Perempuan Mahardhika (Free Women), and member of the leadership committee of People's Liberation Party (PLP - formerly Peoples Democratic Party-Political Committee of the Poor (KPRM-PRD), based in Jakarta, Indonesia.

NOTES

[6] National Education Department, year 2005.

[9] Indonesia's Criminal Code applies a definition of rape which is outdated and does not meet current international standards on prosecution of rape cases. In it, rape is defined narrowly and exclusively in terms of forced penetration of the sexual organs. According to Indonesia's Code of Criminal Procedure (KUHP), the prosecution of rape requires evidence of semen through medical records (visum et repertum) and corroboration from two sources, including a witness. Such legal provisions make it practically impossible for women victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence to obtain justice through the courts. In effect, Indonesia does not have an effective legal framework which criminalizes this gender-specific form of torture—document submitted to the Committee Against Torture (CAT) by National Commission on Violence Against Women, April 2008.

[10] As part of the peace agreement in Aceh, Law No. 11/2006 on Aceh Governance stipulates that the Sharia Law is enforced in this province as recognition of its special autonomy status within the Indonesian Unitary state system. Local regulations produced in Aceh have their own Arabic term, qanun (cannon). Through the qanun, Muslim dress is obligatory for Muslim women and close proximity between an unmarried woman and a man who is not her guardian (khalwat) is a violation punishable by public flogging—document submitted to the Committee Against Torture (CAT) by National Commission on Violence Against Women, April 2008.

Fourth International- “We affirm our solidarity with women in the revolutionary process”

Statement by the IC of the Fourth International
[Fourth International](#)

This statement on solidarity with women in the revolutionary process in the Arab region was adopted by the annual IC meeting of the Fourth International on the 28th of February, 2012.

1. The movements that swept Ben Ali and Mubarak from power, saw the end of the Gaddafi dictatorship in Libya, have been challenging Assad in Syria for almost a year and have affected the whole of the Arab region are part of a process that has marked a real upheaval in the region. They show the strength of the aspiration of these populations to dignity, democracy and economic and social justice.
2. It is therefore logical that women, who are affected by the economic crisis in specific ways and whose rights in a number of countries in the region are particularly restricted, are present, active in or indeed leading these movements. In a number of countries women have emerged among the leading spokespersons for the movements, in Tunisia, in Egypt, even in Yemen.
3. Women participated from the start in these movements in the ways that seemed to them appropriate in their own societies, and that evolved as the movement developed. In many cases the force of these movements was such as to overcome traditional barriers between men and women, as has been emphasised in relation to Tahrir Square and the equality and freedom from sexual harassment experienced by the women during the large mobilizations leading to Mubarak's downfall.
4. As a result of the traditional place of women in all patriarchal class societies there is a tendency towards exclusion of women from political movements — in particular once the first stage of mass popular mobilisations is passed. This takes specific forms using traditional religious ideology in a context where fundamentalist currents are on the offensive in all religions, and in all those countries where Islamist currents have recently won elections.
5. In these countries, where authoritarian and corrupt regimes have been overthrown by the popular movements, parties presenting themselves as Islamist win mass popular support for different reasons: because they appear to be a new force free of links to the former regime and very critical of corruption, and as victims of the former regime and resistance to it, indeed religious conviction itself can be the motive for resistance. At the same time there is a real lack of any progressive, left, radical alternative, largely because of the dismantling of all such parties by the repression of the previous regimes.
6. On the basis of their involvement in the general movement, women, believers or not, resist and fight back against specific anti-women attacks, such as the virginity tests in Egypt, inspired by some religious forces present. The protest against sexist attacks on women by the repressive forces led to a major mobilisation and women's march in Egypt.
7. In some countries of the region like Tunisia and Egypt there has historically been the presence of specific feminist currents. They now face the challenge of establishing strong and organic links with the

predominantly young women who were in the forefront of the general movement and today are resisting the anti-women attacks.

8. Our task is to participate in building solidarity and links with the women resisting the anti-women attacks and new or already existing feminist currents as well as women active in specific milieus such as the trade union movement, through the appropriate movements and structures in our countries.

9. Through making known as broadly as possible the existence and activity of these groups and movements of women we will both help to strengthen their voice including in their own countries and show that the revolutionary process in the Arab region is indeed an emancipatory process, despite the contradictions that exist. This process should not be deviated by the reactionary use of religion. Solidarity with the region's women and the defence of their rights, especially by feminists of other countries, are very important in this regard.

10. We express our solidarity and support for the women victims of the physical repression, violence and torture from which so many women have suffered and died, notably today in Syria. We affirm our solidarity with the women in the revolutionary process, sharing the common battle against women's oppression.

, The Fourth International - an international organisation struggling for the socialist revolution - is composed of sections, of militants who accept and apply its principles and programme. Organised in separate national sections, they are united in a single worldwide organisation acting together on the main political questions, and discussing freely while respecting the rules of democracy.

Greece - Demonstrate Solidarity with Greek Women!

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Interview with Sonia Mitralias, a founding member of the Initiative of Greek Women against the Debt and the Austerity Measures, as well as of the Greek Committee against the Debt.

The Initiative of Greek Women Against the Debt and the Austerity Measures made its first public appearance on March 8, 2011, on International Women's Day. What drove you to take this initiative?

Sonia Mitralia – First of all, there is the fact that those who make up the sadly celebrated Troika, in other words the IMF, the European Central Bank and the European Commission, are imposing on us measures and policies which are not only impoverishing but also destroying Greek society. These measures, which were still completely unimaginable yesterday, constitute a historical turning point in the history of contemporary Europe. They now prefigure the destiny of everyone in Europe. With what consequences? A life of absolute poverty, unemployment, violence and of constantly being preoccupied with survival.

Some women, coming from the Greek component of the World March of Women, took the initiative after the shock treatment imposed by the Troika. In the beginning, we were thunderstruck, unable to react because we were feeling what women who have been raped feel when they are brought face to face with their attacker. By its "shock strategy", a technique of terror and violence, the Troika wants to impose its absolute power on us; it wants to use us as guinea-pigs to measure our resistance. In short, they have transformed Greece into a European laboratory of the application of their cruel policies. But for us, women, there is worse. In addition to all that we share with the whole of the Greek population, the policies of the Troika are aimed at us in particular, at sucking our blood "as a top priority".

Why are women especially targeted by the austerity measures austerity of the Troika?

The destruction and the privatization of public services imposed by the Troika are today synonymous for millions of Greek women of taking on responsibility themselves for the social tasks for which the state was previously responsible. Concretely, Greek women are now obliged to substitute for practically all the public utility services, for the Welfare State forced to its knees and dismantled by the policies of the Troika. It is they who are responsible for the house, the family, the tasks formerly carried out by the kindergartens, the hospitals, the old people's homes, the unemployment funds, the psychiatric hospitals, and even by the Social Security. At a time when young and not-so-young people (even up to the age of 40 or 45!) are obliged to go back to live with their parents because they are unemployed (50 per cent, half of young people!) and can no longer pay their rent, their electricity bills, their food bills, it is their mothers and their sisters who have to feed them, to attend every day to their physical, but also psychological, condition. And all that is absolutely free! The enormous sums thus saved by the public authorities go directly to the payment of the debt. So you can imagine what this daily surplus of work

represents for these millions of women in terms of physical and mental fatigue, of nervous tension and premature ageing.

It really is the "holdup of the century", which is never mentioned, about which nobody speaks.

That is moreover why they camouflage it under the ideological packaging of a return to so-called family solidarity and to the real "nature" of women, an ideology which wants to see them in the home, devoted to their role as mothers and wives! In short, what we are seeing is a well organized offensive by the worst patriarchal reactionaries, sealing thus the marriage of neoliberal capitalism with medieval patriarchy!

What have you already done?

In the beginning, we took part in mobilizations against the consequences of the austerity measures. We fought alongside parents against school closures and in support of their demands for schoolbooks and heating for their children. Today, it is this movement of parents which organizes the distribution of milk and sandwiches to schoolchildren who, suffering from malnutrition, faint in the classroom (10 per cent of schoolchildren suffer from nutritive deficiencies).

What marked the development of our Initiative was our active participation in the International Conference Against the Debt, organized successfully in Athens by the Greek Campaign for a Citizens' Audit of Public Debt (May 6, 2011). Just after that, there began the movement of the Greek "indignant ones" (Aganaktismeni) which swept over the whole country for three months. Our Initiative took part in it and our large banner floated for a long time over the heart of Syntagma Square, right in front of the Greek Parliament.

What are your activities now?

Very recently, we led a large campaign against the decision of the government to make women pay (1,000 euros) to give birth and especially against the refusal of some hospitals to allow women who could not pay to give birth! Our campaign denounced the fact that the government gives priority to reimbursing the banks and other creditors and not to the satisfaction of the elementary needs of its population. In short, we explained that two thirds of the budget goes to the payment of the debt, and then there is nothing left for health, education, social services. It is no accident that our campaign – which continues – has had great success ...

Our fight will not be easy. But we no longer have a choice. Millions of Greek women must fight now for their survival. Your solidarity, the solidarity of all women, is invaluable and even vital for them. Demonstrate it now ...

This interview appeared in *Tout est à nous!* (weekly of the New Anti-capitalist Party, NPA), no. 139, March 8, 2012.

• *Sonia Mitralia is a feminist activist in Greece and member of CADTM Greece.*

Greece - At war in 2012, as Spain was in 1936 for the people of Europe!

This speech by Sonia Mitralia, member of the Greek Committee Against Debt and the Women's Initiative against Debt and Austerity Measures, was delivered at the meeting organised in Marseille on 17 February, by the French campaign for "a citizens' audit of the public debt".

History is moving apace and the cataclysmic events of these last few days in Greece should by now have convinced even the most reluctant among us. For the Europe of today, Greece appears to be playing the same role that Spain did for Europe in 1936! This seemingly bold statement is not the claim of a few romantics. No, it is an observation made by our leaders because those who have been pressuring us daily for almost two years now are the "people at the top" the Merkels and Sarkozys, the IMF and the bankers, the neoliberal response from beyond national borders, those who have elected to transform Greece into a laboratory for their inhuman policies and Greeks into guinea-pigs for their shock therapy.

It is high time for us, "those at the bottom" in Europe, to apply to the letter, what Merkozy and their Troika have been telling us, and to finally act accordingly. Let us accept the challenge and let them know that from now on, and without delay, Greece is going to become a test-case for us as well, for the labour movement, for the social and women's movements, for the peoples and the exploited throughout the whole of Europe! Yes, let us make them understand that we are all Greeks indeed, because we are fully aware that the struggle of the Greek people is our struggle now more than ever. Once they break down their resistance and subjugate the Greek people, it will then be our turn, and the turn of all the other European people, one after the other, to undergo the same treatment...

You might recall that at the very beginning they told us a lot of nonsense such as, "this is a singular case and particularly Greek because the Greeks are lazy, and accustomed to corruption and lies". However,

since then, we have learnt that the black hole of debt is not peculiar to Greece, and is not the result of the so-called...hypertrophy of the Greek State, because it is just as much American, French, Italian and Japanese. In short, this debt is typically capitalist and the crisis is quite simply...systemic.

However, let's be wary of using stock expressions and clichés because they are wholly inadequate to describe the reality of the current situation in Greece. Can we still talk about austerity, even draconian measures, when salaries and pensions in Greece are being reduced by 40, 50 or even 60%? When the purchasing power of the vast majority of the population has already been eroded by 50, 60, or even by 70% or more? When the Greek middle class has been ruined and is rapidly slipping into poverty? When new workers earn no more than 417 euros and recent pensioners only 320 euros? Is it simply a question of "rigour" when one in every two young Greeks is unemployed and the unemployment rate now stands at 25%? How can we talk about simple "temporary sacrifices" when malnutrition is widespread among primary school students, and hunger is even beginning to gain ground in the middle-class neighbours of Greek cities? And how can we claim that all this is "necessary to bring order to the Greek finances" when the oppressors themselves admit cynically that the policies they have forcibly imposed on Greece have failed, are only pushing the country deeper into a horrific recession and that the Greek debt can never be reimbursed? So, is it merely sadism on the part of the now unfortunately famous Troika or an open, all-out capitalist war against the working class? The day-to-day reality is forcing us to acknowledge: Yes, we in Greece are witnessing an all-out war by "those at the top" against "those at the bottom", by the very rich against the rest. At the same time, we must not forget - because this is very serious - that we are seeing the return of the worst type of neocolonialism when we see Greece humiliated and practically stripped of its national sovereignty, treated by its so-called ... European partners like a colony, a protectorate under supervision, managed on spot by a petty Gauleiter of Madam Merkel and Mr. Schaeuble...

So, the Greeks, what are they doing? Do not believe what you are being told about the Greeks. Your media is just like ours: the reality that they are depicting is not at all real. In describing the current situation in Greece, they focus on the fact that there is a government of national unity in Athens which has the support of four-fifths of the representatives of the Greek people. So, if we were to believe them, we would conclude that the Greeks are rather masochistic and just love to be ill-treated...

Of course, the reality on the ground is quite different. More than ten general strikes in less than two years, countless clashes and strikes across the entire country, an atmosphere bordering on insurrection over the last few months, the Indignant Movement (Aganaktismeni Greeks) which swept through Greece in three months, very violent clashes with the unbridled forces of repression, Ministers and parliamentarians who, for 10 months now, do not dare to leave their homes because they are jeered or even assaulted by passers-by, a parliament that is increasingly attacked by hundreds of thousands of protestors who will, sooner or later, invade it. That's a brief overview of what has become an almost daily routine in Greece over the many long months.

However, these are but the preliminary warning signs of a massive social upheaval that is on its way. In fact, a closer look would reveal that popular anger has now exceeded historic levels; Greece is like a social volcano waiting to erupt. Moreover, the ever-increasing surveys present the situation quite starkly. Popular support for the so-called National Unity Government is no more than 8% whereas all the parties to the left of the social-democratic PASOK are now earning scores exceeding 50%! Everything is changing at a terrific rate and the Greek political landscape is undergoing unprecedented upheaval because entire sections of this society are seeking radical solutions to the crisis and their swift slide into poverty. I will give you an example that perfectly illustrates this wholly exceptional situation, which is increasingly similar to what took place in a certain country between two wars on our continent. The PASOK which, two years ago, was victorious in the polls with a record score of 45%, now, according to all the surveys, has less than 10% whereas a tiny group of neo-Nazi killers recently polled 3%! Yes, Greek society is already experiencing its own Weimar Republic ...

So, what's to be done? The first thing is to make it abundantly clear that the Greeks must not pay this debt which is strangling them and which is not of their making. Payment of the debt must be suspended immediately. Why? To do what we are obliged to do under international law, the UN, and a number of international conventions that have been signed by our governments : invest the astronomical sums of money currently being used to service this debt, to satisfy the basic needs of the Greek society, for health, education, infrastructure, public services, for the unemployed, starving children, single-parent households, the sick and infirm, and for the women who are now obliged to carry out, free of charge and with their families, all the tasks that were done by the public services before they were dismantled and privatised.

For how long? For as long as it takes to conduct a citizens' audit of the debt to identify the illegitimate part that must be cancelled. And we need to do this while stubbornly refusing to yield to the blackmail of our oppressors who tell us all day long that such a radical policy will automatically lead to Greece exiting the Eurozone and the European Union, and to compulsory national withdrawal...

No, no, no!! We refuse to pay this debt and we intend to stay in the Eurozone. The main reason for this is quite simple: we want to fight alongside you, all together, hand-in-hand with all the peoples and workers on this continent, to demolish this capitalistic Europe of the Merkels and Sarkozys. This is because we want to create and broaden what we call the "systemic crisis" of this anti-democratic and anti-social European Union of the rich. So, from now on, there is only one option, the only one that is realistic and feasible: for all the oppressed classes in Europe to come together and fight. Comrades, now more than ever, we need to find strength in unity. Let us unite because together we can change this world which is in the process of deteriorating. Let's come together before it's too late... And remember: If not us, then who? If not now, then when?

Translation from French: Angela Mitchell.

• *Sonia Mitralia is a feminist activist in Greece and member of CADTM Greece.*

Greece - Ruled by the memoranda - dependent or imperialist country?

The devastating attacks of the Troika, i.e. of banking capital from the EU and the United States, but also of the (until recently) "Greek troika"—the black front of PASOK, the right-wing New Democracy party and the far-right LAOS—along with Greek big business continues with undiminished fury. This is an attack on the living conditions of the vast majority of the Greek population: the workers, pensioners, young people; also on the rights of the working class, on the concept of democracy itself and on any prospect for an economic recovery, even for the survival of the society, an assault on all who live and work (or try to do so) in Greece.

The "Memorandum No. 2" means the dissolution of Greek society as it existed until 2009. Nothing seems able to withstand the hurricane. Incomes and pensions are lost; unemployment is rampant; the public school and health systems approach the vanishing point; the entire country is facing an abyss of misery. It must be said that this rapid descent is deeply class determined. Some benefit from the decline and leveling. Even for many economists whose objective is hardly the abolition of capitalism, such as Paul Krugman, the policy of the Troika is irrational and will have serious and unpredictable consequences, not only in Greece but elsewhere in Europe where the same memoranda policies are expected to be applied very soon in many countries, starting with those which have been termed "PIGS," and then all over the world.

A number of questions have been posed—in both the reformist and the extra-parliamentary, anti-capitalist and revolutionary Greek left—since the introduction of the first memorandum by the Papandreou government. What are the causes and who is responsible for these policies? What possibilities are there to find a way out of the dictatorship of the lenders and of their willful crimes? The discussion and analyses focus largely on the relationship between the EU, along with the major imperialist countries in the euro zone—especially France and Germany which have unofficially established themselves as the leaders in the past two years—and the European periphery (Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Italy), in particular to Greece. This article cannot deal with the enormous problems of the other Balkan countries or of Eastern Europe.

Some people and organizations have concluded that Greece once again is an "occupied" country, or perhaps the first EU member nation to become an outright colony, as KOE writes [1]. This part of the left considers that the Greek politicians are "sold to foreign imperialist forces" and are mainly "collaborators." They forget that Greek capital and the Greek state continue to play an imperialist role in the southern Balkans and in the Eastern Mediterranean. Consequently a strategic approach is developed, according to which Greece must be liberated from the "dependence on imperialism" and regain in the first place its economic and political "national sovereignty," albeit in a "progressive direction," with a "leftist government" and through a change in the balance of power. Thus it will be possible to free the land, the workers and people from the evil of the dead-end memoranda policy. The most prominent protagonist of this view is undoubtedly P. Lafazanis, deputy of SYRIZA [2]. (In the same spirit, the SYRIZA chairman Tsipras spoke on February 9th about the "enslavement" by the Troika and Merkel and about the transformation of Greece into a "third-world country" etc.)

The memoranda as class struggle

As a way out of the trouble and as a liberation from the coarse extortions by the Troika and the dictatorship of international banks and finance capital, most left forces (such as leadership of the Communist Party / KKE) suggest that Greece should withdraw from the EU or (as both a wing of SYN and SYRIZA and ANTARSYA [3], along with other organizations) from the euro zone. The topic of this article is whether the "dependency theory" might be true at the moment and whether the slogan of "withdrawal from the EU and the euro zone" can offer a serious prospect to the working' class and the broad masses in order to get rid of the deep impoverishment that capital and their governments have prepared for them.

First of all, it is obvious that all memoranda, and especially its latest version, do more than fully satisfy the demands of the Troika, i.e. especially the foreign banks' capital, which cannot be separated from monopoly capital in general—i.e. the "productive" capital of the large multinational companies from Germany, France etc. The same policy also serves the demands of the Greek bourgeoisie. The abolition of the collective wage agreements in entire branches of the economy and the attempt to propel all of society into a sort of crude 'Manchester' capitalism of the 19th century is revealing in this respect, if further proof was needed.

A key element is that the memoranda policies of the Papandreou government were introduced with an initiative of the European "center," i.e. Brussels and the governments of Berlin and Paris. Their aim was to save the unity of the euro zone, the interests of the international banking capital and, allegedly, Greece! It was totally predictable and planned what was to follow: the plundering of the workers resulting in a deliberately induced and devastating recession of the Greek economy plus a not-insignificant deterioration of the position of Greek capitalism in the international arena, especially within the euro zone. Nevertheless, the Greek bourgeoisie holds its position as an imperialist state in relation to neighboring countries and, as far as Turkey is concerned, as an imperialist competitor. What is new is that a country that itself works on the basis of imperialist domination is now subjected to the exploitation process of the (European) "periphery" by the "center." The imperialist countries held such relationships with the countries of the Third World and Eastern Europe in the past. Such relations were typical of the extremely aggressive raids by the IMF in dozens of countries in recent decades.

Greece is certainly just the beginning. The "PIGS" and other countries, especially Italy with its third-largest economy in the euro zone, will follow. The involvement of the IMF in the Greek memoranda serves not only to terrorize the workers and the population in an unprecedented way, but also symbolizes that something unusual is happening. This involves an attempt by the major imperialist countries to cooperate and to "rescue" the euro, along with the stability of the global financial system after its initial collapse and the outbreak of the global capitalist crisis in 2008. One has to understand that in such a serious "rescue" procedure the interests of the smaller and peripheral countries cannot be the focus of the actions taken. Their independence, democracy and prosperity will inevitably suffer serious damage or even be eliminated.

The leaders of the euro zone therefore decided in the summer of 2009, when the Greek population still had no idea what was going on, to communicate with the leaders of the (then ruling "centre-right") "Nea Dimokratia" and of PASOK (who immediately accepted their "new role"). The top leaders of Greek capital and the IMF agreed to impose the first memorandum on Greece. Undoubtedly this was an outrageous and violent interference by what later came to be called the "Troika" in the "internal affairs" of Greek politics. And the results of the national elections in 2009 were, from the outset, totally fake, because the voters did not know what kind of policy they were voting for, especially with regards to a ballot cast in favor of PASOK. The international intervention was initially silent. But in the next two years it became more brazen, finally reaching the level of crude blackmail, e.g. the proposal to establish an account to which Greece must pay the lion's share of its state budget, but which will be exclusively controlled by the Troika.

The looting in favor of the Troika

Also, there is no question that "Greece"—i.e. its working population, of course—is bleeding and being squeezed to the benefit of international banking capital. Tens of billions of Euros have already been transferred from the accumulated wealth of Greek society to the accounts of the Troika through privatization, wage and pension cuts, layoffs, and the exploitation mechanisms of the memoranda. This process will be continued relentlessly. That is the explicit content of the "PSI" agreement which, on February 12, was adopted by the "199" (truly sold-out) members of the Greek Parliament. 89 billion euros of the 130 billion so-called "rescue package for Greece" will be cashed immediately. 275 billion of the 350 billion euro public debt, representing 180% of GDP which constitutes an increase of 60% compared with 2008, will remain according to the PSI "Haircut." This means that the debt will continuously reach a non-viable level. The whole world knows this. In the "best case," a brutal austerity effort will decrease the debt back to 120% of GDP by 2020. This is projected as being a "great success" for the shock therapy applied to the Greek economy and society!

But that's not all. The bonds of creditors which had lost their value will be renewed and become "diamonds" delivered to the bankers. Of course, it is again the Greek population that will have to pay the bill. The loans granted to Greece are to be repaid again by the same, i.e. the working people, pensioners etc. at a rate of 4 to 6%. This means that Greek taxpayers must pay off more than 11 billion euros interest per year over the next 20 years or beyond. This is the torture chamber that Brussels and the Troika have prepared and are implementing for the workers and the population of Greece. (For details see the informative article by S. Kontogiannis, "The PSI Fairy Tales," *Ergatiki Allilengii*, newspaper of SEK, no. 1003). This is the "salvation of Greece" by the troika, the Greek government and its representatives. It is in every respect pure bankruptcy and absolute ruin.

The "political resolution" of OKDE-Spartakos, adopted in December 2011, describes the current trends and results of the memoranda policies as follows: "It is known that the process of exporting capital stifles

the economic development of the less developed countries, because it absorbs most of the resources available for the primary accumulation of capital. As for the national economy, a permanent dispossession of the indigenous social surplus takes place in the interest of foreign capital, which obviously leads to the reduction of the funds available for domestic capital accumulation. The remaining funds flow into areas such as foreign trade, agency services for international companies, real estate speculation, usury, gambling, tourism and food industries. The expanded reproduction of capital, supporting in the advanced countries the process of ongoing primary capital accumulation, hampers this same process in the less developed countries. Where capital is plentiful, there it accumulates at high speed; where it is only marginally available its investment and accumulation proceed slowly and inconsistently."

Greece as a weak link in the imperialist chain

This trend does not come like a bolt from the blue, although the introduction of the memoranda policies undoubtedly represented an incredible turning point, surprising everyone. Its "success" was based on the bureaucratization and the political division of the workers' movement that could not withstand the massive attacks by capital and government. The relentless enforcement of this trend, which shifted the balance of power gradually to the detriment of the weaker Greek capitalism, was the result of the strategic decisions of the Greek bourgeoisie, which joined the EU, signed the Treaty of Maastricht and considered that Greece would be "strong" as part of the euro zone. The "victory" talk of Simitis and the entire establishment of the country is not forgotten. The introduction of the euro actually served, in the first place, the interests of large multinational corporations and the financial capital of the economically powerful European countries. The same applies to the "big projects" before the Olympic Games in 2004, the astronomical cost of the Greek state for armament, and the inevitable opening of the Greek domestic market to large multinational companies in the same period—i.e. for developments dominating the economy during the last two decades.

At the same time it should be remembered that Greece cannot be compared with poor Third World countries. In a remarkable article P. Papakonstantinou pointed out that the GDP of Greece in 2010, according to EUROSTAT figures, was 232 billion euros. This would be enough to grant an income of 2580 euros per month to all working people, 900 to every unemployed person, and 1500 to each pensioner. We are not talking about solving the basic problems of the working class, only about some measures aimed at amelioration in the framework of the existing system ("Are we doomed to starve?" PRIN, Dec. 11th 2011). This shows again that the problem of the memoranda is exclusively a class issue. And we have still not taken into account either the approximately 560 billion euros deposited by wealthy Greeks to accounts abroad nor the wealth of the Orthodox Church, which remains inviolate.

In any case, it should be added that the whole tragic policy of leveling and dissolution would have been impossible had it not been based on a full agreement between the Greek capitalist class and the troika. We are confronted with a continuing crime due to an agreement of the troika with the Greek bourgeoisie. The only logical conclusion is that Greece is the typical—though certainly not the only—"weak link" in the imperialist chain within the euro zone and within the EU. This also means that Greece has entered a period where "troubles," or revolt (an authentic revolution) is more and more likely. It is also true that the memoranda policies are imposed on Greece as part of a strategy by the ruling classes designed to lower the living standards of working people gradually, throughout Europe, and so dramatically that productive investment can become profitable once again. This seems to be their only way out of the crisis. From this perspective the social carnage going on in Greece is only the beginning of a general attack on the rights and living standards of working people in the euro zone and EU. This is one more indication that all of the problems can only be fully resolved on a European and global scale.

The fight against the EU, the euro zone, and its goals

It is undeniable that the resistance of the workers and the majority of the population must be directed against the block of Troika and Greek bourgeoisie, along with their political parties, their media etc. There is no doubt that the EU institutions in Brussels, under the leadership of German capital, work in favor of the imperialist policies of the major powers. A plan has been developed that aims at the abolition of the rights of all European workers. This is a class war that has been brewing for decades, but which has become devastating since 2009. The main reason the German bourgeoisie wants to keep Greece in the EU and the euro zone is that the role of "global player" requires economic dominance also in the European periphery. Thus the struggle against the imperialist EU and for its dissolution is inevitable. It would be an illusion to believe that under the existing institutions "another Europe," a "Europe of the workers and peoples," etc. can be achieved.

In the Greek Left different ideas and programmatic elements are circulating focused on the "withdrawal from the EU and the euro zone." The problem with this demand is that if there is no debt cancellation and no nationalization of the banks and corporations (without compensation and under workers' control) it envisions nothing but a reformist utopia of a "better" capitalism within the borders of Greece. Even complementing the withdrawal with a program of redistribution of wealth, of a "fairer" tax system and a "progressive leftist government" with "socialist orientation" or "perspective" would not fundamentally alter this conclusion. It would be the attempt to develop some improvements within the existing system,

and it could seriously challenge neither the functioning of capitalism nor that of the bourgeois state which holds all the repressive mechanisms—police, army and prisons—as instruments of class domination in its hands. Such a “leftist government” would not only be a hostage of the actual bourgeois power relations, but would also increase the risk of a counter-revolutionary coup, as in Chile in 1973.

The two reformist parties, SYRIZA and the Communist Party, hope and spread the illusion, each in its own way, that through elections and different political majorities in parliament the prevailing policies can be defeated, to be replaced by better, more “progressive and leftist” policies that could, perhaps, even evolve into “socialism” at some point in the indefinite future. Such futile hopes fail, due to both the harsh reality of bourgeois power of the Greek state and the functioning of the capitalist system in Europe and worldwide, of which the Greek economy is only a small part. No, neither Greece nor Europe can be saved by any “left-wing governments” wanting to carry through some reforms for the workers on the basis of the existing system. A “better capitalism” is not feasible. This is shown by the economic analyses of Karl Marx in *Capital*, the correctness of the theory of “long waves” of capitalist crises by Ernest Mandel, and finally the analyses of Robert Brenner (to mention only some of the most interesting results of the Marxist analysis).

The withdrawal from the EU and the euro zone will only have meaning and specific class content if it is connected to the rejection and actual overthrow of the capitalist system. This will not be possible through the routine of elections, important as they may be as a reflection of public opinion at a particular moment. The self-organization of workers in enterprises, of broad layers of the population in the cities and districts, with replaceable delegates at the central and national level based on a system of real democracy is required. This includes the sphere of economic and democratic planning. Such a system would actualize a meaningful democracy and challenge the rotten parliamentary “democracy”—which is nothing but a disguised dictatorship of lenders and capital—eventually taking it down. Such an anti-capitalist assault would be a socialist revolution (or at least its beginning), the inevitable struggle for the conquest of power by the workers, laborers and the oppressed. Such a struggle can be successful if the solidarity of the nations of Europe and the world leads to spreading the anti-capitalist revolution throughout Europe and to the establishment of the Socialist United States of Europe.

This is a translation of an article from the Greek magazine Spartakos, March 2012.

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NOTES

[1] KOE, “Communist Organization of Greece,” is one of the major left-wing organizations that are involved in SYRIZA. SYRIZA is, however, dominated by the reformist party SYN derived from the spectrum of euro-communism. KOE is oriented to Stalinist concepts and stratagems.

[2] Several currents of the SYN and SYRIZA are divided on whether the exit from the euro zone currently represents a desirable and correct perspective. The deputy Lafazanis strongly advocates the exit, while the SYN-SYRIZA chairman Tsipras and the majority current do not agree with this demand.

[3] ANTARSYA is a non-parliamentary anti-capitalist revolutionary alliance of organizations and the unorganized. Its components include NAR, SEK (Greek section of the IS), ARAS, ARAN and OKDE-Spartakos (Greek section of the 4th International).

Syria - The Syrian revolution is one year old

The Syrian army moved into the district of Amro Baba in Homs on March 1 after having surrounded and bombarded it for a month. The resistance of the population was immediate, all over the country. The oligarchy in power presented the destruction of Amro Baba as a great victory against “the terrorists”. For his part, Colonel Riad Alassad, who deserted from the Syrian army and took refuge in Turkey, spoke in the name the Free Syrian Army of “a tactical retreat”. Both sides were lying.

In reality, there is nothing to be proud of in crushing a population besieged and bombarded for a month, defended by a few hundred lightly armed men. The response of the masses in revolt was immediate: the day after the fall of Homs, there were 619 civilian demonstrations in Syria.

The “commander” exiled in Turkey also lied, because the fall of Homs is a defeat. The retreat was neither tactical nor organized by him. That raises the question of the necessary unification of the groups of deserting soldiers and armed civilians under a single military command subject to a political leadership of the revolutionary coordinating committees on the ground. They should no longer be linked to a virtual commander isolated in Turkey or to the Syrian National Council (SNC) in exile which has gambled to the point of frustration on a hypothetical external military intervention, in the absence of any strategy for change, other than the one that consists of following the requests of its protectors (Qatar, Turkey, Saudi

Arabia and France). These “protectors” do not all have all the same approach. Qatar and Saudi Arabia are exerting pressure to arm the “opposition”, that is, the hard and jihadist sectors of the fundamentalist milieu; whereas France, Turkey and the United States consider these milieux dangerous for the stability of the region and the security of the State of Israel, and prefer to weaken Syria, its society and the state, while encouraging an “organized transition”, in other words a change within the regime itself.

The dictatorial regime has not, however, collapsed. Political defections from it are almost non-existent and desertion by soldiers remains very limited. Who are the pillars of this regime, apart from its army, its multiple security services and some acolyte parties? Contestation of the regime is weak in the two big cities of the country, Damascus and Aleppo, where a little under half of the of the population lives. The dictatorship concentrates its forces of repression there, but this calm is also due to the concentration of the “private-sector” bourgeoisie, which supports the regime. The cases of which we have heard, of financial support from wealthy people (trying to buy a clear conscience) to the revolutionaries remain isolated. The “contract” of this bourgeoisie, which is organically linked to the state and to the dictatorship, was and remains: let us govern and we will let to you get rich without limits.

On February 29, a delegation of the government met the representatives of the Aleppo bourgeoisie to respond to its requests for safety and prosperity. Two days later, the dictatorship decided to create a commission on economic policy including the representatives of this bourgeoisie, which moreover takes part in the financing of fascistic pro-regime militias and in the socio-economic organization of the population.

The middle-class has experienced extreme difficulties over the last decade because of implacably applied neoliberal policies. One part of it has taken a position in favour of the revolution, in particular the lower and excluded sectors, and the other has remained undecided or pro-regime, either because, for the majority of them, their employer is the state itself, or because of their fears of uncertainty or change.

Since 1970, the Assad dictatorship has encouraged Islamic and Christian religious institutions to allow the development of currents that are apolitical if not loyal to the regime and actively hostile to the Muslim Brotherhood. Between 1970 and 2000, approximately 12,000 mosques were built by official religious institutions, and 1 400 Assad Institutes for the study of the Koran were inaugurated. The Islamic religious hierarchy (Sunni, Shiite and Druze) has taken a position in support of the regime.

The Churches (Eastern, Western and Anglican) have made a Joint Declaration in favour of the regime. The Maronite Patriarch Alra’ai has affirmed his support on several occasions. The same goes for the Shiite and Druze hierarchies. That has not prevented lower-level religious functionaries from joining the revolt, but it does not wipe out the negative and counter-revolutionary role of their hierarchies.

The popular revolt is confronting the counter-revolution (the dictatorship, its domestic and foreign allies and the reactionary Arab countries and their allies) and it must respond to the question of increasing armed resistance, by integrating it into the revolutionary strategy of the masses.

The organization of the masses from below must articulate the two levels. These formations from below will have to be democratically elected and to assume at the same time a role of organization of non-violent struggles, of self-defence and of organizing the daily life of the masses in revolt. In other words, it is necessary to help create the conditions for the formation of a counter-power. All the forces of the Syrian revolutionary left are called upon to engage in this task.

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Long live the Syrian revolution - Build international solidarity

On March 15, 2011, a few dozen young Syrians dared to demonstrate right in the centre of the old city of Damascus, infected by the spirit of hope that had been ignited throughout the Arab world by the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions; a small demonstration of courageous young people demanding freedom for the Syrian people, who had been subjected to a regime of terror for more than 40 years

Three days after this event, the town of Deraa in the South of the country rose up following the savage repression of children who had written political slogans on a wall. A great mass demonstration was repressed in blood by the security forces of the regime. Starting from that day, the revolution set every town and city in the country alight. As a result of the totalitarian nature of the oligarchy in power under the leadership of the Assad family, independent political life was almost banished in Syrian society. Generations of militants, in particular those on the left, had for decades been severely repressed, were imprisoned, died under torture or were driven into exile. Trade-union activity was and remains under the control of agencies linked to the various security services and to the party in power, the Baath Party, thus prohibiting any independent trade union movement.

This monopoly on political and trade-union activity, associated with ruthless repression, made it possible for the regime to implement over the last fifteen years one of the most aggressive neoliberal policies in the region. It drove increasingly broad layers of the population into the direst poverty - workers, those in precarious work, the unemployed, peasants deprived of their land, those who are today the driving force of the Syrian revolution. This explains the profound social nature of the revolution and its heroic combativeness, but it also explains why it terrorizes the local big bourgeoisie, and why it worries the reactionary Arab countries as well as the Western governments.

Systematic shooting of demonstrators demanding the end of the regime has given way to bombardments, to the encirclement and destruction of neighbourhoods and cities in revolt, such as Homs, resulting in thousands of deaths, tens of thousands of wounded and prisoners, who were generally tortured. But every time that the armed forces, the security services and the bloodthirsty militias moved into a neighbourhood or a city, the following day peaceful demonstrations began again. Despite all these atrocities, the regime is losing more and more ground in the face of the popular insurrection. Its manoeuvres aimed at dividing people along religious lines have fortunately been thwarted. And the two biggest cities, Damascus and Aleppo, are now seeing more and more protests, in particular Aleppo which has become the centre of student protests. The Syrian revolution is now striking at the heart of the regime.

Solidarity without armed intervention

The Syrian people finds itself alone in the face of a machine of death and destruction. It is calling for international assistance, while refusing foreign military intervention on its territory. The regime accuses the opposition of being in favour of such an intervention, but if there is foreign intervention, it is in favour of the dictatorship - for example the military and technical aid and information provided by the Russian and Iranian governments to subdue the revolution. Furthermore, the majority of the economic sanctions affect above all the people and are used by the regime as pretexts for a policy of shortages, rationing and huge increases in the prices of essential products, in order to weaken even more the insurgent masses. In any case, we cannot have in confidence in the manoeuvres of the world or regional powers, which defend their own interests.

The general strike and the actions of civil disobedience which have lasted since December 11, 2011, with daily demonstrations, form the principal character of this revolution. The armed resistance by deserting soldiers and some civilians is a comprehensible reaction in the face of the unrestrained brutality of the regime and its dreadful exactions against the civilian population, but it remains limited. For a year already, millions of Syrians have taken to the streets to demand freedom, equality, social justice and a free and independent country. Today they are even more determined to put an end to the Assad regime, but they need the international solidarity of the peoples. The working-class and democratic movement and the Left have remained much too hesitant, and even blind, faced with the legitimacy and the heroic scale of this insurrection. It is more than time to build this international solidarity at the base, an essential contribution for a progressive future for the Syrian people.

This article appeared in *Tout est à nous!* (weekly of the New Anti-capitalist Party, NPA), no. 140, March 15, 2012.

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Syria - Solidarity with the Syrian Revolution!

Statement of the IC of the Fourth International

[*Fourth International*](#)

The Syrian people have lived for decades under the repression of a bloody and corrupt oligarchy. Power is monopolized by the Baath party, under the aegis of the family of former dictator Hafez el Assad who has been succeeded by his son Bachar.

After the beginning of the revolutions in the Arab region, some may have thought that this regime would escape the process, due to its mask as a resistant to global imperialism and to the State of Israel, and the strength of its repressive apparatus.

But the people's uprising invalidated these beliefs. For one year now, the Syrian masses have been taking to the streets and have heroically and peacefully held their ground in the face of daily massacres that

have resulted in more than 10 000 deaths, several tens of thousands of wounded and disappeared, and people in custody facing the risk of death by torture. The wounded cannot be taken to hospitals, which have become torture and murder centres. Throughout the country, the repressive forces have destroyed hundreds of dwellings and public buildings, and entire neighbourhoods, in their determination to crush all popular resistance, in particular in the martyred city of Homs.

The Russian, Chinese and Iranian powers have scandalously taken the side of Bachar al-Assad, and Putin is ensuring military support to the regime. But faced with the parallel manoeuvres of the US and European governments, and those of Turkey, the kingdoms of Qatar and Saudi Arabia, the Fourth International affirms its opposition to any type of military intervention in Syria, which would aim to strengthen the self-interests of these world or regional powers and amount to a further catastrophe for the Syrian people.

In this heroic process, the insurgent Syrian people are organizing from below, coordinating their efforts and developing the means of waging their struggle to the end for freedom and social justice. They are also refusing all the confessional division manoeuvres carried out by the regime and some Gulf countries.

Faced with the terrible massacre the Syrian people are enduring, peoples of the entire world must affirm their solidarity with their struggle to definitively dismantle this bloody regime. We can have no trust in governments' diplomatic manoeuvres. It is up to the workers' and democratic movement, which has done too little to answer the Syrian people's calls for help, to absolutely make this solidarity real. Leftist Syrian activist forces are taking part in this insurrection, for the development of people's self-organization, for a democratic, social, secular and anti-imperialist alternative to make possible a new Syria based on political and social equality. The Fourth International will do everything it can to help this.

Down with the regime of thieves and killers!

Bachar out!

Long live the popular revolution in Syria!

Amsterdam, 29th of February 2012

, The Fourth International - an international organisation struggling for the socialist revolution - is composed of sections, of militants who accept and apply its principles and programme. Organised in separate national sections, they are united in a single worldwide organisation acting together on the main political questions, and discussing freely while respecting the rules of democracy.

Syria - Socialists on the Ongoing Struggle Against the Regime

This translation of a statement from the Syrian Revolutionary Left, a group of Marxists inside and outside Syria that in January published the first issue of a monthly newspaper was published by the New Socialist webzine on the 19th of February 2012. The introduction is taken from NSW.

The popular movement against the Assad regime continues. We are publishing a translation of a statement from the Syrian Revolutionary Left, a group of Marxists inside and outside Syria that in January published the first issue of a monthly newspaper. We hope that this will allow more people who read English to become aware of the revolutionary socialist presence in the struggle in Syria.

We realize that the statement contains language that, in English, may sound outdated to some readers — for example, using "the masses" to refer to the ordinary people of the country. However, it's important to appreciate that this is not the case in the context of Syria today and in the original Arabic. Also, in this statement "sectarianism" refers to the Assad regime's practice of pitting the country's different ethno-religious communities against each other in order to maintain its rule (the regime tries to present itself as the protector of Christians, Kurds and Alawite Muslims against the Sunni Muslim majority) — NSW

The Barbaric Regime Will Not End the Determination of the Syrian Revolutionary Masses!

Since the beginning of last month (January), the killing and destroying machine of the ruling regime accelerated, with the proposition of the Arab plan which asked for the withdrawal of the tyrant in favor of its Vice President. The army and the militias have actually stormed numbers of cities and villages.

This bloody regime took advantage of the endless discussions of the Security Council — that the Russian and Chinese governments used their veto to prevent from passing a resolution condemning the regime — to trigger the barbaric attack on the neighborhoods of the city of Homs. They have committed a new massacre on February 3 and 4, which adds to the long list of massacres of the determined and revolutionary masses. The barbarity of the ruling regime requires a strong condemnation by the forces and vivid people of conscience struggling for justice and freedom; these latter should appeal to take legal action against the perpetrators of these crimes. Despite the enormous suffering and sacrifices of the

masses, this murderous regime has suffered a huge defeat when it tried to crush the revolution and break the will of the revolutionary people.

The masses, by their great revolution, write the lines of the most prestigious page of the history of heroism, abnegation, courage and honour there is to confront one of the worst regimes in the region, in terms of crimes and terror. They know intuitively and from experience that the regimes concerned by the Syrian case are here only through the prism of their narrow selfish interests or for the long term. They know as well that they are not moved by the sacrifices and suffering of the Syrian people. The masses rely only on their own strength and their will to force the bloody Assad regime to fall. They also know that the increasing participation of the masses in the revolution, reaching the undecided and the timid, the more they rise and extend the forces of the revolutionary movement brandishing the banner of freedom, equality and social justice, the more it strengthens the support, preventing the fall into the dark problems of sectarianism which the regime and counter-revolutionary forces encourage. If this happens, the revolutionary process would have eased the suffering and sacrifice, while provoking the downfall of the regime. This will then offer the prospect of building a new free Syria, democratic and pluralistic, based on equality between all citizens, without discrimination on the basis of gender, race or religion.

We must prevent a repetition of the massacre of Homs and all the others perpetrated by the ruling regime. This is the reason why we tell this rotten regime that it faces the Syrian people in all its components and not neighborhoods of cities or a city and a village here and there. We answer to this regime that the uprising will continue in all locations. The people struggling against the dictatorship (which has no restrictive sectarian characteristic) are all the Syrians in their great struggle for freedom. This is why the regime has failed to break the revolutionary movement, especially on a sectarian basis, which the revolutionary dynamic rejects. The regime will continue to fail in this regard because our people are one and united in its fight against the ruling clique.

The general strike at the end of last year, although it was limited, has shown that it can paralyze the economic and military levers of the regime and help to stimulate the revolutionary political consciousness of the masses. Today, while a movement of civil disobedience was announced for three days in protest against the massacre of Homs, we do not just call on all leftists to call for and participate in it effectively. We also demand to monitor and implement the strikes (with political, economic and social demands), for civil disobedience and to encourage the inclusion of all revolutionary forces which are the only ones capable of paralyzing the material levers of the system and the savagery of its repression.

Syrian revolutionary militants, let's continue the expansion of strikes and the disobedience movement to paralyze this bloody regime by our common struggles, by the mere energy of the revolutionary people of Syria, which is unlimited, and continue building self-managed committees and local councils to deal with the affairs of the revolutionary masses, because this dictatorial regime is tottering, despite its false claims about its infallibility.

With the solidarity and the unity of the Syrian people and their heroic resistance, we will make possible the overthrow of the Assad regime.

Workers, peasants, students, unemployed and officials, oppressed and tortured in Syria, all together let's work for the mass general strike at the national level.

Glory to the martyrs of the revolution, victory to the Syrian people, united, united.

Damascus February 5, 2012

Translation by Khalil Habash.

Published on the [New Socialist webzine](#).

Syria - Founding of the “Watan Coalition”

We publish here the official founding statement of the “Watan Coalition”, which regroups several Syrian organizations.

A group of organizations, currents and independent personalities have come together to found the “Watan (nation) coalition”, with the objective of strengthening their commitment to the revolution of our Syrian people and taking part in overcoming the difficulties that it faces, through their participation in developing a political view of the revolution, and of filling the gap between the political forces and the popular movement, as well as strengthening civil peace ...

They have agreed on the following points

1. The absolutely central objective of our revolution is the fall of the regime and the construction of a civil, democratic state, based on law, justice and citizenship for everyone, the state of all citizens, independently of their nationality, their gender or their religion.
2. The fall of the regime and the construction of the democratic state require the creation of the broadest possible alliance, including all layers of our people, its political currents and expressions, of which we are a component. We call on them all to form a bloc and to coordinate their actions.
3. The revolution of our Syrian people is a revolution for freedom and dignity, a revolution that must implement the demands of the people, namely the end of corruption, pillage, the failure of development and the violation of all the people’s political, economic and social rights. In other words, it objectively reflects the interest of all the classes and components of the Syrian people and expects all of them to join it, sooner or later.
4. The affirmation through clear constitutional principles of the rights of national minorities within the framework of the unity of Syria, its land and its people.
5. The peaceful character of the revolution is a value which is greater than the fiercely repressive regime and represents an effective strategy to confront it.
6. Although we are attached to the peaceful character of the revolution, we consider that splits within the army on the basis of moral and political principles, and the constitution of the “Free Syrian Army” are a result of the pressures on the armed forces through the repression of their brothers and their people, and we insist on the need for the engagement of this Army alongside the political leadership resulting from the forces of the revolution.
7. The affirmation of our attachment to having balanced relations with all the states of the region and the world, with the exception of Israel, including with states which today support the regime. We call on them to re-examine their position as of now, because their interests are related to those of the Syrian people which will certainly remain, and not to those of a transitory regime. We affirm that the building of these relations will reassert the total sovereignty of Syria and at the same time, it will put an end to the spilling of Syrian blood.
8. The affirmation that the liberation of our occupied territory and our support for the Palestinian people, which is fighting for its self-determination, cannot be the object of any kind of dealings in the conduct of our revolution.
9. We are more than ever determined to achieve the goals of the revolution by counting on the forces of the amazing Syrian people itself and we put at the door of the regime the entire responsibility for the risk of foreign military intervention, insofar as it continues to take a strongly repressive option and refuses to listen to the demands of the Syrian people.
10. We, the “Watan Coalition”, like other forces, political currents and organizations of civil society, seek to build different levels of coordination in our orientations and our activities, according to the demands of the situation, starting with common sectoral and political steps forward, in order to finally open up to ourselves the broadest prospects in terms of co-operation, collaboration and unity, leaving the door open to the participation of all individuals, forces and groups which support the revolution. Eternal glory to our innocent martyrs. Freedom for our prisoners. Treatment for our wounded. Victory of the people’s will.

Damascus, February 13, 2012.

This interview appeared in *Tout est à nous!* (weekly of the New Anti-capitalist Party, NPA), no. 137, February 23, 2012

Egypt - Debt Swap is not an Alternative to Cancelling Odious Debt

Amidst a general atmosphere of an extreme lack of transparency it has come to our knowledge that Egypt had sealed agreements with three European countries pertaining to the implementation of debt swap programs, and is currently negotiating with two further countries. The countries in question according to informal sources are Germany, France, Italy and Belgium. The Popular Campaign to Drop Egypt's Debt would like to raise strong concerns regarding the conditions under which these agreement are being negotiated, as well as the practice of debt swap itself under the given circumstances.

In the current phase the campaign opposes in principle dealing with Egypt's foreign debt through debt swap initiatives, as this diverges from the main aim of auditing previous debt, especially that contracted during the Mubarak dictatorship. And since there is considerable consensus amongst a wide group of Members of the European Parliament to suspend payments and conduct an audit to countries going through democratization processes as, stated in the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly Resolution [1], we would like to elaborate more on our concerns.

Lack of transparency and participation

Undoubtedly, whatever the final political or economic position is of any debt swap agreements, they show from the very beginning a lack of transparency, as is the case with all activities related to borrowing from abroad in specific, and from government finances in general. The degree of secrecy this time has reached the situation where the government made no public statements, nor informed any media outlets about the details of the debt swap agreements. It is through informal connections that the campaign was able to obtain any information whatsoever. If the current government sees some gain in a debt swap, and a sort of external help for Egypt, then it is imperative to disclose the details of these agreements and declare the alleged achievements with civil society and the Egyptian public at large.

Campaign's position on the procedure of debt swap

Furthermore, aside from the lack of transparency in procedures, and any kind of popular or parliamentary political participation, swapping debt does not represent in any manner an alternative to auditing and cancelling foreign odious debts. The reason is that debt swap is based on one country forfeiting its right to a debt or part of such in return of the indebted government's vow to direct the amounts to investment projects to be agreed upon with the lending country. However, whereas debt swap achieves initial gains in terms of a) saving the cost of servicing the debt, as well as b) transforming foreign debts to investments, there would be no guarantee that these projects align with indebted states' plans for development. On the contrary such projects often constitute some sort of constraint or conditionality. In this light, setting the nature and value of the projects and the expected returns is another issue that needs to be investigated, to ensure that debt swap does not further burden the indebted country – Egypt- with more liabilities than those of the original debt. In all cases, the details of the agreement should be disclosed, along with the standards upon which the projects were agreed upon.

Debt swap and odious debt

Most importantly, debt swap agreements do not represent in any manner an alternative to auditing and dropping foreign debt that are proven to be odious, illegal or illegitimate. This is true in the case where loans are made without true political representation of a population. Furthermore, loans or debt swaps are considered illegitimate or odious when the creditor is aware that the borrowing government is not subject to any real supervision, which would allow for a guarantee of a sound spending of the funds, or that this government is oppressive of its population. Unfortunately, those conditions stated above have manifested during Mubarak's dictatorship, thus bringing urgent rise to conduct an extensive debt audit of the foreign debt incurred under the Mubarak regime. Therefore, The Popular Campaign to Drop Egypt's Debts will continue to search and examine the external debt register, although it further demands the disclosure of the details related to debt swap agreements. The members of the campaign are strongly disappointed all reports of the corruption of the Mubarak regime have not translated into an examination of the accumulated external and internal debts during the extended years of his rule. The disregard of such a matter occurred, in spite of the disclosure on the part of official parliamentary or judicial parties of the corruption in the external debt file.

Respect for the sovereignty of the Egyptian people

One aim of this exercise is to send a clear message to future governments, that contracting new debt without transparency and accountability is no longer acceptable. After the Arab Spring, the people demand from both their own government and creditors to respect the fundamental sovereignty of the Egyptian people with regards to economic decision-making.

Transitional governments should not formulate Egypt's long-term policies

The campaign believes, that the government's continuous tendency to swap debts instead of reviewing and abstaining from payment of whatever is proven to be illegal, or odious, is an attempt to avoid the responsibility for past misconduct carry out at in the name of the Egyptian people. This is not unexpected since most members of the current economic decision making team remain in the same positions they held during the previous regime. Furthermore, we find it entirely unacceptable that a 'transitional' government is overstepping its jurisdiction and is negotiating agreements with foreign governments, the implications of which determine the economic future of Egypt.

For all the reasons mentioned in this letter we herewith call upon all foreign governments to abstain from negotiating with any unelected transitional government, allow for the auditing of all uni-lateral debt incurred by the Egyptian dictatorship and to ensure all future negotiations are transparent and take place with a legitimate partner that represents the Egyptian population.

Excerpt from our founding statement

2) As a general rule, the campaign disapproves of debt swap mechanisms. Debt swaps create new debt burdens, whose legality and benefit are not checked by the people. In cases where debt swaps are used instead of audit and cancellation, the campaign adopts the following stands:

Debt agreements should be reviewed to determine the legitimacy of the swapped debts. The conditions of debt swap should be discussed in a manner that guarantees integrity and transparency in the decision-making process

17 February

USA - Who are the control rods?

After losing a war, one of the worst things that can happen to a society is for its people to be told it was a "victory." The inability or failure to learn the lessons of the United States' defeat in Iraq enables the plunge into the next disastrous adventure: Can you say "Iran"?

Is a U.S. and/or Israeli direct military attack on Iran really as imminent as recent reports might indicate? We think probably not, but the direction of events is ominous. Iran and Israel are engaged ("allegedly") in mutual rounds of assassination. Elements of the Israeli intelligence and military establishments are waging either an open faction fight, or a strategic escalation of tension, through articles planted in the American press over the feasibility and timing of the coming war.

An important analysis by Moshe Machover sums up the Israeli regime calculus:

"(A) decision to ignite a war against Iran is not one that any Israeli leader would take lightly. There is a non-negligible risk that Israel would suffer many casualties...But in this case the prize is the highest possible one from a Zionist point of view: eliminating the demographic threat to the future of Israel as a Jewish ethnocracy [through a possible mass expulsion of the Palestinian population]. So Netanyahu will be sorely tempted to make a sacrifice of his own people for the greater national good.

"I assume that American policy-makers are aware of Israel's special interest in a military denouement of the conflict with Iran, an interest not quite shared by the U.S. This is why they are worried, and issue stern warnings to Netanyahu and Barak — discreetly and behind the scenes, of course, because especially in this election year, when he will face Republican crazies, Obama cannot afford to appear pusillanimous.

"However, Netanyahu cannot flagrantly go ahead and start a war without U.S. approval. Therefore the most likely scenario is a series of provocations instigated by Israel, mostly by devious and covert means, in order to escalate the conflict and drag the U.S. by degrees into mission creep." <http://www.cpgb.org.uk/article.php?...>

The danger of the U.S. population accepting a "drag into mission creep" would be much less if the lessons of Iraq were properly publicized. The reality of the defeat in Iraq is hardly obscure, since it took about 20 minutes after the last official U.S. combat troops crossed the border from Iraq into Kuwait for the Potemkin village of "Iraqi stability and democracy," so carefully constructed during eight years of occupation, to fall apart.

President Obama, who inherited and chose to continue the war he had denounced as "stupid," saluted the returning troops for bringing about a stable, free and democratic Iraq. Meanwhile the regime of prime minister Nouri al-Maliki brought a terrorism indictment against the vice-president Tariq al-Hashimi, who promptly headed north to autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan where the central government's hand doesn't reach.

Sunni and independent Shia political figures accuse al-Maliki of organizing a new dictatorship with the support of the United States, which is shipping billions of dollars in advanced weaponry to Iraq — ostensibly to defend against a possible Iranian threat, which may be slightly incongruous inasmuch as al-Maliki's adversaries accuse him of acting as Teheran's agent. Meanwhile, The New York Times (January 29, 2012) reported that the 11,000-person U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad is protected by 5,000 private military contractors, and "When embassy personnel move throughout the country, small helicopters buzz over the convoys to provide support in case of an attack. Often, two contractors armed with machine guns are tethered to the outside of the helicopters."

Will Iraq's fragile political system collapse entirely? That's hard to predict, but the people of that "liberated" country are probably pretty realistic about what they're facing. After some hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths, the devastation of war and the humiliation of an eight-year occupation, the hideous tyranny of Saddam Hussein has been replaced by the prospect of endless sectarian bloodshed in which, among other ruinous developments, Iraq becomes a proxy battleground between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Losing At Home

Among the war's other losers, however, are those from whom the truth is hidden — the people of the United States. Although we obviously haven't suffered anything resembling the physical destruction and the mass death that imperialism inflicted on Iraq, the deaths of over 4000 troops and the horrific lifelong injuries suffered by tens of thousands of others are a sickening enough waste.

It's necessary for the antiwar movement to state the truth clearly: This was a criminal war, which the United States lost. Just compare the results with what the Bush-Cheney gang promised at the outset: those fantasies about a liberated democratic Iraq, allied with the United States and its war partners, whose reconstruction would be self-financed by its oil money.

Perhaps the biggest lie about Iraq wasn't the Weapons of Mass Destruction fraud — after all, imperialist adventures of the past have also been launched on lying pretexts from "Remember the Maine" (1898) to the mythical Gulf of Tonkin incident (1964). The big fraud was telling the U.S. population that this war didn't have to be paid for, that in fact taxes could be cut in wartime.

We've paid for it, all right — and we'll be paying for decades to come, somewhere upwards of four trillion dollars by some estimates once the full costs of treating physically and emotionally ravaged veterans are counted. But neither the Bush-Cheney neoconservative gangsters who launched the war, nor the Obama administration that inherited it, are going to tell the truth about this defeat.

In fact, the stage for U.S. defeat in Iraq was set early in the occupation, between 2004 when U.S. forces destroyed the city of Fallujah and 2006, by which point the reality of civil war among Iraqi factions couldn't be denied. Juan Cole looks back to a decisive turning point:

"It turns out that the day on which the U.S. military lost Iraq once and for all was September 16, 2007, when Blackwater private security guards, all decorated ex-military, opened fire in Nisoor Square under the mistaken impression that they were under attack by the ordinary civilian motorists there. 17 were killed, dozens wounded, and the incident became a cause celebre for Iraqis eager to see an end to a foreign military presence in their country. That the U.S. courts declined to punish the perpetrators of the massacre was a nail in the coffin for extraterritoriality. The Iraqis wouldn't grant it after all that.

"... The U.S. will receive no benefit from its illegal war of aggression, no permanent bases, no bulwark against Iran, no new Arab friend to Israel, no \$14 a barrel petroleum — all thing things Washington had dreamed of. Dreams that turned out to be flimsy and unsubstantial and tragic."

Along then came "the surge," billed by Bush and subsequently by president Obama as the new strategy for victory. In reality, this was a salvage operation to halt the slide toward the complete disintegration of Iraq — and it worked, in the sense that "al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia" was suppressed (before the U.S. invasion, of course, it had never existed) and the cooperation of Sunni forces was purchased.

In this period U.S. political-military strategy essentially switched gears, away from Paul Bremer's and Paul Wolfowitz's ideologically driven post-invasion scheme of forcing massive "de-Baathification" and dissolving the Iraqi army that plunged the country into chaos. The "surge" was based on a more "classic" colonial mode of buying the support of the indigenous (so-called tribal) elites. That strategy brought about a rough political compromise and allowed the holding of halfway credible Iraqi elections and the formation of a coalition government.

That's the arrangement that has come unglued as American combat troops departed — as everyone in Iraq knew they eventually must. The remaining cohorts of U.S. military "contractors" in Iraq make the situation messier, but don't change the political equation.

And Then Comes Iran

If the peoples of both the invaded and invading countries lost, then who won? The only clear winner has been the regime in Iran, which saw its main enemy Saddam Hussein disappear from the map. The Iranian

regime, we now know, quietly offered back in 2003 to deal with the United States for a comprehensive regional bargain. The Bush-Cheney regime, with Iran next on its hit list, contemptuously refused — and that opens another chapter to today's looming tragedy and imperial disaster.

In the coming year, Barack Obama — who was elected in part because he had opposed the Iraq war, and once in office embraced it — will take the Republicans' heat for "losing Iraq." If this seems like one of those absurdities of domestic politics, of course it is — but that was an inevitable outcome of president Obama's deal with the devil. And this comes at the time when the dysfunctional mutual co-dependent U.S. relationship with the military and intelligence apparatus of Pakistan has made the Afghanistan war the next inevitable loser for U.S. imperialism. (This reality is explored by Adaner Usmani in this issue of *Against the Current*.)

Most dangerous of all, perhaps — because the truth of the U.S. defeat in Iraq is hidden by the bipartisan agreement of the Republicans and Democrats, and because the entire destructive record of intervention in Afghanistan is conveniently all but forgotten so that the lessons of the past 30 years remain unlearned — there is far too little public understanding today of Washington's slide toward confrontation with Iran.

The pretext for U.S.-European sanctions and the step-by-step embargo of Iranian oil, of course, is the Iranian regime's alleged drive for nuclear weapons. But that's at most a secondary issue: The real imperial objective would be the destruction of Iran's conventional military capability that makes it a strong regional power. This is not achievable merely by air power or computer worms or Special Forces strike teams; it entails a major military operation on land as well as sea.

To repeat the point from Moshe Machover: There is no way that Israel can launch a war with Iran on its own, despite the eager encouragement from some desperate neoconservative and evangelical nutcases for an Israeli strike to force the United States to take the plunge.

As for the Iranian rulers closing the Strait of Hormuz, that's a deterrent threat rather than an imminent scenario. Such an attempt would make sense only in the extreme case of an imperialist physical blockade of Iranian oil shipments (which would be in international law an act of war to which Iran would be entitled to respond). Absent that level of aggression the Iranian rulers, detested by much of the population, are engaging in their own brand of rhetorical bluster, no doubt related to their internal factional battles.

From Washington's side, it's hardly likely that the Obama administration in an election year would launch an action that would cause a big oil price shock and expose U.S. interests in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Persian Gulf to covert Iranian retaliation. Even the Bush-Cheney gang, who undoubtedly intended to make Iran the central target in their Middle East war adventure, had to shelve those plans as they choked on Iraq.

In the medium and longer term, the Israeli tactical game is evidently to provoke some Iranian response that would force the United States prematurely into a confrontation that the Obama administration — at this stage — clearly does not want. The revelations that Israeli agents have posed as the CIA to recruit al-Qaeda-type terrorists (the Jundullah group) to carry out assassinations in Iran, is a window onto this deadly game. The temperature of the crisis, both real and manipulated, could begin to rise beyond the control of the participants, just as a nuclear reactor may "go critical" as the result of accidents and miscalculations.

To prevent catastrophic meltdown in a nuclear reactor, there are control rods that supposed to stop the chain reaction. In the face of a war drive, it's the people who must become the "control rods." The American people are already sick of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. If the full costs and outcomes of these wars were understood, popular opposition to this looming new adventure would be overwhelming.

The path away from destruction requires a nuclear-free Middle East, in a nuclear-free world. For the antiwar movement, for Occupy activists — indeed for any voices of sanity in our country — getting these realities into the political debate could hardly be more critical now.

, *Against the Current* is the magazine of *Solidarity*, a radical socialist regroupment in the United States.

USA - Longview Port Workers Set Example for All Labor

ILWU Local 21 Victory
[Jeff Mackler](#)

Until Jan. 23, few people in the labor and social justice movements expected anything less than a major class confrontation at the state-of-the-art \$200 million grain facility at Longview, Wash. The scab complex was operated by the multi-billion-dollar Export Grain Terminal (EGT) and owned by three giant

international agribusiness holding companies—Bunge Ltd. (one of the seven top grain exporters in the world), Itoche, and STX Pan Ocean.

The scene had been set for what might have erupted into a battle of the first order – more akin to the mass labor struggles of decades past than the present spectacle of a class-collaborationist labor bureaucracy acceding to the boss class's every incursion on past contract gains won in class-struggle confrontations long ago.

On the ruling-class side, the Obama administration authorized armed U.S. Coast Guard vessels, which operate under the authority of the Department of Homeland Security and in collaboration with the U.S. Navy, to escort a cargo ship to load hundreds of thousands of tons of grain for export to Asia. Breaching union pickets, EGT had accumulated sufficient grain via rail and truck shipments from all over the Midwest and beyond to fill this massive non-union storage facility, capable of loading a typical bulk-grain-carrying ship in 24 hours as compared to the week required at less mechanized operations.

This was the first time in 40 years that the U.S. government authorized the use of the military in an overt strike-breaking operation. The cargo ship was also to be escorted by armed military helicopters. On the ground, police and associated military forces throughout the region and beyond were readied to thwart any union interference.

Relationship of forces

On the union side stood the ranks of the small but battling ILWU Local 21, unsure that their broad call for ILWU and national rank-and-file union mobilizations would be answered by sufficient forces to challenge this government-sponsored union-busting venture. Local 21 was also in close collaboration with the Occupy movement, including sending messages of solidarity with Occupy Oakland's mobilizations that twice closed the Port of Oakland—once on November 2 in the course of the "general strike" and again on Dec. 12.

While no one knew the precise date that EGT would attempt to head up the Columbia River to test the relationship of contending forces, the tension grew in mid-January as a major grain cargo ship set anchor at the coastal port city of Astoria, Ore., 30 miles from the EGT operation. This was seen by both sides as a virtually assured test of strength, which if successful on EGT's part, could open the door wide to doing to the entire West Coast ILWU what was planned for Local 21's 10 to 50 workers who had been replaced by the scabbing Operating Engineers Local 701.

It was in this context that rumors of an impending settlement began circulating on Jan. 23.

- At the initiative of Washington Governor Chris Gregoire negotiations were opened between the ILWU and EGT on Jan. 23. A tentative agreement regarding arrests was reached that included the dismissal of most, but not all, of the charges filed against some 225 union activists and their supporters. It appears that it has been approved by the ranks of Local 21. Since then all six jury trials have dismissed EGT charges against ILWU members, indicating that the Longview community has no stomach for jailing courageous union fighters and their allies. The ILWU is pressing for the dropping of all charges.
- EGT has bought out the contract it signed with the General Contractors, the agency that hired the International Operating Engineers Union to scab on Local 21. At present there are no scab workers at the EGT facility – only ILWU Local 10 members.
- The grain cargo ship anchored at Astoria has left, thus eliminating the immediate threat to load grain from EGT's terminal.

An announcement approved by the Solidarity with Longview working groups of Occupy Oakland, Occupy Portland, Occupy Longview, and Occupy Seattle reads as follows: "Supporters of the Longview workers are still planning to mobilize if needed, but are asking the caravans [organized to travel to Longview in defense of Local 21] to wait for official word on the contract negotiation outcome. If in fact the membership of ILWU Local 21 approves a contract, Occupy will mobilize in celebration of this victory for the community of Longview and workers everywhere."

There is no doubt that some minority elements in the Occupy Movement have made excessive, if not foolish, statements that dismiss the U.S. labor movement in its entirety and see the Occupy movement, despite its absence from capitalism's central points of production and transport, as a present alternative to the unions. This usually anarchist and substitutionist minority, who have claimed to represent the "89 percent" of unorganized workers, have good reason to be harsh critics of the present union bureaucracy. But they are entirely mistaken in any assertion that a movement lacking an organized class base at the point of production can substitute for a reinvigorated, democratic, and fighting labor movement, and especially one with an emerging class-struggle left wing aimed at the heart of the capitalist system itself.

This said, the vast numbers of these enthusiastic and dedicated activists see their fates tied to the victories of workers against the capitalist establishment and hail what they hope will be a resounding victory for the ILWU.

It appears likely that Local 21's ranks will approve a basically sound contract even if it includes some important concessions that have previously been negotiated by ILWU locals in the region. History will record this struggle as among the first critical victories registered by class-struggle fighters in decades.

EGT did not eagerly return to the bargaining table. Its intention was to break the ILWU and set a precedent for future union busting along the entire coast. As far back as the 1980s the Pacific Maritime Association reported, "We continued in 1986 to see a slow but steady progress toward an improved labor environment. Dramatic and essential reductions were accomplished in offshore labor costs. A clear reversal of trend in longshore labor costs was accomplished in the East Coast and Gulf Coast ILA settlements, although a fragmented approach to bargaining was required to set this in motion." (Emphasis added.)

Class struggle confrontations at Longview

EGT's filling its new terminal to the brim was accomplished with brute force as local and regional police and company-hired goons repeatedly breached the fighting Local 21 picket lines. In early September, Local 21, with some 250 members, and aided by ILWU locals in the region from Tacoma, Seattle, and beyond, mobilized over 1000 workers in defiance of a court injunction and entered EGT's expansive 34-acre rail and trucking line complex to challenge the scabs and company goons head on. This ILWU mobilization had the added effect of closing down the Tacoma and Seattle ports.

By pulling the plug on several grain-laden rail cars, tons of grain were dumped onto the EGT terminal's railroad tracks while goons protecting the scab operation were "gently" moved out of the way—union style. Police and company officials later charged the union with "kidnapping" some of these paid union busters.

EGT responded soon after the September battle with a massive display of ruling-class power. They mobilized an army of cops and hired strikebreaking "protection agencies" to challenge Local 21 and its allied picketers. They arrested some 225 workers and leveled a broad array of punitive charges against the trade unionists. But these workers were doing what unions are supposed to do in such disputes—close down employer operations and defend their jobs at the point of production. Fines exceeding \$300,000 were levied against Local 21 by compliant judges. Union efforts to reverse these fines and arrests in court were rejected with impunity, but union appeals are still in process and may be negotiated in any final settlement.

The national AFL-CIO assisted the EGT scab operation when the federation ruled that the hiring of the scab workers from the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE), as opposed to the ILWU that had jurisdiction over West Coast ports for the past 70 years, was a "jurisdictional" dispute to be resolved by "arbitration within the AFL-CIO." The Richard Trumka-led American "Fakeration" of Labor, as the IWW used to call it long ago, bent to its higher dues paying Building and Construction Trade Council affiliate as opposed to the smaller, 55,000 member ILWU.

Local 21 calls for working class solidarity

The ILWU's signature solidarity credo, "An Injury To One Is An Injury to All," was put to good use as Local 21 initiated a call to the entire labor movement and all its supporters to mobilize in Longview to challenge the planned scab operation. Local 21's call was enthusiastically supported by AFL-CIO-affiliated Washington State county central labor councils, which called on "all able-bodied workers" and community supporters to come to the aid of Local 21.

ILWU Local 10, based in the San Francisco-Oakland area, allocated \$10,000 to organize Bay Area caravans to prepare to join the Longview mobilization. The San Francisco Labor Council allocated \$1500.

Union locals across the country and AFL-CIO state federations, as in Wisconsin, passed resolutions condemning the government's use of the military to break strikes. Carpenter locals in the AFL-CIO's Building and Construction Trades Council broke ranks with the Trumka leadership to condemn EGT scab herding.

A powerful new ally in the form of the broad Occupy movement joined the ILWU Local 21 cause early on. This was seen in the course of the Nov. 2 "general strike," called by Occupy Oakland to protest the brutal police dismemberment and tear-gas and pepper-spray attack on the Frank Ogawa Plaza Occupy encampment and the police-fired canister-missile that fractured the skull of encampment activist Scott Olsen, an Iraq War veteran. In that action, 30,000 protesters closed down the Port of Oakland, with the obvious solidarity of ILWU Local 10 members, who refused to cross the Occupy "mass picket lines."

While the ILWU's International leadership took its distance from this port closure, it was not so passive on Dec. 12, when Occupy Oakland moved to organize a West Coast port shutdown in solidarity with Local 21.

A message of appreciation from Local 21 President Dan Coffman was read out to the Oakland crowd of 6000 and widely publicized. ILWU tops in contrast, stood in direct opposition to this partially successful effort—instructing its members to cross the Occupy picket lines up and down the coast. Even here, a number of ports were closed, including Portland, where an estimated 4000-5000 mobilized.

When the Occupy Wall Street organization in New York City allocated \$12,000 toward the organization of caravans to Longview and other mobilization efforts, it was clear that Local 21 had a new and important ally that was serious about mobilizing to defend labor's cause.

ILWU's "one-day strikes"

From the ILWU bureaucracy's point of view, it is one thing to employ the union's historic contract provision that allows members, for reasons of "health and safety" to respect third-party picket lines, as ILWU members have done for decades on issues ranging from opposition to the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars to demands to free Mumia Abu-Jamal; it is quite another to challenge the bosses and their government on an issue pertaining directly to the ILWU itself—in this case Local 21's fight against EGT's government-backed and AFL-CIO-abetted union-busting onslaught.

The occasional one-day ILWU strikes over the years were aimed at expressing workers' solidarity with the oppressed and persecuted in the U.S. and around the world. But the one day's lost pay that ILWU members usually incurred was more than offset by the great majority's working double or even triple shifts soon afterward to more than make up for the loss. One could honestly say that the ILWU ranks, among the most highly-paid workers in the country, were most often both honored to express their solidarity with radical political causes on the one hand and pleased to take a day off on the other, and especially so because the union faced no employer threats to invoke Taft-Hartley.

We must add here that not all ILWU one-day strikes have been conducted under the union's "health and safety" contract provisions. The ILWU's May Day 2008 West Coast antiwar port closure, for example, was a strike in defiance of the PMA and in the face of its threat to invoke Taft-Hartley. Today, the ILWU tops cite this anti-union law to justify their effective paralysis in the face of a major ruling-class offensive. To the very extent that this remains the policy of the ILWU, and virtually all other unions in the country, American labor relinquishes its most powerful weapon—solidarity. No single union is capable of taking on the full force of the U.S. government. But the full utilization of the combined forces of all labor does present more than a formidable obstacle to employer/government abuse.

The stunning reversal of EGT, embodied in its return to the bargaining table and the intervention of the Washington state governor to try to settle this dispute has no explanation other than an emerging and major change in the relationship of forces on the ground.

It is one thing for a giant multi-billion conglomerate to take on a small ILWU local; it is quite another when that local successfully calls on its allies inside and outside the trade-union movement to mobilize in massive numbers to challenge the bosses and their capitalist state, that is, its police, military, courts and antiunion legislation.

Local 21 took on these powerful forces and, indirectly, perhaps, the ILWU tops as well. The latter pledged to mobilize workers in Longview, while at the same time guaranteeing the Pacific Maritime Association bosses that no other West Coast ports would be closed—a contradiction indeed!

If the ILWU bureaucracy had any real intention of challenging the union-busting effort at Longview it could not divide its forces and present a credible power at the same time. It could not promise the bosses in the massive ports of Los Angeles, San Pedro, and Oakland—and at every other port—that work would continue as usual while mobilizing in Longview at the same time. In fact, the most serious challenge that the ILWU could offer would be to mobilize the full power of ILWU's Longshore Division to simultaneously shut down the scab operation in Longview and close down the West Coast ports at the same time.

ILWU tops bend to Taft-Hartley

While ILWU's international president, Robert McEllrath, pledged to support the impending Longview confrontation, the union's solidarity statement went to great lengths to affirm, denunciations notwithstanding, its obligations under the Taft Hartley Law to refrain from interference with what that reactionary law defines as "the full flow of commerce" (see *Socialist Action*, January 2012, for key portions of the ILWU statement). Taft Hartley, historically dubbed by the entire labor movement the "Slave Labor Act," was passed by Congress in 1947. It explicitly prohibits jurisdictional strikes, wildcat strikes, solidarity or political strikes, secondary boycotts, secondary and mass picketing, and closed shops. In short, it bans labor from mobilizing in solidarity with workers under attack.

Early on in the Local 21 struggle, one could argue that McEllrath's statement was little more than a defensive formulation aimed at officially protecting the ILWU from future law suits and punishment under Taft Hartley. But it soon became clear that "protective" legal language was not the ILWU's intention.

When Labor Solidarity Committee members of Occupy Oakland and leading activists in Local 10 traveled to Portland and Seattle to join with Local 21 rank and filers and other trade-union and Occupy leaders at public meetings to plan solidarity mobilizations for Longview, the ILWU officialdom was outraged.

In Seattle some two dozen ILWU officials, led by three northwest ILWU presidents, physically attacked a meeting of some 200 Occupy and trade-union activists gearing up to mobilize for the then impending Longview confrontation. The officials' stated pretext for the disruption was that they were demanding

to read aloud McEllrath's statement that warned against any efforts to close West Coast Ports and against ILWU locals taking their lead from forces not under the control of the ILWU—a more than oblique reference to the Occupy movement. These ILWU leaders were physically escorted from the meeting but not before they hurled a few punches and screamed vile and sexist epithets at a number of the woman who helped monitor the meeting.

Some in the solidarity and socialist movements have argued that this confrontation might have been avoided had the meeting's leaders agreed to read and debate McEllrath's fork-tongued statement early on rather than announcing that it would be read immediately after the meeting's speakers had concluded their remarks. Whatever the merits of this view, they are subordinate to the fact that it was well known in advance of the meeting that the ILWU officials aimed to disrupt the Seattle solidarity event rather than engage in a fraternal exchange.

The ILWU's top leaders judged with fear and trepidation that their most likely tepid Longview protest might have taken on a different character altogether had the Occupy forces proved capable of mobilizing the forces on the scale of or exceeding the 30,000 that had closed the Port of Oakland on Nov. 2. The ILWU ranks themselves could not be other than inspired by tens of thousands of working people mobilizing on their behalf.

The dynamic set in motion by Local 21's call for a mass mobilization, already supported by local central labor councils, other ILWU locals, and union bodies across the country—combined with the youthful ranks of the courageous Occupy movement → might well have resulted in an outcome far exceeding anything the bosses, their government, and the ILWU officialdom had anticipated.

Following the disruption in Seattle, the Seattle-based ILWU Local 19, in accord with the warning against Occupy signaled by McEllrath, passed a lengthy and angry motion denouncing the Occupy movement and breaking all relations with it, while demanding that Occupy leaders come to the union's hall with a formal apology. Yet the same local maintained its commitment to support Local 21 when the EGT scab operation was at hand. Such is labor's contradiction, and especially operable in the ILWU, where democratic forms exist to this day that allow the ranks to elect their officers on a yearly basis. In general, those who fail to lead in accord with the interests of the ranks are not long for top posts in ILWU locals.

Ruling class and EGT back off

The potential for such a serious challenge to the EGT/government offensive, in the context of a grinding economic crisis that has cut deep into the fabric of American life, proved to be decisive in the decision of the ruling class, the one percent, to back off in order to seek to take their pound of flesh at another place and another time. The Obama administration chose not to risk a nationally publicized spectacle of thousands, if not tens of thousands, of workers and their allies confronting a government scab-herding military operation.

The Longview events will undoubtedly teach labor and social justice activists some important lessons: First and foremost is that the labor movement—still based in critical points of manufacturing, transportation, construction, shipping, and many other decisive sectors of the capitalist system—retains the power to bring the system to a grinding halt and to win important gains, not to mention inspiring support from unexpected layers.

Equally important is the fact that the Longview battle demonstrated the absolute necessity of labor reaching out to all the oppressed and exploited—to the unemployed and youth, to the immigrant communities and oppressed nationalities. And it is essential to be on the alert for alliances with new movements that have been brought into being by virtue of a capitalist crisis for which there are no solutions other than deeper repression and incursions on working-class life.

History is replete with examples of workers finding these new allies and new forms of struggles, from the mass unemployment leagues of the 1930s and '40s to the worker's councils and assemblies that periodically rise up to provide new organizational forms to encompass all those who are driven to fight back in order to survive and to stand in solidarity with all others in the same situation.

The emerging Local 21 victory can only inspire even bolder and more conscious efforts. The first hard fought victories after a long string of defeats are always among the most important and longest remembered. They serve as an example to millions that a united labor movement in alliance with all its allies can win.

Socialist Action Editor's note: As we go to press the EGT conglomerate has formally recognized ILWU Local 21 as the bargaining representative for all workers at its Longview, Washington terminal and on all vessels that load grain from that facility. Contract negotiations are presently underway and are expected to be concluded on union favorable terms in the next few days.

, Jeff Mackler is a leading member of Socialist Action, USA.

USA - Assessing the Battle of Longview

THE SETTLEMENT OF contractual issues involving International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 21 in Longview, Washington also ended the immediate plans by Occupy Oakland Labor and other West Coast Occupy groups for a mobilization in defense of the Longview workers. But relevant questions are still posed about how this settlement occurred, and how the Occupy movement connects with more militant segments of the workers' movement.

The analysis presented here is both a followup of this author's previous article on the Port closures in Oakland (ATC 156, January-February 2012) and other coverage of the Longview struggle (see in particular Eduardo Soriano-Castillo's report in Labor Notes, February 2012).

The Longview dispute between ILWU and the Portland-based transnational grain exporter EGT is multifaceted. It involves issues around jobs, pensions and automation, as well as the massive expansion of commerce in agricultural goods. EGT is a creation of a troika of multinationals — the St. Louis-based Bunge North America, the Japanese firm Itochu and the Korean shipper Pan Ocean STX — in order to link up with other facilities in such diverse locations as Vietnam and the Ukraine, and to ship primarily grain to the East Asian/China market.

Bunge in particular is a significant player in this massive agribusiness game, with major involvement in soy and other crops in Brazil as well as other locations in South America (where they have been accused of tax evasion and violation of labor laws).

The conflict around the \$200 million Longview terminal initially arose in the context of a struggle in which the ILWU, whose strength is especially tied to its longshore worker base and whose members have worked the grain trade in the Northwest for eight decades, was confronting further automation, a concern that the union has battled over since the 1950s.

EGT wished to impose new work rules, especially around the length of shifts (12 hours long) which ran counter to ILWU work guidelines and would have eliminated some jobs, But the number of jobs directly at stake here was only around 50, so the immediate question was not around short-term profit rates — with chump-change savings to EGT calculated at barely over a million dollars. The economic implications for ILWU members were more serious, in that the grain work accounts for 20% of the financing of its already seriously underfunded pension and welfare funds.

Yet the real issues were around strategic class questions, especially over the historic ability of the ILWU to demonstrate its power through concerted actions, around both contractual and community/labor/international solidarity struggles including South Africa, Palestine, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Mumia Abu-Jamal and police brutality.

The position of a union at critical chokeholds in international trade provides special leverage. When negotiations broke off, then, EGT and its corporate sponsors and allies saw a golden opportunity to deal a blow to what is regarded by many activists as the bellwether of union militancy. This was an attack on the ILWU's overall West Coast agreements, not just at one port. The Struggle Escalates

Over 1000 Local 21 and other ILWU members and supporters in the Pacific Northwest responded with a dynamic campaign, dating back to last July when hundreds massed to block grain-hauling trains. One hundred were arrested when they entered EGT's terminal. Another train blocking took place in September, but the train eventually made it to the terminal. However, the following day workers and activists converged to empty the hoppers and dump the grain. This effectively shut down virtually all the ports in the region.

EGT responded to these efforts by co-opting the conservative leadership of Operating Engineers Local 701, who agreed to work the longer shifts at Longview and further undermine working conditions. In addition, EGT went to court and succeeded in having over \$300,000 in fines levied on Local 21, with other charges targeting the union leadership. Further, the local police predictably harassed the workers, picking them off one by one. After 35 were arrested on various misdemeanor charges, the union organized a march from the Local 21 hiring hall to the courthouse. All 200 members, accompanied by family members and retirees, turned themselves in rather than continue to be picked off one by one.

A federal judge issued an injunction, ordering the longshore workers not to block movement in and out of the terminal. But the ILWU vowed to protest any use of scab labor, and winter conditions turned this into a bitter impasse in spite of ongoing militancy.

Into this difficult situation came the forces of the Occupy movement, especially the Occupy Oakland (OO) Labor Solidarity movement. As mentioned in my previous ATC article, OO had called for a general strike in Oakland on November 2, the highlight being a mass march and action at the Port of Oakland, which was shut down with the militant solidarity of ILWU Local 10.

On November 19th, Dan Coffman, president of ILWU Local 21, spoke to an Occupy Labor rally in downtown Oakland, praising the November 2 action and calling for further solidarity with the Longview struggle. While a Defend the ILWU Committee had already been established, largely through the efforts of several senior Local 10 members, to build support for the Longview campaign — including sending people to the port when the first ship arrived at the new terminal — it was the infusion of energy from Occupy Oakland which altered the whole dynamic.

Shortly afterward, a convergence of issues (including the situation of port truckers in Los Angeles and Oakland, but primarily focused on Longview) led to the call for a second Port of Oakland shutdown on December 12. This was followed by organizing of Occupy activists along the West Coast, including Seattle, Portland, LA and Longview, which with varying degrees of success halted shipping in the ports, especially at Oakland where there was a mobilization of over 5000.

Despite the relative effectiveness of these shutdowns, considerable debate arose both within and outside the labor movement as to whether the Occupy movement had sufficiently worked with the ILWU and other unions in this mobilization. Yet December 12 was truly the turning point in the organizing campaign, not only demonstrating the capacity for coordinated Occupy action, but gaining a response from ILWU members (Locals 21 and 10 but also in Portland, Seattle and elsewhere).

The linkage between Local 21 and the Occupy movement (as well as the Defend the ILWU committee) continued to be very strong. The joint campaign was supported by a number of education unions and labor councils in the Bay Area, and began to organize for a major mobilization in Longview when the grain ship might arrive.

There was also further coordination among Occupy groupings along the coast, including the one in Longview, and even reaching the Midwest where protests occurred at the Bunge offices in St. Louis.

The leadership of the ILWU International, and leaderships of several of the leading West Coast ILWU locals, not only failed to back Occupy's efforts to build solidarity with the struggle of Longview Local 21, but ILWU International President Bob McEllrath publicly distanced the union from the December 12th actions, and ILWU Seattle Local 19 passed a resolution forbidding its members to support Occupy, formally or informally.

Most scandalous, on January 6 in Seattle, the presidents of ILWU Seattle Local 19, Portland Local 8, and Vancouver Local 6 led a gang of thugs in physically disrupting a meeting held by Occupy and members of the Longview local helping to organize the upcoming Longview convergence. Nonetheless, organizing for the mass protest in Longview continued. No More PATCOs

A new element in the battle was the involvement of the federal government — not only threatening Local 21 members with the revocation of their Transport Worker Identification issued under Homeland Security, but in mid-January indicating that Coast Guard vessels would accompany the scab grain ship going to Longview.

This was the first time the federal military was used against organized labor in the United States since military air traffic controllers were called out by Ronald Reagan during the crushing of the air controllers' union PATCO in 1981, and before that with Richard Nixon's use of federal troops in the postal strike of 1971.

Protests arose from unions and labor councils from California to Wisconsin, with ILWU Local 10 activist Anthony Leviege stating that the Longview battle was "a watershed struggle for organized labor. No more PATCOs."

Shortly after the Coast Guard did escort a vessel seemingly destined for Longview, news broke that negotiations had resumed between EGT and the ILWU on January 23rd. Initially only legal matters were discussed, but shortly afterward the Local 21 picket lines came down. The ILWU was again recognized as the bargaining agent in Longview and workers began unloading a ship there on February 7.

Finally on Thursday, February 9th, members of Local 21 voted to ratify the contract, all the terms of which are still not clear. What is clear, however, are the political dynamics that led to some resolution of this struggle, which has been described in local papers as the largest labor battle in 30 years.

The fact that Governor Gregoire of Washington expressed major concern over the proposed Occupy mobilization led longtime Local 10 militant Clarence Thomas to state: "When the Governor intervened a year ago, nothing was settled. It wasn't until the rank and file and Occupy planned a mass convergence to blockade the ship that EGT suddenly had the impetus to negotiate. ... Labor can no longer win victories against the employers without the community."

Jack Mulcahy, officer of ILWU Local 8, also observed, "Make no mistake — the solidarity and organization between the Occupy Movement and the Longshoremen won this contract." Likewise, Jess Kincaid of Occupy Portland noted:

"The Occupy Movement and rank-and-file unionists both within and outside our ranks have forced the company to settle, but this is not over. ... EGT and its parent company Bunge bribe the government for

military escorts, use slave labor in Brazil and systematically avoid contributing anything to our social safety net in the US or abroad. There is no ethic here beyond putting money back in the pocket of the 1% at the cost of working people and the sustainability of the earth.”

It is in struggles like this one, centered in Longview, where more and more young activists and union members see the nature of our system laid bare.

March/April 2012, [ATC 157](#).

• *Bill Balderston writes on the Bay Area for the US journal Against the Current published by Solidarity.*

Quebec - Massive demonstrations support Quebec students striking against fee hikes

Tens of thousands of students and their supporters marched in major Quebec cities yesterday, March 18, in opposition to the Charest government's promise to impose a 75% increase in post-secondary education fees over the next five years. In Montréal some 30,000 "former, present and future university students" responded to the call of the Coalition large de l'Association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante (CLASSE). [1] The march stretched for more than 1.5 kilometres, according to Le Devoir. Thousands more marched in Quebec City, Sherbrooke and Alma.

This week, more than 200,000 university and college students will be striking throughout Quebec, and their ranks continue to swell. The strike began four weeks ago on some campuses. While the main demand is of course to stop the proposed hike in fees, many of the students support the demand of the CLASSE, which is spearheading the strike movement, for free post-secondary education.

This message — that education is an integral right of Quebec society, and must be accessible to all — has struck a responsive chord among broad layers of the population. In recent days, the students' demands have inspired strong messages of solidarity from their professors, more than 1,600 of whom have signed a powerful statement against neoliberal "commodification" of education and the privatization of university funding. [2]

Thousands of parents are now organizing through Facebook in support of the students, and many participated with their children in the marches yesterday. High school students are joining in, with strikes planned in several schools this week. The major trade-union centrals have issued calls for solidarity with the striking students.

The government continues to stonewall the student demands, and Finance Minister Raymond Bachand is expected to confirm the increase in his budget speech tomorrow. The increase will boost student fees by \$325 a year for five years. Yesterday's demonstrations were a prelude to even bigger student protests planned for March 22. And the organizers are already planning further actions in weeks ahead.

In recent weeks, student demonstrators have faced violent attacks by police using tear gas, sound percussion guns and rubber bullets, and hundreds have been arrested. In one such attack, a Montréal student was hit in the face and may lose sight in one eye. But this repression has, if anything, aroused mass indignation and public expressions of support for the students.

As the business media never cease to remind us, Quebec university fees are the lowest in Canada. But that is because Quebec students have mobilized repeatedly against attempts to raise them. As Chantal Sundaram notes in Socialist Worker:

"From 1968 to 1990, tuition fees in Quebec were frozen at \$500 a year. After a hike of about 150 per cent from 1990 to 1993, a PQ government introduced a new freeze in 1994. But that same government opened the door to a new increase in the name of deficit cutting in 1996. It faced a Quebec-wide student strike with mass street protests and gave up that idea. Fees have also increased by \$100 a year over the past five years under the Charest government.

"Today's strike comes only seven years after the last one. In 2005, an unlimited student strike shut down nearly every post-secondary institution in Quebec to protest the cutting of \$103 million from bursaries to convert them into loans. The students won, forcing the government to backtrack on a policy it had already passed. That strike received massive public support and was the source of the 'red square' badge, worn by thousands of students and supporters, which is also in use today."

The strike has been organized faculty by faculty through mass assemblies and democratic votes of the students; it began in mid-February when the CLASSE threshold of a pro-strike vote of 20,000 students in at least seven student unions was met. At first, Education Minister Line Beauchamp dismissed it, claiming the movement represented only 2% of the province's 495,000 post-secondary students. But already more than 40% of the total student population are on strike.

And now other student organizations, traditionally less militant than the CLASSE, are planning their own actions to protest the fee increase. For example, the Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec (FECQ) has announced it will hold a sit-in at the National Assembly on March 20 when the finance minister tables his budget.

The 2005 student strike ended with serious divisions in the movement; the CLASSE predecessor was sidelined and in the end the government negotiated only with the FECQ and a rival organization, the Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec (FEUQ). At the outset of this year's strike movement, the CLASSE had only 40,000 members, while the FEUQ boasted 125,000 and the FECQ 80,000. However, the relationship of forces within the student population may be changing rapidly in the current mobilizations.

"There is something in the air," 21-year-old CLASSE leader Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois told *Le Devoir*. That's why people are mobilizing so much." "There is momentum. The Arab Spring, the indignés, the Occupy movement.... There is an entire discourse being advanced about the interests the governments serve. They do not work for the majority. And the question of the increased education fees is a stunning demonstration of this."

According to another CLASSE spokesperson, Jeanne Reynolds, "It is a whole vision of education that is changing."

And indeed, an important feature of the movement is the attractive appeal of the CLASSE demand not only for a freeze on fees, but for free university education as a right of society. Other organizations have advanced similar demands for treating social services as a public right, not an opportunity for private profit. In a statement coinciding with yesterday's marches, the Coalition opposée à la tarification et à la privatisation des services publics [3] called for public participation in the students' actions and opposition to the Charest government's increase in electricity rates and its tax on medicare services. "Although the Charest government is so far showing its rigidity, it is our impression that the relationship of forces is increasingly in the students' camp," Coalition spokesman François Saillant told the media. Saillant is also a leading member of Québec solidaire, Quebec's party of the left.

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NOTES

[1] "Broad coalition of the Association for student union solidarity."

[2] See the professors' statement translated on ESSF (article 24635), 'We are all students.' Quebec profs issue call for unlimited general strike of campuses.

[3] In English, Coalition against fee-for-service and the privatization of public services.

Chile - Return of the Penguins!

The penguinos came back, and their march turned into an all out anti-neoliberal stampede. The powerful movement of Chilean students (nicknamed "the penguins" after their dark-blue and white uniforms), which first rocked the presidency of Socialist Michelle Bachelet in 2006, returned with a vengeance last year. It grew in numbers, allies and intensity, and had the rightwing businessman president Sebastián Piñera on the ropes. And although the movement and government have entered a sort of stalemate, the struggle to democratize Chile's educational system has, for the first time since the country's return to democracy in 1990, challenged the very foundations of its neoliberal model.

Still, after eight months of mass mobilizations and broadening support, none of the radical reforms students demanded had been achieved, and Piñera, for the time being, has ridden out the storm. A newly elected leadership of the university federations has announced giant demonstrations to kick off the academic year in March, but for the moment the movement is on summer pause. Meanwhile, as students address lingering internal differences and suspicions, party elites have initiated reforms intended to restore the regime's legitimacy. Now that the movement appears to be entering a new phase, it is important to take stock of its lessons and examine possible implications for Chilean politics.

Even against the backdrop of the Arab Spring, the Occupy Wall Street upsurge and European resistance to austerity, the Penguin rebellion stood out for its magnitude and diversity. It's been estimated that in the course of eight months there were no fewer than 40 massive demonstrations, some reaching 500,000 participants (in a country of 17 million — 3% of the country's population!), and over 150 total actions, more than one every other day. Nothing even approaching such continual mobilization had been seen since the mid-1980s, when Chileans participated in the historic days of protest which precipitated the end of the military regime, in power since the 1973 coup that overthrew Socialist Salvador Allende.

Further, students employed a range of creative methods including — besides the conventional means of mass disruption like marches, occupations and cacerolazos (pot banging demos) — marathon kiss-ins, a thousands-strong flash Thriller re-enactment on the lawn of the national palace, and an 1800-hour relay around the historic site of Allende's death. The diversity of the protests promoted the involvement of a range of students, beyond experienced and politicized activists.

Finally, the movement distinguished itself by quickly moving from sectoral grievances to class demands for systemic and radical reforms. By July, students were mobilizing broad support for re-nationalization of the copper industry, a radical overhaul of the tax code, and a transformation of the country's restrictive electoral rules.

The first protests erupted in May 2011, drawing thousands of students onto the street. By August, hundreds of thousands were disrupting business and governance as usual on thoroughfares, on campuses and in public offices. Hundreds of high schools were being occupied alongside the country's main university campuses, and dozens of secondary students had initiated hunger strikes. In many instances, teachers walked out in solidarity with the pingüinos' calls for a drastic overhaul of the school system.

By then, the state's response had turned to repression and a vain attempt at vilification. In late July and early August, at the height of the mobilizations, hundreds of students were being beaten and arrested at every march. Yet while the government was able to strike at the students — 16 year-old Manuel Gutiérrez was shot dead by the police on August 26 — it was unable to intimidate them or to drive a wedge between them and the sympathies of "ordinary law-abiding" citizens.

Instead, as the students escalated the movement, responding to each carrot or stick from the government with larger and more militant mobilizations, support for the penguins — and their tactics — kept growing and reaching, according to some polls, up to 85% of the population. By contrast, the movement proved costly for the president whose approval ratings sank to 25% — a huge reversal from honeymoon he'd enjoyed after the drama of 33 trapped miners a year ago!

The rising tide of the movement culminated in an unprecedented 48-hour general strike, widely backed and observed by public sector unions and neighborhood associations, at the end of August. Even the now opposition Socialist and Christian Democrat parties that make up the "center-left" Concertación alliance were forced to come out in support of the national stoppage. Their hypocrisy and opportunism was lost on no one: the Concertación spent the previous 20 years faithfully implementing the very policies that are now being protested and systematically repressing any popular demonstration against them. [1]

By December the movement had slowed through the combined effects of exhaustion, tactical adaptations to opportunities for negotiation, and the threat of losing a school year's worth of credit. Yet the penguins continued to demonstrate the capacity to disrupt centers of power. On October 20, dozens of students and parents "occupied" a senate subcommittee session where education minister Felipe Bulnes was defending the government's education budget proposal.

On November 10, 30,000 students marched through the streets of Valparaíso, the site of Chile's Congress. Most importantly, they have placed an inescapable demand for wholesale educational reform on the national agenda, and, in the process, have laid the groundwork for a potential realignment of forces that may decisively undermine the legitimacy of the heretofore most stable neoliberal project in the region.

Students raise a simple and basic demand: free, renationalized and quality education for all. Though there have been some improvements since the military regime gutted the school system, they have been minor and in fact reveal the very source of the educational crisis: While education spending has grown from 3.9% to 6.9% of GDP, public funding has only grown from 1.5% to 2.7% of GDP. The difference (over four GDP percentage points or 350% of the state's share!) is accounted for by private and household expenditures, stretching working families to the breaking point.

Primary and secondary students demand that the profit motive be removed from schools entirely. They are asking for a complete annulment of the privatizing and deregulating legislation that Pinochet passed on the eve of giving up power, formalizing the de facto changes he imposed throughout his regime. This program established a tiered school system which bolstered quality private education for the children of elites, while defunding and segmenting public schools via "municipalization," and creating a new category of low-quality private schools through a voucher system.

Today, the private sector has deeply penetrated the school system. Fewer than half of Chile's high school students attend fully state-funded schools; the rest go to private schools (7%), or subsidized schools (48%) where costs are split between the state and parents. Significantly, students are demanding a full reform — beyond the cosmetic modifications enacted by Bachelet following the previous bout of student protests — that abolishes the voucher system, recentralizes state funding, and generates more revenue for schools through higher taxes on the wealthy and corporations (which in Chile enjoy the most generous rates of Latin America).

University students are demanding nothing short of free tuition along with an alternative and fairer admission policy for all students, as the deterioration of the public school system has erected a veritable apartheid barrier to higher education for working class families. They too are fighting for more state funding for public universities, as well as more democracy in the administration and academic life of these institutions. Further, they insist that curricula and research reflect the country's pressing social needs rather than the corporate priorities that permeate higher education.

Chile's university system is one of the most privatized in the world. Three-quarters of Chile's universities are privately owned, and the country's colleges charge about as much as in the world's richest countries. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), nearly 40% of all higher education spending, more than in any other OECD country, comes from Chilean household income in the form of tuition fees. Families pay 85% of tuition costs out of their own pockets!

On average, OECD countries publically fund 70% of university education outlays; in Chile, only 16% of higher education spending comes from the state. The United States is the only OECD country that has a higher share of total private post-secondary spending — which means, given the state of the American university system, that Chile is not in good company. And as in the U.S. system, student debt has emerged as a key issue. As students are realizing that they will be repaying their loans until retirement, debt forgiveness has become another important demand.

The government's response, led by the incompetent Bulnes since his replacement of Joaquín Lavín [2] in mid-July, has been threatening, deceitful and thus far largely ineffective. After realizing that teargas, truncheons and water-tanks were backfiring and that the majority of Chileans continued to support student demands and reject his unilateral palliative schemes, Piñera invited the heads of CONFECH, the university student federations coordinating council, to the presidential palace for negotiations.

Initially, student leaders, principally Communist Youth leader Camila Vallejo, president of the national university student federation (FECH), and Socialist Giorgio Jackson who heads the Catholic University students, under pressure from the street, smaller regional student federations and more radical, mostly high school local assemblies, refused to enter talks.

On his end, Piñera categorically rejected full re-nationalization and free tuition. Instead, he insisted on offers of full rides for the poorest of students and the vague promise to increase national education revenues by keeping the corporate tax rate at 20%, a temporary hike established to assist reconstruction efforts after last year's earthquake and set to revert to 17%.

Moreover, repeating the World Bank mantra, Piñera maintained that free university education amounted to a subsidy for the rich by the poor. Students, their families and workers retorted that higher mining royalties, which would recover some of the windfalls from Chile's copper bonanza, was the most effective way of redistributing the country's surplus to the poor.

By early October, when the movement had exerted sufficient leverage over the government, students were ready to sit and talk. They insisted, however, on a number of guarantees. Chief among these were an end to threats of loss of the academic year (a threat to which working class students are particularly vulnerable), an end to repression and legal persecution, broadcasting the talks live over national TV, and perhaps most significantly, the freezing of national budget proposals for the duration of negotiations.

None of the guarantees were met. Worst of all, the government submitted a budget to Congress, one that Piñera falsely claimed offered the largest expansion of education funding since redemocratization. [3] In response to such dishonesty and strong-arm tactics, CONFECH broke off talks. By then, Vallejo, the rising star of the communist youth, spoke of consolidating the nascent movement and transforming it into a political instrument that "transcends the Concertación" and could redraw the constitution and dispute state power "for the people."

High school leader Andrés Vielma put it in more strategic terms: "Our bases need to build a more political movement, and I don't mean the politics of the parties we know so well... We are in a period of popular power construction, that is, we are building and strengthening in all the provinces and linking up with social movements. This is the moment to connect our cause to workers' struggles. The idea that we alone as students could abolish the Chilean educational system is an illusion. This system depends on something more complex, and that is neoliberalism. For it to fall, different sectors must unite and get involved."

Critical Strategic Questions

As the students withdrew from talks, they faced critical decisions. Clearly, the six-month wave of mobilizations has ebbed. Further, as students debate next steps, there are signs of declining public support — down to 65% according to some polls. Finally, the promising links established with workers and the poor have failed to translate into a well-structured, independent and coherent movement for systemic reform.

The student movement, along with the broader challenge to Chile's neoliberal model, finds itself in a crucial juncture. As we wait to see in which direction things move, it is worth making five observations about the "penguin revolution:"

1) For the first time since 1990, a sectoral movement has transformed into a national and explicit rebuke of neoliberalism and the low-intensity democracy that has managed it. Indeed, the dynamic which propelled the movement so forcefully — the synergistic relationship between mobilized students and generalized public frustration — has its roots in the growing rejection of the elite-driven "democratic" institutions which govern in favor of corporations and their political brokers.

Over the past 20 years, a number of important movements have emerged — most notably the ongoing indigenous Mapuche campaign for lands, the student movement of 2006, the subcontracted miners' insurgency of 2007, mortgage debtors revolts, and various environmental campaigns — and all have elicited high levels of public sympathy. But this was the first time that broad sectors, particularly labor

and poor urban dwellers, not only sympathized but claimed the movement as their own precisely because they agreed with the target — the neoliberal state.

Recent mobilizations were not provoked by a rightward turn in Piñera's social and economic policies, even if the global recession has produced the first increment in national poverty since 1990. All the fears (or Concertación fear tactics) invoked around the unmediated ascension to power of Chile's new "billionaire class" have proved unfounded. In many ways, Piñera extended the timid reforms of his center-left predecessors. Besides preserving a higher corporate tax rate, the new president, for instance, actually broadened Bachelet's much touted "solidarity" mini-pensions. [4]

In spite of such continuity, in the past year and a half, there has been a steady upsurge in protest. Before the student movement erupted, Chile had experienced a widespread rebellion in the polar south following the sharp reduction in heating-gas subsidies, militant middle-class street protests in Santiago over the destructive HidroAysén multi-dam project in Patagonia, and a wave of miners' strikes, some wildcats, during the latest round of sector bargaining.

2) This rising insurgency was not fueled by austerity measures; cushioned by rising revenues from copper exports, public funding has expanded in recent years. Something else is behind this popular rebellion. Simply put, the institutions of the neoliberal regime that emerged from the democratic transition have undergone a wide and deep crisis of legitimacy. The widespread popular discontent that had been building for years among Chile's popular sectors required an opportunity to burst forth. The needed fissure was opened by shifts in elite alignments.

Coming out of the dictatorship and up to the current juncture, the center-left coalition of Christian Democrats and Socialists had efficaciously managed the free-market economy and social order through a combination of anti-authoritarian credentials, sustained growth, targeted welfare services and elite-run electoral competition and passivity of non-elite constituents. [5]

A pact with economic elites and the military whereby the "center-left" would not alter the basic rules of neoliberal accumulation has been strictly observed by the Concertación. This included foremost a promise never again to facilitate the levels of popular organization encouraged by Chile's historic left parties and unions leading up to and during Salvador Allende's radical Popular Unity 1970-1973 government. Their commitment to the model was bolstered by the role that many of its cadre began playing as privileged brokers and managers of business interests, most notably in privatized utilities and infamous infrastructure, mining and hydroelectric/hydrothermal mega-projects.

Until now this formula for oligarchic decision-making achieved a form of consent based on low levels of class contestation and minimal civic engagement. The election of Piñera's rightwing government has disrupted the delicate elite-driven political arrangements that undergirded the stability of post-Pinochet neoliberalism. The frustrations and grievances festering in what has been turned into one of the world's most unequal societies exploded irrepressibly when the elite's trusted center-left managers lost power.

3) The movement has raised key questions about the political logic of both the "left" within the Concertación, represented by factions within the Socialist Party and the marginalized Communist Party, calculations that could impact the alignments that hold up Chile's neoliberal order. During the past 20 years, the Socialists, who co-governed with the Communists under Allende, have been faithful followers of deregulation, privatization, docile and flexible labor, and repression of dissent. They have profited from the bipartisan system that harmoniously shares congressional power with their rightwing rivals.

The Communists meanwhile, though continuing to organize at the grassroots — mainly in unions, campuses and shanties, have continually exhorted their former partners to make common cause and change the electoral rules in favor of proportional representation. While such a strategy would deliver the numbers necessary for less restricted rule by a genuinely reformist center-left, it would also breach the Concertación's commitments and potentially empower subordinate sectors — the very groups that the rigged voting system is designed to exclude.

Cautious of the Socialists' fear of independent organization from below and wanting to present as attractive a deal as possible, the Communists have always been prepared to use their influence in student and worker struggles to temper protests in exchange for a deal and access to the state. [6]

Significantly, the current student and popular revolt has split the Socialists on this question. Indeed, the Concertación had already alienated rebellious figures such as Senator Alejandro Navarro and, facing defeat in 2010, had been forced to cut a deal with the Communists, whereby the latter were ceded three safe districts in return for their meager (and ultimately unhelpful) votes in the presidential election. Today, polls show that were elections to be held, the Concertación would garner as little as 15% of the national vote!

While the oligarchs of the Socialist Party remain committed to their strategy and will do everything possible to resurrect the coalition, an important faction of the party favors a looser embrace of the Christian Democrats and an opening to the left that would give birth to an alliance with the Communists and Socialist splinters. [7]

In short, the party is divided between those wishing to bring the Communists into the Concertación, leaving everything else unchanged, and those who view the alliance as a spent force, and wish to build a renovated center-left without Christian Democracy, modeled on the Uruguayan Frente Amplio (Broad Front) which includes Communists, former urban guerrillas, and Social Democrats. Thus far, this last option has been received with widespread skepticism. After all, the Frente Amplio has always sworn by the neoliberal Concertación as its shining example!

The Communists wish to seize on this enticing opening to the centers of national power. Indeed they, including student leaders like Vallejo, tacitly backed an effort by Concertación legislators to bargain for limited reforms in Congress, a resolution that the movement has explicitly and repeatedly rejected. For the Communists, "transcending the Concertación" and "disputing state power" may very well mean entering a center-left alliance and governing as the Socialists' junior partners.

Such a strategy would likely imply a significant cost for the movement: negotiating at the top echelons of power could result in demobilizing and de-prioritizing base building or "popular power construction," despite the party's vows to keep the heat on in the streets. Moreover, it would undermine student demands by coating the regime with a veneer of legitimacy. But abandoning the radical demands and compromising the independence of the students has already cost the Communists dearly on campuses and the streets. In short, the opportunity generated by the student rebellion is simultaneously rife with dangers.

4) Regime elites have already taken the initiative to restore the viability of Chilean democratic neoliberalism by preemptively proposing reforms. The first order of the day was to address the immediate student demands by passing Piñera's "generous" budget in Congress. In spite of the condemnation from below and the Concertación's façade opposition in the lower chamber, the budget passed thanks to the abstentions of the center-left senators. More significant for long-term stability, partisan elites are considering limited institutional modifications designed to secure "governability" and the reproduction of Chile's neoliberal model.

The powerful "center" parties of the dominant electoral coalitions, Renovación Nacional (RN) and Christian Democracy, have responded to the threat of continued and unpredictable disruption on one hand and Concertación defections or reconfigurations on the other, by announcing talks to review the country's electoral rules. [8] Though the movement deserves credit for forcing democratic reform onto the national agenda, the aim of partisan and business elites is to make the minimal changes required to preserve the very neoliberal policies that the movement has taken aim at.

The central proposal involves a tightly regulated step in the direction of proportional representation, a plan that would open up minor institutional channels to capture and diffuse popular discontent while bolstering in practice the dominant electoral blocs and their shared power. Regime elites hope a remodeled Concertación will win the next presidential elections with Michelle Bachelet at its head. The intended result would be a limited incorporation of the country's marginalized though increasingly potent forces into the fringes of the political regime. Thus far, the RN-CD pre-emptive scheme has the Socialists in disarray and the Communists in impotent silence.

5) The risks of the moment are presently playing themselves out inside the movement. Just as left currents at the state-partisan level are debating future moves, serious disagreements have crystallized within the student movement, disagreements which have already impacted its future perspectives.

Broadly speaking there are two rival strategies. In dispute with the tendency led by the Communist Youth, which, reflecting their parent organization's orientation, turns to high level state institutions and advocates for formal, partisan accords, is Chile's new New Left. These fragmented student groupings look to build and mobilize their bases while prioritizing the expansion of social power through horizontal alliances with workers' and poor people's struggles.

Composed of autonomist, local and radical left organizations, they remain deeply suspicious of Communist and Concertación partisan maneuvering and, having participated in the more fleeting 2006 mobilizations as high school students, keenly remember Bachelet's seductive invitations to dialogue and join official and ineffectual "task forces."

While the student mobilizations were on the upswing, Communist leaders, fearful of losing credibility and influence, were pushed to keep the heat on in the streets. Early on, however, the more radical, grassroots forces expressed a distrust of Communist-Socialist willingness to open talks with the government and reach an institutional settlement. [9] While both camps insisted throughout that mobilization alone was neither sufficient nor permanently sustainable, high school assemblies, students from smaller regional universities, dubbed the "ultras," along with left dissenters within the central federations, initiated outreach campaigns and fortified their organizations and incipient structures of resistance.

When the stalemate with the state began to set in, the Communists inevitably adapted their behavior to the logic of compromise. In the end, the Communists have paid a hefty price for their decisions. By January 2012, the formerly dominant Communist Youth had lost leadership of three major university federations, and therefore of the CONFECH. In the December FECH elections, Vallejo lost the presidency

to an alternative left slate [10]; in January, an “ultra” displaced her comrades in the historically militant University of Concepción.

Communist losses present a serious challenge. Since the movement had benefitted enormously from the organizational strength and discipline of the Communist Youth, its place has now been taken by more radical, yet also more dispersed, forces. Their emphasis on grassroots independence and on strengthening incipient structures of resistance is encouraging. Moreover, recent talks among new “ultra” leaders aim to establish a coherent and non-sectarian revolutionary left alternative to the Communists and check the impulses of the autonomists. But it remains to be seen whether they can coalesce into a coordinated force with the ability to reactivate the movement and whether they can adopt a fruitful approach with respect to rising workers’ fightback.

The decisive factor may still be the Communists. Students can only hope that given the rebuff it received from regime elites, the party will rethink its collaborationist strategy. Were it to regain some autonomy and lend its organizational capacity to a revamped movement, the challenge to Chile’s democratic neoliberalism may grow yet. Vallejo’s recent declaration that she would never vote for Bachelet is a positive sign.

Despite the uncertainty and the inherent risks of the moment, this remains a promising juncture in Chilean politics as it has activated entire sectors in independent and radical struggles. Even if a realignment fails to produce meaningful shifts in Chile’s democratic neoliberal regime, the political landscape appears to have changed irreversibly. The choking grip that the Concertación regime had on popular collective action — through incorporation of party elites, passive consent and outright repression — has largely vanished.

Independent forces are rising from below. Their new-found power and autonomy should push the Communists away from debilitating deal-making. In any event, mirroring the impact of the historic emergence of the 1967 movement for university reform, Chile’s radicalized students and youth will now have to be reckoned with on their own terms. After gaining invaluable experience and developing formidable capacity for action during its 2006 fight, today it aims to consolidate with proven organization and battle-hardened leader-activists.

It is no exaggeration to say that a tectonic shift has occurred. A whole generation is breaking through and entering active politics and struggle. Layers of formerly “apathetic” students, cut off from collective action after 17 years of a dictatorship and 20 years of marginalization of protest, have appeared on the scene in the tens of thousands.

This fact alone, which challenges a fundamental tenet of Chilean neoliberalism, will have a destabilizing impact on Chilean politics as usual. Combined with the anti-capitalist and anti-Concertación strategic outlook of the new radical movements, the political dynamic is outright threatening to post-authoritarian neoliberalism. While the danger of a re-composition of the Concertación and a new lease on the regime’s life is very real, putting this broken and spent coalition back together will not be easy.

Economic elites will surely pour resources and influence into this effort and specifically into a future Bachelet campaign, and their Socialist and Christian Democratic brokers will do all in their power to avoid a substantive shift in the national balance of forces. But the new reality is that this cycle of mobilizations will have an enduring impact, as it has forged a generation of radical activists and erected new, or solidified existing, infrastructures for independent class politics.

In sum, for the first time since the years of rising struggle that forced Pinochet to give up power and laid the groundwork for the historic and ignominious deal that gave birth to democratic neoliberalism in Chile, popular forces, students and workers together are back on the scene and will have an undeniable say in their country’s future.

Notes

NOTES

[1] Using lethal force against protesters does not represent a change in policy by the new “center-right” government. Responding to any and all demonstrations with paramilitary coercion has been a staple policy of all center-left governments since 1990. This approach has taken the lives of población (shanty-town) youth and especially Mapuche activists reclaiming community lands.

[2] Lavín is from the far right UDI party, the ally of Piñera’s RN (National Renovation) party which has close historical ties to the military regime. He narrowly lost to Socialist Ricardo Lagos in the 2000 presidential run-off. Lavín has since been moved to the Planning and Social Development ministries. Bulnes switched from the Interior Ministry to the Education portfolio, the office most responsible for carrying out the repression of the movement.

[3] Left economist Orlando Caputo has pointed out that there is nothing new in proposed levels of education funding. In fact, Piñera is offering a decrease in the growth in allocations for education. For next year, the government is proposing a 7.7% increase in the systems’s budget, compared to a 13.8% growth this year, and 15.5% in 2010.

[4] Bachelet's "Solidarity" retirement program, designed to assist the hundreds of thousands of workers for whom the privatized pension system will offer nothing or close to nothing, paid out monthly sums of \$120. Under Piñera, these are slated to grow to \$400 per month — this in a country where the parity indexed GDPPC is \$14,000. Tellingly, the general welfare fund from which revenue for the new pension program as well as other targeted handouts come, amounts to a paltry 0.11% of GDP! By contrast, the Argentine and Venezuelan states spend 0.4% and 0.45% of GDP, still quite low percentages on most counts, of their GDP on a universal child allowance program alone and on social "missions," respectively.

[5] The binomial electoral scheme has been instrumental in keeping popular participation to a minimum. It grants inordinate veto power to the Right electoral bloc and thereby incentivizes cooperation within strict policy bounds. Moreover, by giving exclusive representation to parties that gain a third of the vote or above, it marginalizes smaller, non-corporate backed parties. Most importantly, it encourages dominant bloc partisan oligarchs to distribute seats via elite deal-making while strongly discouraging campaigns built on the expansion and activation of party bases.

[6] The fact that the Mapuche campaign has been the most sustained and militant struggle in recent Chilean history has much to do with the fact that the CP has lost most, if not all, influence among Chile's indigenous population and groups.

[7] To facilitate this controlled leftward extension, former Socialist president Ricardo Lagos has proposed the formation of a broad Left Party which could attract the Communists and also have the clout to bargain with the Christian Democratic kingmakers. Some Socialists have even raised the possibility of a tightly scripted constitutional convention. The other group they seek to enlist is the Progressive Party (PRO), an eclectic and demagogic force that broke away from the Socialists in 2009. The PRO was founded by Marco Enriquez Ominami, son of legendary MIR founder Miguel Enriquez, who managed to capitalize on widespread frustration with the Concertación and polled at 20% in the first round of the 2010 elections. In reality the PRO is a shell of a party that serves above all as a vehicle for the personalist aspirations of its founder.

[8] This is not the first time that RN has allied with the democratic 'center-left' to guarantee the survival of neoliberal accumulation. In 1988, when the country was still feeling the impact of the days of action that fatally weakened the military regime, RN promoted the anti-Pinochet campaign in the plebiscite that would decide whether free elections would ensue, thus unavoidably ending military rule. At the time, having experienced the threat of mass mobilization, the representatives of the new business class understood that a deal with Christian Democrats and refashioned Social Democrats was the best means of ensuring neoliberal continuity.

[9] Though this division was no secret to organized youth, reflecting as it did a secular difference in secondary and university milieus, it became embarrassingly public during a press conference organized with a progressive Puerto Rican rapper during his visit to the occupied administrative building of the University of Chile. Flanked by Vallejo and Jackson, René Pérez AKA "Residente" was thrown off when, during what was intended as a feel-good show of hip, international support, a young woman called out the leadership for "acting without consent of the bases" (pasando a llevar las bases) and "selling out" the demands of the movement at the negotiating table. Her intervention was met with widespread applause. The episode, captured by a student's camera, is posted here: [youtube.com/watch?v=GtEh2A6vfiQ&...](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtEh2A6vfiQ&...)

[10] This is considered a double blow to the Communist approach. Firstly, it was an unequivocal indication that the party has lost some of the social strength that it uses as a bargaining chip in its negotiations with the Concertación. Secondly, its rising public face has suffered a humiliating defeat. In fact, the party had intended to run Vallejo in a highly visible campaign in the next round of national elections. When it became obvious that its prospects in the student federations were weakening, it quickly rethought its plans and asked her to compete again for the FECH leadership. Unfortunately, even her new-found stardom could not guarantee a win.

Mexico - Solidarity with Mexican Electrical Workers

Revolutionary and anticapitalist organizations of countries from throughout the world Meeting in Amsterdam in the Netherlands at the call of the Executive Committee of the Fourth International, demand from the Mexican government led by Felipe Calderón the immediate resolution of the conflict arising from the illegal closure of the company Luz y Fuerza del Centro.

For our organizations, it is perfectly clear that the mass dismissal of forty-four thousand workers, organized within the Mexican electricians trade union (SME), had no other goal than the privatization of the electrical industry the destruction of a democratic and combative trade union. Two years after the beginning of the conflict, the SME continues to carry out an exemplary, internationally-recognized fight back.

On September 13th, 2011, the government of Felipe Calderón, via the Secretary of Government, undertook to ensure the re-employment of 16,599 women and men workers who had fought against the liquidation of the company, as well as the release of 12 electrician political prisoners, unjustly imprisoned. Up to now, the government has not respected its commitments.

We demand that the immediate reinstatement of the workers in struggle and the release of the political prisoners.

International Committee of the Fourth International,
Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores (PRT-Mexico),
Labour Party of Pakistan (LPP Pakistan),
Nava Saama Samaja Party (NSSP Sri Lanka),
Movimiento de Unidad Socialista (MUS-Mexico),
Gauche Socialiste (Quebec, Canadá),
RSB (Germany),
Jeunes du NPA (France),
OKDE-Spartakos (Greece),
Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire (Belgium),
Agrupación Popular Socialista Revolucionaria (APSR, Portugal),
Corriente Enlace del PSOL (Brazil),
Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (France),
Socialistisk Partiet (Sweden),
Izquierda Anticapitalista (Estado Español),
Antikapitalistak (Euskal Herria, Basque Country),
Ligue de la Gauche Ouvrière (Tunisia),
La Lucha Continua (Perú),
Communist Party of Bangladesh (M-L) (Bangladesh),
MST (Argentina),
Marea Socialista (Venezuela),
International Socialist League (Germany),
Solidarity (USA),
ISO (USA),
Socialist Action (USA),
MES-PSOL (Brazil),
Al Mounadil-A (Morocco),
Peoples Liberation Party (Indonesia),
Revolutionary Workers' Party-Mindanao (Philippines),
Revolutionary Socialist Party (Australia),
Colectivo Feminista (Ecuador),
Revolutionary Communist League (Japan),
Sinistra Critica (Italia),
Groupe Revolutionnaire Socialiste (Martinique),
Russian Socialist Movement (Russia),
Jeunesse Anti-capitaliste (Belgium),
Socialist Resistance (Britain)

India - A first assessment of Indian strike - to break their haughty power

Eleven all India trade union federations and about 5000 trade unions came together to call an industrial strike on 28 February 2012. It was reworked to become a general strike. This was against repeated court orders, according to which calling bandhs or hartals, i.e., total shut downs, which are of course political acts directed against the government over the heads of individual bosses, are not to be tolerated. In a number of provinces, governments reacted sharply.

In Kerala, the Congress led government declared that those who struck work would have their pay docked. In West Bengal, the Trinamul Congress government threatened break in service and compelled a high proportion of government employees to work, often by staying overnight, though even then some 35 per cent were absent. But the strike, taken as a whole, was quite a success.

Workers in sectors like coal, power generation and construction showed their solidarity with the call given by the trade unions. "We got great support from coal miners, electricity generation and transport sector," said G Sanjeev Reddy, president of the Indian National Trade Union Congress. Among the demands was one for equal wages for equal work for regular and contract workers.

Publicly, governments put on a brave face and declared the strike a failure. But reality bit hard. The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (Assocham) said there was no justification for the strike which could have resulted in a national economic loss of about Rs 100 crore (US \$ 20 million).

Among the unions' demands are a national minimum wage, permanent jobs for 50 million contract labourers, more government efforts to rein in the rising cost of living, and an end to the sale of stakes in profitable public companies. In Kolkata, a traditional trade union stronghold, most bank branches, shops and other businesses were closed, with taxis and rickshaws staying off the streets. The city's metro (citywide underground railway service) was working normally, and West Bengal's aggressive Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who had denounced the strike call, brought 1,000 state-owned buses into the city.

Kolkata police chief R.K. Pachnanda said 10,000 police officers had been deployed across the city, including special units in government offices, bus depots and metro stations to prevent intimidatory picketing by union activists. The Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency said about 100 pro-strike supporters had been arrested in different districts for obstructing rail and road traffic. In Mumbai, the financial capital of India, All India Bank Employees Association general secretary Vishwas Utagi claimed there was a "complete shutdown" in the banking sector. The clearing house for transactions at the central bank had been shut, "so the private and foreign banks where we do not have a presence also get affected," he told Press Trust of India agency.

In New Delhi, traffic was lighter than usual and people arriving at the capital's main railway station struggled to find transport to other areas of the city. Just a couple of staff had reported for work at a branch of the Bank of India, a public bank, in the centre of the capital which was open, but no business was being carried out. Commuters complained that frequency of state-run buses was low.

The one-day strike affected life across Karnataka, including Bangalore, with shops, banks, factories, restaurants and cinemas shut and public transport curtailed as taxis and autorickshaws kept off roads. More than 10,000 employees representing various unions, including those affiliated to All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and bank employees took out protest rallies against the anti-labour policies of the UPA government, in front of Town Hall and Mysore Bank Circle in the city.

In Nagpur, not only were transport services and banks hit, but for the first time in recent past, the Ordnance Factory at Ambhajhari, which makes artillery shells as well as the latest Pinaka rockets, was closed for the day. This factory makes almost 600 shells of different calibers including those of 155 mm fired through Bofors guns, apart from dispatching 24 Pinaka rockets each day. This was all held up due to strike.

Industrial unions, unions organizing the unorganized, bank unions, and teachers unions all came together. The All India Federation of University and College Teachers' Organisations endorsed the strike call. Currently, across the country, full time teachers are waiting for five years for their back wages while the number of ill-paid contract teachers is increasing. The picture is equally grim among government employees.

Outsourcing, contractualisation and casualisation of the workforce, which began in 1993-94, has by now resulted in a loss of close to a million permanent jobs. As a result, pressure was so high that even the Congress controlled INTUC was forced to go along with the strike call, along with unions led by CPI, CPI(M), socialists, and others. The unions said hundreds of workers were arrested from various states,

with 200 arrests being reported from Delhi and 2,000 from Jammu and Kashmir. They said a similar number was arrested in West Bengal where the government was opposing the strike call.

For close to two decades, the power of the working class has been exercised in a very uneven manner. The ruling class has had things more or less in its own way. This strike puts the rulers on notice that the working class is again recognizing

They have taken untold millions that they never toiled to earn, But without our brain and muscle not a single wheel can turn. We can break their haughty power, gain our freedom when we learn That the union makes us strong.

Bangladesh: - Left movement in Bangladesh and CPB(ML)

At the recent meeting of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist-Leninist) was accepted as a Permanent Observer within the Fourth International. This presentation of the Bangladesh left and his party was made by Pathak Lal Golder at the French New Anticapitalist Party (NPA)'s summer university in Port Leucate in August 2011.

Introduction

Bangladesh (previously the East Pakistan) is especially known in the history of revolutionary movements in Indian sub-continent. A lot of forefront progressive revolutionary leaders in the anti-British movement lived in Bangladesh. There was a strong current of revolutionary movements in the sixties and seventies. In those times, the left current was able to influence the national politics in Bangladesh. The left hegemony on behalf of the workers, peasants and toiling people in social, political, economic, and cultural field of Bangladesh was noticeable. Communist ideology with huge [critical] dedication vis-a-vis consumerist-capitalist spirit spread to the larger extent. Many people -even from the rich and orthodox capitalist families giving up affinity to the wealth- joined revolutionary politics and movements. But presently the scenario is quite different. Except with a very small left current, both the ruling class and the opposition are legacy of the thought of consumerist-capitalist bourgeoisie society. Left revolutionary politics are, thus, lagging behind in the mainstream national politics in Bangladesh.

Communist Party of Bangladesh (M-L)

The independent Bangladesh coming out of the bondage of Pakistan started to move with lot of financial difficulties and a crisis [within] the bourgeoisie leadership. A group of leaders of the East Pakistan Communist Party, who understood that the spirit of liberation war would not be implemented by the bourgeoisie leaderships, now strove to form a communist revolutionary party with a new line of thought and strategy. Hence in 1976 an independent communist party with a different thought, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist-Leninist) was formed. It held up a different thought in the sense that it was different in thought and activity from other existing left political parties. As for example, CPB-ML decided to underscore building the mass organizations with highest priorities rather than the party organization. If there is a strong mass based organization built by the party leadership, then they will be able to carry out revolutionary party activities. So the party did not function as a party but rather as a party cell. For the implementation of this target the party then built a peasants' wing called Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF). The party has a bit of success in this regard because BKF expanded very swiftly. A strong organizational basis in different areas and districts of Bangladesh was created and a movement of different kinds of demands including land occupation movement began. Later other more 7-organizations were formed as its associates.

Hegemony as Idea

CPB-ML in principle owns the hegemony idea of Antonio Gramsci who was the leader of Italian Communist Party in the thirties. It feels the thought of Gramsci is a creative development of Marxism. Thus, it is creating movement and action for the establishment of a counter hegemony of workers, peasants and toiling masses in the fields of society, economy, culture and psychology to the bourgeoisie hegemony. The CPB-ML considers the hegemony as a pre-condition for the revolution. It is making efforts to strengthen the struggle of rights throughout the country by organizing the subaltern class belonging to the toiling masses including indigenous and organic intellectuals, especially rural intellectuals. It puts emphasis also building a historic bloc to play a catalyst role in the hegemonic revolution in addition to the leading role of the party. Through this struggle, to create dedicated-competent-honest and creative leaderships that bring in all the people's movements and right-based struggle in a single platform with all diversities marching towards revolutionary upheavals are the serious tasks of the CPB-ML as a revolutionary party.

Eco-socialism

The CPB-ML accepted the concept of eco-socialism on principle. The CPB-ML thinks that eco-socialism as idea is a critical and creative development of Marxism. Where the existence of the earth planet is under threat due to climate change there is no way to establish socialism or communism by not building movement against green house gas emission, by avoiding the thought of environmental hazards and difficulties of climate change. CPB-ML opposes the use of fossil fuel, the major responsible for the creation of carbon gas and defends the use of renewable energy like solar energy, windmill and biogas, etc. The solutions like the use of agro-fuel, REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation) and CDM (Clean Development Mechanism) that are being promoted by the capitalist system are not the solution to the problem. The CPB-ML thinks that the internal balance of the earth has been jeopardised because of massive extraction of oil-gas-coal including other mineral resources that contributes to natural disaster in the earth. In view of all this, the CPB-ML believes in eco-socialism.

Feminist Approach

The CPB-ML believes in an equality-based society of men and women. In a patriarchal society women are more victims and deprived than men. Even women are affected more than men as a result of climate change. The findings of a survey on the death toll caused by cyclones Sidr and Aila in Bangladesh showed that the number of women doubled men out of death. The CPB-ML reasons that the oppressed, repressed and deprived women should enjoy opportunities and rights in the spheres of society, politics, economy and culture equal to men.

Religion Approach

The CPB-ML reckons that the belief on religion lies deep in the heart of working class people. It is also part of their life and livelihood. [Today] still, religion loving people take religion as some sort of resort, [recourse] to [help them] live. So the CPB-ML thinks that we should not hurt religious spirit, which working class people brace and get mental peace from. Religion is own affairs of the people. As all have their right to practise religious rituals so they should have their right not to practise. However, the CPB-ML is completely opposed to the business capitalizing religion, religion based fanatic politics, religious fascism and fanatic militancy.

The Left Politics in Bangladesh

There are two mainstream lines of politics in pre-independent Bangladesh. One is the Muscovite line and the other is the Beijing line. However, in the course of the liberation war, the Beijing line encountered odd situation. Chairman Mao Zedong took the position against the liberation expected by the people of Bangladesh, defending the side of Pakistani invaders sponsored by the American imperialism. Although the position of Mao went to the side of imperialism and against the independence of Bangladesh it was not possible for the Beijing groups to take position against the liberation war. They also took part in the liberation war that had very controversial aspects. As a result, the Maoist political groups have been disappearing gradually. In the post independent Bangladesh leftist means the parties belonging to Marxism-Leninism. However, those who are Marxist-Leninist own of Mao's work as thought, not as theory.

Underground and Armed Left Group

- In major part of the sixties and the seventies underground and armed cadre based left politics was in effect a part of the leftist politics in the country. But in the later part of the seventies the underground politics and armed wings of the party were isolated from the people. The CPB-ML, since its inception, identified underground politics and the use of arms as a wrong line in the socio-political context of Bangladesh. The CPB-ML acknowledges the open politics for a peoples' democratic revolution.
- Because of the ill propaganda [launched from] bourgeois political quarters on the one hand, and [because] the underground left politics got unpopular on the other hand, many dedicated-experienced-talented leaders and activists died [due to] different controversial steps of the ruling class aimed at eliminating the leftists. Besides, many others have been killed even by the left due to internal conflicts on the [question] of political differences, leadership [issues], and feud among the armed wings of different political parties. Ideological degradation, deviation and separation from the party gave the rise to it. [In addition], lots of left political leaders are sold out to the bourgeoisie political parties in exchange of Ministership or opportunity. At present, in both ruling and opposition [blocs], there are many stalwart leaders who came from left background giving up their ideology. Many are Ministers and MPs now with ruling party. Many were Minister and MP before. As a result, a meltdown started in the left politics long goes.

Present Left Politics

The left politics of Bangladesh is divided in two main blocs. A portion of left is aligning behind [practicism "tailendism"] ruling bourgeoisie parties and sharing their power. Another portion is trying to create a left current in the real sense. In its case, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) was at the forefront in practising "tailendism" with the bourgeoisie. However, under the present regime, they are out of power

and it is another party, called the Workers Party of Bangladesh, which has occupied their space. Some other left political parties accompanied them.

On the contrary, the Democratic Left Alliance is working with firm determination in order to create a left political current out of the bi-partisan bourgeois political circle. The Communist Party of Bangladesh (M-L) is an active component of this Democratic Left Alliance. The Democratic Left Alliance comprises 10 political parties and organizations. These are presently the only forces out of the bourgeois circle. Despite various differences of opinions among the components of the Democratic Left Alliance, the movement is going on based on common minimum issues. The forces of movement and the understanding among these parties are progressively on the increase. The CPB-ML believes in united movements. Thus it is determined to create a left political current and create revolutionary conditions by unifying different struggles and to take the lead to insure a hegemony based peoples' democratic revolution in Bangladesh of which ultimate goal is eco-socialism.

, Pathak Lal Golder is the Office Secretary of the Bangladesh Krishok Federation. He is also a central member of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (M-L).

Bangladesh - Peasant Movement in Bangladesh and Bangladesh Krishok Federation

This presentation was made by Pathak Lal Golder at the French New Anticapitalist Party (NPA)'s summer university in Port Leucate in August 2011. At the recent meeting of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (M-L) was accepted as a Permanent Observer within the Fourth International.

Introduction

Peasants all over the world are now at the verge of destruction because of evil design of the industrial agriculture. In Europe, America and Australia peasant farmers are disappearing every day. While in the developed world the situation is so, 80% people are still engaged in agriculture in Bangladesh. The main incomes and employments are still based on agriculture. However, as a profession agriculture is not a dignified one in Bangladesh. A successful peasant too does not want his children to become peasant professionally rather every peasant family expects their children to be service holders or business holders. This is because of the fact that the agriculture as a profession is undignified and always a losing and risky sector. In the government there is no representation of real peasants and so-called moneyed educated business-industrialists are running the state in the name of democracy. For this reason the state is limited to take hardly steps in the development of small-scale peasants and family farmers.

There are a total of 165 million people in an area of 56000 square miles in Bangladesh, which is number one in view of the density of population. Nevertheless, these are peasants who are feeding the people of Bangladesh. And the country imports foodstuff, especially rice insignificantly. Foodstuff is imported less than the import of luxurious goods in Bangladesh. Hence the peasants are still driving force of productivity in the country.

Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF)

The peasants were in the lead of any successful movement in the Indian sub-continent. The role of peasants was very glorious in the all movements including Tebhaga movement, Nil revolt, Nanker revolt, Hajong revolt, Santal peasant revolt. The role of peasants in the independence movement of India and even in the independence movement of Bangladesh was in the forefront. In 1976, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (ML) formed Bangladesh Krishok Federation in order to bring the leading peasantry for struggle towards change in state regime. Since its inception Bangladesh Krishok Federation carried out different programs across the country aimed at raising issue of the right of peasants. With its works related to crises, problems and the living condition of the peasants, the main task of BKF is to arouse the sense of right and class spirit among peasants and make peasants competent militants for the realization of their rights.

The crisis of peasant and the land occupation movement in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is mainly a land of landless people. A peasant without land does is in no way recognized. He is seen as a peasant if he, for sure, owns productive land. But in Bangladesh there are 70% people who are landless. On the contrary, non-peasants unfortunately own the arable land. It is alarming that as the number of landless is increasing day by day while the number of land possessed by non-peasants is also on the rise.

Indeed we think only peasants have the right to own the agricultural land. Since its inception in 1976, Bangladesh Krishok Federation conducted a survey on the expectation of peasants. The findings showed that every peasant families dreams to be owner of a piece of land. Based on the result of the survey,

Bangladesh Krishok Federation started with off the land occupation movement in the interest of landless peasants. At the beginning of the land occupation movement, BKF realized that there was no legal protection measures for the rights of landless people. So the movement for introduction of a law in behalf of landless people continued side by side with the land occupation movements. At a certain phase of the movement in 1987, the then government introduced a manual containing the provision of the distribution and settlement of Khasland (Government owned abandoned land) among the landless people, which are so far contributing to protection initiative for the right of the landless.

In 1992, under the joint leadership of Bangladesh Krishok Federation and Bangladesh Kishani Sabha, the landless people took over 4 Khaschars (Sandy tracts which emerged from the riverbed) in their possession in Patuakhali district in the southern coastal belt of Bangladesh. It was the real start. Then the occupations of Khaschars continue one by one. Thus far, led by BKF and BKS, the landless people occupied more than 76,000 acres of Khasland throughout the country and have been living with their families permanently. Although they are constantly engaged in tough fight for their survival they have been able to sustain their occupation in the Khasland. More than 100,000 men and women are living in this occupied Khasland. According to the government census there are 3.3 million acres of Khasland in Bangladesh. In fact, the quantity of Khasland is much more. But local influential land terrorists are enjoying this Khasland illegally. Influential land terrorists and Joteder (Big land owners) remained un-evicted despite the existence of land manual and frequent government gazette notifications. The settlement process of land among the landless also remained unsettled. The land occupation movement of BKF and BKS proved that the landless people are able to be the owner of the land through systematic tough movement.

Food Sovereignty

Bangladesh Krishok Federation officially embraced the concept of food sovereignty and considered the establishment of peasant right to land by the way of occupation movement as part and parcel of the struggle for achieving food sovereignty. What we mean by food sovereignty is (1) Peasant right to land (2) Right to choose which crops to grow in the field (3) Right to use and resilience of the traditional art of farming which is nature friendly. In view of BKF the insurance of culturally appropriate and accepted food is possible through the achievement of food sovereignty.

Green Revolution

The so-called green revolution introduced in the mid-sixties has very much destroyed the traditional farming method. It introduced the cultivation of laboratories bustard (hybrid) seed promoted by multi-nationals. This aimed at bringing in the entire agricultural system under Multi-national Corporations and making the peasant totally dependent on them. So they compelled the peasants to cultivate their high hybrid seeds with different tactics. Consequently the peasants are losing their own domestic seeds and traditionally tasty and nutritious food.

Furthermore, because of green revolution the agricultural system took a different shape, which lacks social and ecological coherence. The use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides negatively impacted on bio-diversity. As a result bio-diversity almost disappears. The grasses, the main feed of livestock have been damaged due to the regular use of chemical fertilizer and pesticide. The livestock is at the point of destruction as there is a big crisis of animal feed as grasses. As the livestock is on the decline peasants are compelled to use chemical fertilizer excessively in place of manure which normally consists of cow dung coming from livestock. Cow dung also met the demand of fuel used by the peasant families. Now wood and other non-organic fuel make it up. Moreover the breeding zones of the fishes including fish itself in the swamp are almost destroyed by the poisonous effect of the chemical fertilizer and pesticide. The major portion of nutritional source of the peasant came from the different indigenous species of fishes and livestock milk and meat. Due to lack of fishes and cattle, there is an extreme nutritional crisis among the peasants. The healthy peasants are speedily becoming sick. Also, due to lack of cattle, the plough is replaced by power tiller. Artificial fish culture with hybridisation is introduced in the watersheds. As a matter of fact, the green revolution brought about devastating change in agriculture and the living style of peasants in the name of development.

GMOs

Now there is an evil move to introduce GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms). Few NGOs play a leading role to familiarize the GMOs in Bangladesh. One of the leading NGOs named BRAC is experimentally cultivating GMOs secretly in Bangladesh. They made an agreement with Monsanto but the GMO seeds are yet to be handed over to the peasants in the country.

NGOs and Micro-credit

As an efficient complement to transnational corporations (TNCs) and imperialism, NGOs capitalizing the peasants and agriculture started with usury business in the name of micro-credit and other consumer products. Victimized by micro-credit, 90% peasants are indebted in the countryside. Within a span of time peasants failed to pay back the instalment owing to skyrocketing interest rate, payment starting

immediately, the week after getting the credit, arbitrarily offer of different products and hybrid seed as credit, various types of extra charges and inconsistency of instalment with income. This credit offer process gives rise to the indebted families in the rural areas. Thus micro-credit as a debt trap successfully made the medium size peasants landless and landless pauperised. Bangladesh Krishok Federation views that the usury NGOs business that create poor and poverty should be stopped for the protection of agriculture and peasants. BKF has rather promoted a genuine and comprehensive agrarian reform as well as food sovereignty that will be able to eradicate rural poverty.

Climate Change

Bangladesh is on the front line in the list of countries affected by climate change. The cyclones like devastating SIDR and Aila pauperised thousands of millions of people in Bangladesh and claimed the lives of thousands of people. On the one hand as the northern part of the country is facing deadly drought, the rivers are drying resulting in sandy islands, and a desertification process has started due to the rise of the temperature as an effect of green house gas. On the other hand, the southern part of the country is encountering overflow of the new areas because of tidal surge resulting from the rise of the sea level, sudden storm like SIDR or Aila hitting the country. Salinity and its escalation and duration in the south are on the increase resulting in substantial decline in crops production. Due to both excessive rainfall and scarcity of rain, peasants face crops failure almost every year and the durability and onslaught of cold-hot-fog are increasing alarmingly. All together, it is as if climate change was dealing with us in an unknown and uncertain mood. The majority of the people in Bangladesh still do not know what the reasons of crazy behaviours of the climate are. They even do not know the explanation of green house gas effect and the increase of global warming. They are just victim of damages: victimization of onslaught of storm surge. Most of the people feel that this sort of natural calamity is the creation of God.

Indeed, they have their right to know why they are victimized of these sufferings; why they are to be heard that within 2050 the southern part of Bangladesh go under water meeting with the sea; why they have to be climate refugees. BKF thinks that the innocent peasants have their rights to know the whole gamut of climate change; who are responsible; why this humanitarian disaster; what is its solution; what might be their (Innocent peasants) own responsibility? For this reason, Bangladesh Krishok Federation officially started working on climate since 2000 and continues.

Climate Change, Gender and Food sovereignty Caravan

We devised the plan to hold climate change, Gender and Food Sovereignty Caravan in Bangladesh coming November 15 to 4 December 2011. The caravan of 20 days beginning from the north of the country will move through almost all affected districts and culminate in the south. Various events including seminars, workshops, meetings, exchanges of views, rallies, processions, and visits to different historical places will take place.

The representatives of peasants, indigenous, women, environment and youth organizations from different countries of south Asia including Bangladesh, the representatives of different international organizations in addition to South Asia and progressive individual will be present in the caravan. In the first place, as we will be able to reach out tens of thousands of masses of producer class, of peasants-indigenous-landless communities, with the message of climate change, Gender and Food sovereignty through this caravan and in second place we will get a clear idea about their lives, traditions, cultures, difficulties and crises. BKF is optimistic that the caravan will remain a unique thing to the toiling masses that will help them cope with the crises of climate change in future.

We, Bangladesh Krishok Federation cordially invite all of you to attend this unique caravan. Your participation and cooperation will make this caravan a success.

How Can You Help?

- 1) Through your own participation. As your participation and role will give our caravan momentum so your assistance to the caravan for your participation will help ensure the participation of one South Asian and one Bangladeshi delegate.
- (2) Through motivating your enthusiastic friends to attend the caravan if you yourself cannot take part in.
- (3) Through assisting financially one South Asian and one Bangladesh delegate for their food and accommodation in the caravan if you yourself cannot take part in.
- (4) By contributing to the caravan for making it a successful one based on your ability. Even your small contribution will play an important role for making the caravan a success.

We seek your overall assistance for the organization of the caravan. Finally I conclude my speeches by offering invitation to all of you to visit the activities of Bangladesh Krishok Federation and the nice country Bangladesh.

, Pathak Lal Golder is the Office Secretary of the Bangladesh Krishok Federation. He is also a central member of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (M-L).

Pakistan - The U.S.-Pakistan Co-dependency

As 2011 closed, the mainstream press was awash with ominous, dark assessments of the state of the relationship between the United States and Pakistan. After a cross-border NATO air strike in November resulted in the deaths of 24 Pakistani soldiers, Pakistan responded forcefully, closing the Af-Pak border to NATO traffic, expelling the U.S. military from an air base inside Pakistan, [1] and boycotting the International Conference on Afghanistan in Bonn, which had been tasked with outlining the next steps for the occupation.

While Pakistan is likely to re-open NATO supply routes imminently, the incident has significantly altered the tactical parameters of the alliance — after a drone sortie on November 26, for example, the United States called a halt to drone operations for almost two months, in an attempt to assuage domestic outcry inside Pakistan.

We can be forgiven for thinking we have been here before. Not much more than a year earlier, in October 2010, a similar mishap had elicited a similar reaction from Pakistan. More recently, both the Raymond Davis and Osama Bin Laden incidents, in January and May 2011, had been reported as leaving the relationship in tatters.

There has never been a shortage of alarm about the alliance. The U.S. press has routinely berated Pakistan's "duplicity," accusing it of ties to the Afghan insurgency, and of operating on its own agenda in Afghanistan. Always, these charges are given their gravity by earnest, if apocalyptic, concerns that Pakistan's nuclear stockpile will work its way into the wrong hands.

Yet for all the public handwringing and backbiting, the alliance between Pakistan and the United States has endured the duration of the Afghan occupation. Their shrieking and shrilling aside, U.S. policymakers have seen fit to pour money into the Pakistani Army, year after year, making the country one of the highest recipients of Washington's aid behind Egypt and Israel. Transfers amount to approximately eleven billion dollars since 9/11, the majority of it military in nature [2] — significant numbers, considering that the Pakistani Army's annual budget is no more than five to six billion dollars without it.

What explains this odd, Janus-faced romance? How has the U.S.-Pakistan partnership persisted in the face of such pronounced tension, even hostility?

The answer is not particularly complicated. The twin dynamics of collaboration and chaos are the product of a few simple, well-known facts. Both establishments are working from different scripts in Afghanistan, but for each the path to its own goals runs through the other. While Pakistan and the United States do not want the same things out of the Afghan endgame, neither can get what it wants without deferring to the wishes of the other.

Endgame in Afghanistan

The structuring reality in Afghanistan today is the near-certainty of a U.S. withdrawal by 2014. [3] After over a decade of murderous, catastrophic wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, current plans anticipate the transfer of security responsibilities to the Afghan national government within two years. This reluctance to maintain a heavy footprint in the region was evident in the deliberations preceding president Obama's announcement of "the surge" in December 2009, where he denied his military advisors the full panoply of forces they demanded he commit to the war. [4]

Some on the Left have tended to explain the occupation as a product of U.S. desires to manage the ascendant power of China and Russia and, sometimes, the additional goal of ensuring favorable control over the oil and gas resources of Central Asia. But even if these figure amongst the aims of U.S. planners, the argument needs qualifying.

Although the United States may want all manner of things from its Afghan adventure, it lacks the capacity — given low levels of domestic support, an anemic economy, and its persistent failure to construct a viable national authority in Afghanistan — to sustain a fully resourced occupation much longer. (Of course, this hardly precludes a continued presence in the form of base agreements and influence through client states).

In this sense, its dilatory withdrawal (the initial date was July 2011) is not a sign that the United States in fact hopes to leave troops behind in perpetuity, but is better understood as a consequence of its attempting to leave without losing face, and without surrendering all influence in a future regime. To put it differently, the Great Game matters, but only in the context of other considerations.

Pakistan's strategy is necessarily formulated around the looming U.S. pullout. The military brass, who retain the prerogative of negotiating Pakistan's policy despite the transition to formal democracy in 2008, would like nothing more than to replicate the mid-to-late 1990s, when a relatively pliable Taliban government ruled over a ravaged, but (more) peaceful Afghanistan.

Their minimum goal is stability — given that the intensification of the insurgency in the past several years in Afghanistan has heightened levels of violence inside Pakistan's own borders, claiming several thousand lives. In an ideal world, of course, they would get more: Pakistan's wish, no doubt, is to place an ally in Afghanistan that would answer to them alone.

It is this strategic orientation that explains their much-maligned duplicity.

On the one hand, the goal of installing a pliant post-occupation government means that, for Pakistani military planners, oft-derided links to various elements in the Afghan insurgency are indispensable.

The strength of this relationship is often overstated — available evidence indicates open lines of communication and some provision of safe havens, but not that insurgent groups take their cues from Pakistan. [5]. Nonetheless, to the extent that these groups succeed in exerting their influence in a negotiated settlement, Pakistan's planners will be the happier for it.

On the other hand, there are several compelling reasons to accommodate American demands. The most obvious, but also the most important, is rooted in the asymmetries of the relationship with the United States. So long as the world's most well-stocked military has tens of thousands of troops stationed in a neighboring country, they set the rules.

Additionally, there are those (Tariq Ali, for example) who argue that Pakistan is milking the Americans for hardware and economic assistance, arrangements likely to lapse as soon as the United States leaves. While this may well be a real dynamic, it's important to note that the U.S. presence has also carried real costs for the Pakistani establishment, in the form of full-fledged insurgencies in districts in the Northwest as well as domestic unrest.

Last, as Pakistan's military is undoubtedly aware, a maximally desirable final settlement is probably unlikely. While the Afghan insurgency seems to have reasonably broad support in the Pashtun heartlands, its capacity to command the loyalty of the rest of the country's population is significantly more limited. No national peace will be sustainable if it fully excludes other powerbrokers, be they the current quisling government or representatives of Afghanistan's Tajik, Uzbek, Hazara and other populations. If its interests in a stable Afghanistan are to be served, Pakistan cannot afford to alienate the United States, through whom any settlement of this sort will be brokered.

Of course, this same fact makes Pakistan terribly important to the United States as it looks to leave. The Pakistan military's links to the Haqqani network and to elements of the Afghan Taliban so roundly and regularly denounced in U.S. mainstream media, are bound to prove indispensable if post-occupation Afghanistan is to avoid slipping into civil war. The U.S. intention is to ensure that its dependents have as much sway in this future as is possible, but as the trajectory of the negotiations has shown, no one doubts that this will involve considerable concessions to the Taliban. [6]

At least in the present conjuncture, then, mutual dependence is inescapable. It guarantees significant cooperation, and sets the bounds beyond which the relationship cannot deteriorate. Granted, the fact that both parties have an interest in shaping the character of the settlement to suit their own interests unavoidably generates tensions. Since the last of Pakistan's major military offensives in South Waziristan in 2009, for example, one of the Americans' principal grievances has concerned the failure of the Pakistani Army to sanction an operation against the Haqqani network's safe havens in North Waziristan.

But the larger strategic realities - not to mention concerns about capacity and blowback — mean that from Pakistan's perspective, an operation against the Haqqanis, who constitute one of the insurgency's four nodes, is not just unlikely but fundamentally unwise. [7]

The Destructive Great Game

The foregoing helps clarify the tendentious, shallow character of much of what passes for analysis of Pakistan's role in the Afghan drawdown. While Pakistan is certainly culpable of "double-dealing," this posture is rooted firmly in regional strategic realities. Its links to the Taliban and the Haqqanis have never been a product of Islamist aspirations of "bearded generals" bent on civilizational conquest, nor an irrational obsession with India bred into every military Pakistani planner.

Hypothetically, had the syllabi of our military academies long been purged of Islamist and anti-India content (and there's more than enough of it in what officers are taught), it's improbable that much of significance would change. The military would still find it necessary to balance the competing imperatives of acceding to U.S. demands and cultivating ties to the insurgency. In short, it's the demands of bourgeois statecraft that render a certain amount of duplicity incumbent on Pakistan's army.

None of this should distract from the fact that the war in Af-Pak has taken a horrific, grievous toll on the people of the region. In case the point needs clarifying, a course of action that is rational, from the

perspective of State managers locked in heightened rivalries, is hardly going to align with policy that would be rational from the perspective of the region's great majority.

Afghanistan, now beginning the second decade of its occupation by U.S. and NATO forces, lies in tatters. As Nick Turse noted in late 2010, the hundreds of billions of dollars that the United States has expended in its military and civilian efforts have made no discernible impact on the persistent, desperate misery of the Afghan people. "Pick a measurement affecting ordinary Afghans and the record since November 2001 when Kabul fell to Allied forces is likely to show stagnation or setbacks and, almost invariably, suffering." [8]

In a country where roughly 850 children die, daily, of preventable diseases like diarrhea and pneumonia, 50 billion dollars have been squandered erecting a State overrun by "warlords and businessmen." [9] In the words of Faheem Haider, the country is now little more than their "personal fiefdom." [10]

While the links between the insurgency and the opium trade are widely known, it's not well-publicized that only 25% of total domestic revenue from the drug trade accrues to the Taliban and farmers. The other 75% "is captured by government officials, the police, local and regional power brokers and traffickers." [11]

Nor has the construction of this neocolonial, garrison State put an end to the violence. Quite the contrary. The escalation of night raids and air strikes, foundational to U.S. strategy as it attempts to negotiate its withdrawal from a position of strength, has rendered the last two years the deadliest since the insurgency began.

While much is made of the UN's allegation that most of these civilian deaths have been at the hands of the Taliban, Gareth Porter has shown that the official statistics vastly undercount the number of civilians killed by occupation forces. [12] Official protocol, for example, counts all adult males killed in night raids as insurgents, unless evidence later 'proves' them innocent. [13]

Sober Realities and the Way Forward

The most recent developments in the U.S.-Pakistan alliance come at a time when relations between the civilian and military arms of Pakistan's government are at their lowest since the last coup in 1999.

Nor are the two trends unrelated — recent tensions were triggered by allegations that the former U.S. ambassador to Pakistan, Hussain Haqqani, sent a memo in the wake of the Osama bin Laden assassination, asking for American help in staving off a military coup. Though it's unlikely that the civilian leadership knew of the memo (whose contents were confirmed by Mike Mullen), and almost unthinkable that the military was actually contemplating an overthrow in May, the consequent threat to Pakistan's democracy is real enough. [14]

Even though a coup is probably not in the cards, the fracas illustrates the persisting shallowness of Pakistan's most recent transition to democracy: the civilians cannot claim, in practice, the authority over the State apparatus to which they are constitutionally entitled. As ever, a waffling, unpopular bourgeoisie finds itself incapable of carrying the democratic revolution to its conclusion.

The war has taken a grave toll in more palpable ways, as well. Particularly since the insurgency in Afghanistan re-emerged a few years into the U.S. invasion, the northwest of Pakistan has been the staging ground for massive domestic military offensives, and - particularly in the Obama years - an unprecedented wave of drone strikes responsible for the deaths of several hundred civilians, at minimum. [15]

These same regions rank among the most deprived in all of Pakistan. [16] In a country blighted by unconscionable levels of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and landlessness, billions of dollars are annually appropriated by the armed forces. The military budget, and the funds allocated to servicing Pakistan's foreign and domestic debt, together add up to roughly 60% of the government's budget. [17] Not surprisingly, this leaves pitiful sums to be spent on health, education and other social programs.

Though a recent IMF program was halted due to the inability of the Pakistani government to meet the pace of its austerity targets, no establishment party offers a meaningful alternative to the steady dismantling of those already miserly forms of welfare spending that do exist (food, fuel, and electricity subsidies, already slashed in recent years, remain on the chopping block).

The goal of a sustainable, just peace in Af-Pak demands more than any of the forces currently in or around power can promise. Foreign and domestic policy will have to be wrested from the sordid array of actors animated by interests irreconcilable with the needs of the region's people.

This task is formidable, and will fall to the Left. A December conference of several progressive parties from both sides of the border is an encouraging step in the right direction - the final resolution rightly commits to organizing "coordinated days of action and other initiatives at the political as well as the cultural and educational levels." [18]

This said, as the conference participants themselves admitted, there's no obscuring the fact that, sadly, the short term belongs to the elites, domestic and foreign, who have run roughshod over the region for the past several decades.

As the United States, Pakistan and a host of other power-brokers scramble to bend the negotiations to their will, it's the specifics of the final settlement that are indeterminate — not the structuring fact that Afghanistan will be ruled by an "alliance of foreign and domestic powers" against whom the Left must unreservedly struggle.

But even the immediate future is bleak, progressives in both countries can take heart from developments in the wider world. If there were ever a year that demonstrated that the challenges of a long slumber were surmountable, it was 2011. May 2012 see this spirit spread to Af-Pak.

NOTES

[1] Confirming, in the process, what otherwise the Pakistani Army had always denied: that the U.S. military had, in fact, been granted permission to operate from within Pakistan's borders.

[2] Lawrence Wright, "The Double Game," The New Yorker (May 2011) <http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/...>

[3] Of course, if any of the loonies up for the Republican nomination manage to spring a victory in November, all bets are off.

[4] According to Bob Woodward's Obama's Wars, Petraeus, McChrystal and others in the military argued that a full counter-insurgency campaign was unviable unless Obama committed a force of roughly 80,000 troops to Afghanistan. Of course, nor did Obama opt for the alternative, christened "counterterrorism-plus" by Biden, which was to concentrate on Al-Qaeda, rather than the insurgency and the tasks of "nation-building."

[5] "The truth is, according to half a dozen senior officials with access to the intelligence, the evidence of Pakistan's affinity for terrorists is often circumstantial and ambiguous, a matter of intercepted conversations in coded language, and their dealings are thought to be more pragmatic than ideological, more a matter of tolerating than directing..." (Bill Keller, "The Pakistanis Have a Point," (December 12, 2011) <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/18/m...>

[6] Karen DeYoung, "Clinton: Talks with Taliban not 'pleasant' but 'necessary,'" The Washington Post (June 2011) <http://www.washingtonpost.com/natio...>

[7] Bill Roggio, "Taliban appoint al Qaeda-linked commander to lead Peshawar shura," The Long War Journal (January 2012) <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archi...>

[8] Nick Turse, "How Much 'Success' Can Afghans Stand?," ZNet (September 2010) <http://www.zcommunications.org/how-...>

[9] Ross Eventon, "Victory in Afghanistan," New Left Project (July 2011) <http://www.newleftproject.org/index...>

[10] Faheem Haider quoted in Eventon 2011

[11] Julien Mercille quoted in Eventon 2011.

[12] Gareth Porter, "U.N. Reported Only a Fraction of Civilian Deaths from US Night Raids," IPS News (March 2011) <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=...>

[13] Gareth Porter, "US Night Raids Killed 1,500 Civilians," Asia Times (November 2011) http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_...

[14] See Cyril Almeida, "A sceptic's guide to memogate," DAWN (November 2011) <http://www.dawn.com/2011/11/18/a-sc...>

[15] See Muhammad Idrees Ahmad, "The magical realism of body counts," Al-Jazeera English (June 2011) <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/op...>

[16] "Malnutrition a major problem of public health in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, FATA: survey," Business Recorder (November 2011) <http://www.brecorder.com/general-ne...>

[17] Syed Fazl-e-Haider, "Pakistan drugged out on defense and debt," Asia Times (March 2011) http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_...

[18] "Pakistan Afghanistan Progressive Parties Conference Joint Declaration" International Viewpoint (December 2011) <http://www.internationalviewpoint.o...>

Sri Lanka - Government organizes protests to distract from economic crisis

Tens of thousands took to the streets of Colombo and other cities and towns, in the last week of February and into the following week. There were two oddities about these demonstrations of "peoples' power" – as some government politicians described them.

First, no-one was shot dead, no-one was tear-gassed, no court orders were taken to ban public protests, the state media did not demonize the demonstrators, and nor did cabinet ministers blame "western-funded NGOs" for stirring up the people. Quite unlike the repression and intimidation unleashed in other recent demonstrations.

Second, the issue at stake in far-away Geneva, appeared not to be known or understood by the protestors. They came waving the Sri Lankan flag, or carrying printed posters of president Mahinda Rajapakse or defence secretary Gotabhaya Rajapakse, or holding banners and placards (printed of course at state expense and distributed in state vehicles).

The messages were in favor of the unity and integrity of the country, denying human rights violations and war crimes, denouncing the US for supporting the LTTE (!), blaming the opposition UNP and NGOs for supporting international intervention in Sri Lanka, and similar vein.

Some protestors were faithful supporters of the government bused by local politicians from their electorates; others were public officials who have long forgotten the difference between serving the state and serving the government; or who were mobilized by government trade unions they dare not offend; and some came simply for the ride and the goodies on offer; or worse as in parts of the North and East through fear and coercion.

Ruling politicians including former UNPers, former JVPers and former Leftists like Vasudeva Nanayakkara, along with the clergy from all religions, joined the main protest outside Fort railway station on 27 February.

These government-organized and backed protests were apparently a show of popular sovereignty in defiance of a draft US-sponsored resolution to be debated at the current session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

What is this resolution about? Does it recognize the right of the Tamil nation to self-determination? Does it demand an independent and impartial investigation of allegations of war crimes in Sri Lanka? Does it propose to station international human rights observers on Sri Lankan soil? No.

The US resolution is titled "promoting reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka". Basically, the US government calls upon the Sri Lankan government to (1) "implement the constructive recommendations" in the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC) report; (2) to present an action plan on steps taken and that will be taken to implement the LLRC recommendations; and (3) to accept advice from the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in undertaking the above. A time-frame of one year is given for a progress report.

There is no direct reference to accountability for violations of international human rights and humanitarian law that were identified by the UN Secretary-General Ban-Ki-Moon's, Panel of Experts report in 2011, in its investigation into the conclusion of the war in 2009. However, where the draft resolution also urges the Sri Lankan government to "initiate credible and independent actions to ensure justice, equity, accountability and reconciliation for all Sri Lankans", there is a hint of the unmentionable report.

Let us remember that the Lessons Learned and Reconciliation commission was a process that was designed by the government to reduce the international pressure on it concerning accountability for human rights issues after the defeat of the LTTE in May 2009.

The mandate of the commission was decided by the government, the members of the commission were selected by the government, the time and resources available for its investigation was determined by the government, and the testimonies in Colombo were heavily influenced by government, pro-government and ex-government personalities, including Gotabhaya Rajapakse and Sinhala nationalists.

Yet, to the surprise of its supporters and critics alike, the LLRC presented a series of important recommendations including on release of Tamil detainees, demilitarization of the north and east, land dispute resolution mechanism, right to information law, independent public institutions, respect for 'rule of law', and most controversially in supporting political and constitutional reforms for power-sharing with minorities.

The LLRC's weak point is that it played down gross violations of human rights in the last stage of the war. Hence, the careful reference to the need for accountability in the US resolution.

Since May 2009, the government regularly informed the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) that it would conduct its own investigation into the conduct of the war. After the LLRC was created, member-states

of the UNHRC were told to be patient and wait for its recommendations, and even briefed on its 2010 interim recommendations which remain unimplemented.

Now that the LLRC recommendations have been released, suddenly the same government that was trumpeting this mechanism – and that even called on the opposition to support its recommendations when the LLRC report was presented in parliament last year – suddenly takes offence to the request that the recommendations of its own commission be followed in full, and that asks the same question being asked by many within the island: as to how and when these recommendations will take effect. In fact, the present US resolution is milder and more favorable to the government than the one it feared would be on the agenda of the Human Rights Council this month. For many months, international human rights organizations, the pro-LTTE diaspora organizations, as well as some political and human rights activists within Sri Lanka, have been lobbying for a stronger resolution calling for an “international monitoring mechanism on accountability”.

Such close international interest with the threat of intervention in the internal political system would certainly be most unwanted by the regime. However, in the present post-war euphoria and enormous popularity of the president among the Sinhala masses, it could ironically strengthen his hand by unifying the majority nation against an external enemy.

In fact, the mobilization against the current US resolution is precisely for the purpose of regaining popular support that has been slowly falling through anti-people policies such as pension reforms, privatization of higher education, land-grabbing, and fuel price increases.

A more sophisticated diplomacy would have been for the government to co-sponsor the US resolution, winning some allies and buying itself more time through the “constructive engagement” of the so-called ‘international community’.

However, for this regime, domestic goals are paramount while street-fighting talk and public brawls are its signature; and this latest attempt in reviving patriotic fervor has, at least for now, succeeded in distracting attention from the unbearable increase in the cost of living and economic insecurity.

This transparent manoeuvre to hoodwink the Sinhala masses is being aided and abetted by the Left parties within the coalition, who rail against the US resolution in the name of ‘anti-imperialism’, while meekly appealing to their own government to implement the LLRC recommendations in full.

Unfortunately for the Communist Party, whose Matara parliamentarian and cabinet member Chandrasiri Gajadeera sees antharjathika kumanthranaya (‘international conspiracies’) abroad in Geneva, the Communist Party of India – pandering to its own electoral alliances with South Indian Tamil nationalism – has supported the US resolution. Imperialism is the main enemy the governmental Left cries, avoiding any mention of their government’s adoption of International Monetary Fund conditionalities in return for loans; its neoliberal monetary and development policy veiled in populist rhetoric; and its headlong rush into financialization of the economy, including through heavy borrowing from international money markets and western banks.

The real issue, irrespective of the US resolution, is whether or not the LLRC recommendations will be implemented in full. The drama that has been enacted in our streets and on our television screens conveys that there will only be half-hearted and token actions falling short of full implementation.

What this rotten regime will not and cannot do, is to execute even modest reforms that restrict in any way its corrupt, nepotistic and authoritarian capitalist rule, and counter the Sinhala nationalism that is its ideological base.

March 7

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Taiwan - Presidential elections in the shadow of the Empire

On January 14, 2012, the Taiwanese people voted for a new national assembly and president. Ma Ying-jeou, the outgoing president and chair of the Kuomintang (KMT) party, was re-elected with 51.60% of the votes, against 45.63% for the candidate of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). The KMT also gained an absolute majority in the National Assembly (60 seats out of 113). This was the fifth direct election since the democratic transition in 1994. The rate of participation in the election was the lowest since 1994, at around 75%. If the result held few surprises, the course of the electoral campaign showed to what point the political development of the country is under the influence of the economic interests of foreign powers, notably China and the United States.

Based on a two party system, Taiwanese democracy has for a long time been dominated by the debate on relations between Taiwan and China. The KMT has always insisted on the territorial unity of Taiwan and China stressing the principle of “one China, two models”. It seeks a long term reunification During the

campaign, the PDP took an ambiguous position on the question of independence in relation to mainland China and on the questions of social policy which concern its centre-left electorate [1]. Ma's previous term between 2008 and 2012 was marked by closer links with China, notably with the implementation of the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), the development of tourism from the mainland to Taiwan and the arrival of Chinese students on the island. Even if industrial relocations to China had begun well before 2008 [2], the official rapprochement between mainland China and Taiwan was reflected at the national level by an absence of political responses to growing poverty and an inability to construct a specific economic policy favouring internal consumption. Investment in Taiwan has stagnated and labour market insecurity has increased because of the predominance of the tertiary sector.

Tsai Ing-wen, the DPP presidential candidate and a specialist in commercial law, is the symbol of a less radical current on the de jure independence of Taiwan. Her image marked a break with the popular tradition of the DPP and seemed rather aimed at winning over the voters of the centre. She appeared less convincing to the popular classes, the traditional voters of the DPP. Tsai's main challenge during the campaign was to provide an economic programme which was both protectionist (to reduce economic dependence on China) and realistic (given that China is already the main "economic partner" of Taiwan), so as to keep the votes of traditional electors and win those of centrists.

One of the striking points of the presidential campaign was the virtual absence of debate concerning internal policy. The KMT campaign essentially rested on only two subjects: political stability between Taiwan and China so as to guarantee economic growth, and accusations of corruption against Tsai during the previous presidential term of Chen Shui-Bian. Tsai sought to appear as the candidate of the middle and popular classes, without success [3].

While Beijing remained exceptionally silent during the campaign, at the last minute the big entrepreneurs gave their support to the KMT so as to defend their economic interests. Thus Guo Tai-ming, CEO of Foxconn, where a wave of young workers have committed suicide since 2010, stated publicly his preference for political "stability" and encouraged his Taiwanese expatriate employees in China to return to Taiwan to vote. Also Wang Xue-hong, CEO of HTC and the richest entrepreneur in Taiwan, called for "peaceful relations between Taiwan and China" on the eve of the vote. Their position reveals to what point the interests of Taiwanese capitalists converge with those of the governments on both sides of the Formosa Strait. That is why Beijing no longer needs to intervene through military threats, as it tried to do in 2000 – it was sufficient to let it be understood that voting for the DPP would cause damage to the Taiwanese economy.

As for the United States, the Obama government also played its cards in the Taiwan elections. A week before the day of the vote, a delegation from Washington arrived in Taiwan and announced that "if Ma is re-elected Washington and Beijing will be reassured". The delegation then called for respect for the "1992 Consensus" which defines Taiwan and China as a single country [4]. These words show the growing reluctance of the US to intervene in relations between Taiwan and China and to confront the Middle Kingdom.

Certainly international factors alone do not explain the results. The results for the parliamentary elections and the formation of a front for independence express a disagreement with Ma's politics, reflected in the loss of 800,000 votes in comparison with the elections of 2008 [5]. In addition the low rate of participation seems to bear witness to a popular disillusionment with what remains a controlled democracy. Between a conservative party and a party hesitating between a radical nationalism and a more "centrist" approach, the frustrations of the people are far from being heard.

A week after Ma's re-election, the KMT government announced the resumption of negotiations on the free trade agreement between Taiwan and the USA (TIFA). This agreement has stalled particularly on the question of the importing into Taiwan of US hormone treated beef. It seems difficult not to see links between US economic interests and the KMT's continued hold on power. With this logic, public health is sacrificed in the name of political conquest and the wellbeing of citizens is subordinated to economic interests. If this scenario is not currently specific to Taiwan – a parallel could be drawn with the struggle in Greece – it is not possible to fill this democratic deficit without a broad mobilisation, to place human beings back at the centre of political discussion, and favour the needs of the people rather than those of transnational capital.

NOTES

[1] The DPP emerged from the struggles for democracy and de jure independence in Taiwan from the 1970s onwards. It brings together different currents with different views on questions like independence, the social movements and social democracy

[2] Since the beginning of mainland China's economic reforms in the 1990s it has sought to attract investment from Taiwan and Hong Kong. Fourteen "special economic zones" have been set up for this purpose in southern coastal towns of mainland China, leading to increasing de-industrialisation in Taiwan from 1996 onwards. Even when the political climate was unfavourable to this trend, for example when the

DPP was in power between 2000 and 2008, many entrepreneurs chose to base themselves in Hong Kong or the countries of south east Asia to invest in China

[3] Washington Post Nov 11, 2011, Taiwan opposition builds campaign with shiny, tiny piggy banks in bid to unseat President Ma

[4] This refers to the 1992 agreement between Chinese and Taiwanese governments that Taiwan and China "form one single China". During the election Ma proposed a referendum on peace between Taiwan and China on the basis of the "1992 Consensus" specifying that Taiwan would declare "neither independence, nor reunification, nor war" to guarantee economic stability. This forced the DPP to also express its view on the "1992 Consensus"

[5] The KMT lost 20 seats in the national assembly while the pro-independence party, the "Union for Taiwanese solidarity" gained three seats

China - Wukan – a symbol of popular resistance

The terms of the debate on the future of the Chinese political system are often defined starting from three different perspectives: some believe in a democratic transition impelled by movements of citizens and intellectuals [1], others believe in a popular uprising legitimated by social inequalities and corruption [2], finally some believe in a reform guided slowly by the élites of the Communist Party [3]. These three perspectives embody different visions of the roots of the current tensions and relationship of forces in contemporary China.

But whether the working class, the middle classes or the political élites are seen as the subject of political transformations, a common character of these three perspectives is considering the city as the site of change. And yet the massive protest which developed in Wukan (a coastal village in the province of Guangdong in the south of China) at the end of 2011 has drawn attention to the countryside, from whence the Chinese revolution emerged.

Land at the heart of Chinese social struggles

The protest at Wukan results from the conjuncture of two factors - the corruption of the local authorities (*cunweihui*, the village committee, which is directly linked to the Communist Party), and the question of who owns land in the countryside - two problems of the greatest importance in rural China since the beginning of the privatisations from 1978 onwards.

Indeed, the acquisition of land takes an increasingly central place in social contradiction in China today. After the Communist revolution in 1949, the social system was based on the binary City/Country distinction which defined both the rights of citizens and land rights. In the Communist era, the land of the cities belonged to the state to allow the construction of factories and public enterprises; the land of the countryside belonged to peasant collectives (*commune*, *gongshe*) and was devoted to agricultural use. The economic reform undertaken in 1978 has changed this system. A new law in 1991, which distinguished the "right of use" and the "right of possession", allowed the local authorities to lease the land to other economic actors with the agreement of the villagers and with compensation [4].

In reality the work of the village committee was not always transparent, despite the existence of elections at the village level [5]. This has created then a major source of conflict in China today. Because of rapid urbanisation, the geographical frontier between the "city" and the "countryside" tends to become vague. This has created financial opportunities for the political cadres in the countryside who have made big profits by selling the land to property agencies without the agreement of the villagers. Thousands of demonstrations have taken place around the sale of land and the derisory compensation paid.

This is the scenario which is at the origin of the struggle of the villagers of Wukan. Since 1993, the village committee has little by little sold collective land to construction companies. Whereas the official representatives have received profits of more than 70 million Yuan, the costs of compensation were only 550 Yuan (55 euros) per family. A mobilisation seeking the democratisation of the village committee and the revaluation of land values thus began.

Mobilisation and repression

As during the Arab spring, youth have played a central role in the mobilisation. The experience of work in the cities has rendered them more conscious of the injustice of the monopoly of power by the village committee. Thus in 2009 a social network called "Wukan Radical Youth" was created to discuss the situation of the village. The network broadcast video discussions and distributed leaflets and songs which stressed corruption and evoked résistance.

In September 2011, 5,000 villagers demonstrated before the village committee and elected 13 representatives to negotiate with the Guangdong officials. Above all they asked the officials to investigate the corruption of the village committee and the compensation for financial losses of the villagers. This protest won a favourable response from the Guangdong authorities.

But after a month of waiting without action, another collective petition was launched in November with the slogan "Give us the agricultural land" and "Down with corruption!" This new action was violently repressed by the authorities. On December 9, the authorities arrested five members of the temporary village committee deemed "illegal" by the officials. At the same time, the Lufeng municipality announced that all the problems raised by the villagers had been resolved and the case of Wukan should end with the resignation of the former representative of its village committee.

The next day, the villagers were stupefied to learn of the death in custody of Xue Jing-po, aged 47, vice-president of the temporary village committee. The police denied all responsibility. Overcome with anger and sorrow, the villagers decided to resist to protect the other activists against new arrests. They set up barricades at the entry to the village to block access to officials and police. Only journalists from Hong Kong and foreign countries were authorised to enter, the villagers being suspicious of Chinese journalists who might be members of the secret services.

In the following ten days, tension rose markedly, in particular because of the attention aroused by the foreign media. The police cut off water, electricity and food supplies to the villagers who had to live off their reserves and the solidarity of neighbouring villages. At the same time, the demonstrations continued around firm demands: democratic election of local leaders, the return of the remains of Xue and a continued investigation of corruption on the village committee.

But the Guangdong cadres were no longer trusted and the villagers requested the intervention of Beijing. Faced with the calumnies "of conspiracy with the foreign media" spread by the officials, the villagers remained solid, maintaining their demands and the request for intervention from the Beijing government. After ten days of demonstrations and confrontations with police from the city, and despite the rumour of an army intervention, the villagers were uplifted by the turn of events on December 20. The vice-secretary of Guangdong made a televised speech announcing that the demands of the villagers were "reasonable", specifying that if they did not organise "over-radical" demonstrations, the authorities had agreed to free four people still held and to respond to their demands.

After a continuous negotiation between the villagers and the authorities on February 1, 2012, the first "democratic" and "transparent" election finally took place in Wukan. 6,000 villagers participating in the election of 109 representatives. Lin [6] aged 67, the main negotiator with the Guangdong officials, was elected President of the village committee. On February 14, Xue's family was finally allowed to bury him.

The struggle in Wukan thus ended with the birth of an autonomous and "democratic" political structure and the name of Wukan incarnates the new paradigm of the people's struggle in China.

Why did they succeed?

As we tried to explain in the introduction, the cause of the conflict in Wukan is not extraordinary but represents a short episode in a long series of conflicts. However, several factors have made for the exceptional "success" of Wukan among the incessant protests in rural China today.

Firstly, the self-organisation of the villagers, initiated by the youth, was an essential factor. Zhuang, the leader of "Wukan Radical Youth" has a clothes shop in a big town near Wukan. Discussing with other migrant workers, he understood that the behaviour of the local rulers was scandalous. With another youth born in 1990, they interviewed some old people in the villages on the privatisation of land by the local political élites. Thus the will to fight was forged and cooperation established between the 41 clans [7]. A division of tasks was established and became more obvious after the death of Xue: the older people took care of negotiations with the government while the youth participated in stewarding and remained in the first rank of the demonstrations.

Secondly, the attention brought by the foreign media was undoubtedly a favourable factor. Because of Wukan's position near Guangdong and Hong Kong, its struggle was followed very closely by the Hong Kong media, who not only sent images of the struggle around the world, but also put pressure on the governments of Guangdong and Shanwei.

Another striking characteristic is the politico-economic structure of Guangdong. Having been the leading region developed by the economic reform, Guangdong has a more liberal ambiance than other Chinese provinces. Its governor, Wang Yang, is influenced by the "liberal current" inside the CCP. The Wukan struggle took place just before the 18th "State National Assembly" which was to renew its cadres. The international pressures of the media thus encouraged a more "conciliatory" approach from Wang and prevented military repression.

Finally the demand for more "local democracy", without however defying the legitimacy of the Communist Party, illustrates the contradictions of the resistance in China today. In a context of radical transformation of Chinese society, the central government supports the victims of violation of the law to better fragment

the massive *résistance* [8]. In the name of “defence of rights” (*weiquan*) and the “rule of law” (*fazhi*), the government increasingly tolerates individual action for the defence of rights, but oppositional and collective mobilisations are severely repressed [9]. The insistence of the villagers on referring to the central government in Beijing to defend their rights has the goal of delegitimizing military repression.

In fact this choice is not only a strategy of negotiation, but is also linked to the complex heritage of the Communist Party. For a great part of the older generation who lived through the era of the Communist revolution and Mao, the CCP and the central government still have an idealised image which incarnates a regime which “serves the people”. Also, as citizens have got wealthier with the economic reforms, their anger has been turned directly and exclusively towards the local leaders, rather than the Beijing government. Thus Zhuang’s father has affirmed that “the Party is still with the people!” [10]. In spite of the rage against local injustices the heritage of the Communist revolution allows the maintenance of loyalty towards the Chinese state.

If local injustices explain the determination of the villagers to struggle, the statement by Zhuang’s father show the capital of confidence that the central government maintains. In other words, despite the widespread corruption at all administrative levels in China today, the discontent with the local regime is not necessarily reflected by a loss of legitimacy in the system. This is the dilemma stressed by Han Han, a writer and popular blogger living in Shanghai, intervening in a series of debates on China’s future: “the Communist Party has 80 million members and 300 million families are linked to these members, so this goes beyond the framework of a political party, it amounts to a system. Moreover, unlike the Arab revolutions, political discontent in China today cannot be reduced to the image of a dictator inside the Communist Party” [11]

The stunning success of Wukan is then also revealing of the limits of the political movement in China today. Without a political alternative the reign of the CCP remains the most legitimate for most citizens in spite of all its faults. Also the increasingly flexible attitude of the government heads off the intensification of the popular struggles by valuing “negotiation”. If the claim for more autonomy at the level of the local structures – village, factory, school – is a convergent demand of the struggles in different milieus, the trend to flexible “reforms” at the local level could mean for now an absence of opposition to the central government and of a dramatic overthrow in the style of the Arab Spring.

NOTES

[1] This is for example the constant demand of the overseas movement for democratisation since the Tiananmen massacre in 1989. In China, there is also a current of thought which wishes to reproduce the “Velvet Revolution” guided by intellectuals, illustrated by Liu Xiao-Bo, Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2010, held since 2009 because of his activity around “Charter 08”. We can add the protest of the dissident artist Ai Weiwei, essentially asking for more freedom of expression and less corruption

[2] This is for example the viewpoint of the novelist Yu Hua expressed in the following article, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/dec/11/opinion/la-oe-yu-hua-china-20111211>

[3] This is perhaps the most widespread view and has led to much research on the various currents inside the Communist Party. For a summary, see: http://www.piie.com/publications/chapters_preview/4174/03iie4174.pdf

[4] Ding Chengri, 2003, “Land Policy Reform in China : assessment and prospects.” *Land Use Policy* (20), pp.109-120

[5] The “Village committee organisation law” of 1988 states that the village committee should be decided and renewed by regular elections. However, in reality, because of the rural exodus and the non existence of elections at higher levels, it is hard to apply this law in all Chinese villages. In Wukan, there were several so called “elections” organised by the village committee, but this has never been done in a transparent manner, and the same people have monopolised power on the village committee for 41 years <http://www.lifeweek.com.cn/2011/1220/36080.shtml>

[6] A member of the Peoples Liberation Army during the Cultural Revolution; in 1969, he worked for three years on the village committee, before becoming an entrepreneur until his retirement

[7] Social relations in the Chinese countryside is organised around the “clan” – people who have the same family name and the same genealogy. For generations, decisions on the overall interests of the village have been decided by common discussions among generations. In Wukan, there are 41 clans and it is not possible to have a significant mobilisation without their solidarity

[8] In the case of violation of rights, often by the corruption of local authorities, Chinese citizens have the right to go to Beijing to “petition” the central authorities and request compensation. This system of *Shangfang*, or individual petition, is not only a long and slow procedure, but it is often blocked by the local authorities. On the other hand, the state encourages a legal approach to encourage individual solutions to conflicts linked to land. See <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/EG03Ad03.html>

[9] See Yongshun Cai, 2008, “Local Governments and the Suppression of Popular Resistance in China”, *The China Quarterly*, March 2008, pp.20-42

Microfinance- Myths and reality

For about fifteen years, microfinance has been touted as an essential means of emerging from poverty by international institutions like the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). According to Muhammad Yunus, the pioneer of microcredit, and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006, microcredit should relegate poverty to history.

From the 1990s onwards, the concept enjoyed real success in numerous developing countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa and today there are more than 3000 microcredit institutions.

Recent events have thrown another light on microfinance and its effects on poverty. In autumn 2010, a wave of suicides took place in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh which has the highest rate of microfinance institutions in India. More than thirty people who had had recourse to microcredit killed themselves because they could no longer meet the repayments. A first wave of 200 suicides had already taken place in Andhra Pradesh in 2006 for the same reasons.

In Bangladesh, Muhammad Yunus and Sheikh Hasina Wajed, the Prime Minister, fought for control of the Grameen Bank, the main microfinance institution, founded in 1983 by Yunus. Yunus was dismissed from the bank despite a battle which had gone as far as the Supreme Court and despite the support the "banker of the poor" had received from powerful figures such as former WB president James Wolfensohn, Hillary Clinton and Nicolas Sarkozy, The image of microcredit seems durably damaged.

A brief history of microcredit

In the 1970s, Muhammad Yunus was an economist at the University of Chittagong. The great famine which struck Bangladesh in 1974-75 made him aware of the gulf which existed between the economic theories he taught and the reality lived by millions of Bangladeshis. Making contact with the inhabitants of Jobra, a village near Chittagong allowed him to "understand" that all these peasants were trapped in a vicious circle of poverty because they did not have sufficient funds to escape from it. A dollar could be enough to escape this infernal cycle but the peasants, excluded from the traditional banking system, were at the mercy of usurers whose loan terms ensured they sank still deeper into poverty.

Yunus then decided to lend to the poor and as the banks refused to grant credit, he made himself guarantor for the loans made. This experience could not however be realised on a wider scale, which led him to found a special bank for the poor in 1983. Thus the first microcredit financial institution, the Grameen Bank ("gram" means village in Bengali), was created.

The Grameen Bank

The site of the Grameen Bank [1], is indicative of the founding principles and functioning of microcredit.

The first principle affirms that credit is a human right. Nothing less. Thus the Grameen bank would fulfil a humanitarian mission by offering poor families, especially women, access to a universal right. Credit is issued so as to allow self-enterprise (in the form of micro-enterprises) to generate income or to allow access to housing. It is specified that consumer credit is not covered.

To obtain credit, the borrower must join a group of "joint" borrowers. The loan is not based on a legal contract but on "confidence" with the bank and between the members of the group. Credit is obtained in parallel with a compulsory and voluntary programme of saving on the part of the borrowers.

In March 2011, the number of borrowers in Bangladesh reached 8.36 million, 97% of them women. The bank has 2,565 branches and works in 81,379 villages in Bangladesh. It employs 22,289 people. Since its creation, Grameen has spent the equivalent of 10.52 billion dollars in loans and 9.32 billion has been repaid. Between April 2010 and March 2011 the amount of loans came to 984.34 million dollars.

Since 1995, the Grameen Bank has no longer received private funds. It is 100% self-financed from its deposits. More than 55% of the deposits originate from the savings of borrowers themselves and the total amount of deposits represents 147% of loans. It is then the poor themselves who finance the loans.

All entrepreneurs on their own account

According to Yunus and the partisans of microcredit, poverty is not the result of exploitation but the exclusion of the most deprived from the capitalist system. "Poverty originates from the inability of workers to benefit from the fruits of their labour, because they do not control capital" 1. A little monetary impulsion would allow the world's millions of poor to transform themselves into entrepreneurs on their own account.

“What are needed are real structural changes so that the poor can have access to the market in the same way as the rich... Poverty can be eliminated, everywhere, without delay. It is solely a question of political will. We can only suppress poverty by giving the most deprived the means to themselves control their destiny. It is not work itself which eliminates poverty, but the capital derived from this work... ” [2].

To sum up Yunus’s philosophy, poverty can be eliminated by helping the poor become auto entrepreneurs, which all of us are in capability. The sole difference between a Bangladeshi woman and a company director is access to capital. So all those deprived of it should be allowed access to the market and the banking system.

A business on the back of the poor

The inadequacies of the banking system and the growing demand for credit from poor households has favoured the development of microcredit institutions. In India for example, the government estimated in 2005 the number of people excluded from the traditional banking system at nearly 300 million. It estimated also that 70% of the rural population had no deposit accounts, 87% had no access to banking credit and 55.1% of the poor borrowed informally (from family or friends).

The niche is very profitable. It is a business which allows making money on the back of the poor. Investment in a microfinance institution yields profitability on equity of around 20%. The rate of repayment of loans is more than 95%, but not because the poor are more honest than others and feel honour bound to repay their credit. Following the wave of suicides in Andhra Pradesh, the methods of microcredit institutions were highlighted and denounced. Excessive rates stretching from 24% to 36% (but going as high as 75% as in the case of Compartamos Banco in Mexico); loan agents paid according to the number of clients, leading to insolvent persons borrowing; physical and mental harassment to recover unpaid debts, and so on.

An essentially neoliberal project

With microcredit, there is no contestation of the established order, no alternative to the capitalist model to struggle against poverty. Worse, the idea according to which “social aid distributed by numerous industrialised countries, including France, allows the deprived to survive, but not eradicate poverty” [3] reveals an essentially neoliberal project. At no time is it envisaged that the state could play a role in eradicating poverty. Microfinance invests where the state fails: for access to housing, care, the education of children.

The case of India is edifying from this viewpoint. Microfinance developed in the 1990s with the neoliberal turn. In the 1970s, the nationalised Indian banks had a quota of credits granted to rural areas as well as to small companies and to the most deprived persons. The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was abandoned at the end of the 1980s and the liberalisation of the banking and financial sector opened the door to private intermediaries.

The promotion of “capitalism with a human face”

In parallel with microcredit the concept of “social business” has emerged. In his book “Towards a new capitalism” Muhammad Yunus explains what he means by this: “A social business is a company which does not distribute dividends. It sells its products at prices which allow it to self finance. Its owners can recover the sum that they have invested in the company after a certain time but no share of the profit is paid to them in the form of dividends. Instead of that, the company profits remain internal to it so as to pay for its expansion, create new products or services, and do more good in the world” [4].

Social business is presented as a humanitarian and disinterested project. Big companies like Danone, big banks (CitiBank India for example) are very favourable to partnerships with companies which allow them to combine making money with a “social” profile.

In fact “social businesses” are social in name only. They operate on the same markets as other companies and are in competition with them. To survive, they must make a profit to be competitive. How then can they combine the search for profits with fulfilling a social mission?

If we look a little more closely, we see that these enterprises fulfil functions which should be the responsibility of the state and could be the subject of development of public services. Microfinance and “social business” develop because of the absence of the state as in Bangladesh or its withdrawal as in India in the late 1980s.

What effects on poverty?

According to Muhammad Yunus: “We are engaged in helping 100 million families to emerge from poverty through microcredit and other financial services.”]ibid.]] What is the reality of this? In fact microcredit is rarely used by borrowers to found a company. It is used in nearly 8 out of 10 cases for consumption, health, housing or education. This use does not generate any income allowing repayment for the loan, thus the indebtedness of poor borrowers increases.

Behind the “ethical” image of microfinance the picture is not very instructive. The principle of group solidarity increases the pressure on borrowers with each member of the group being responsible for the surety of the others. Not repaying means to cut off any new source of credit. As the families have access to several microcredit bodies, they borrow off one to repay the others A Ponzi spiral ensues.

Loans are aggressively offered to the poor without real checks as to their solvency. Interest rates are in the best of cases between 24 and 36%, a rate deemed acceptable by Yunus and the other promoters of microcredit. Increasingly enterprises associate a consumer product with the corresponding microcredit. Among NGOs it is not rare to associate the loan with products like mobile telephones, chickens and so on, by presenting them as products which could generate sources of income. In reality they create a dependency on the association. At the end of the day, microcredit favours the over-indebtedness, Ponzi schemes and dependency on financial bodies.

Several independent studies [5] have attempted to determine the real effects of microfinance in the fight against poverty. Two teams of researchers who worked respectively in India and the Philippines have based their study on the comparison of two populations, the one having access to microcredit and the other being refused it. The conclusions of the two studies converge, microcredit does not favour exit from poverty. In most cases, it allowed significant purchases of durable goods, but after having contracted a loan in the context of microcredit studies have shown that families abandon certain small pleasures (tea, snacks, tobacco, betel nuts and so on) to repay the loan which allowed them to buy the goods.

After 18 months no significant development in the lives of the borrowing families is noted. The more long term impact is in the process of being measured. Will the initial loan generate supplementary income? Will the repayments be too heavy? Watch this space.

Another study realised by a Bangladeshi economist working in the United States, Lamia Karim [6] sheds some new light. Surprised by the excessively high rate of recovery of loans, this economist made an investigation on the ground in 1997 then returned in 2007 to continue his study. Rejecting the discourse according to which there would be a natural correlation between poverty and honesty, Karim highlighted a much more sordid reality which he calls the “shame economy”.

The study shows that 95% of the requests are made by the husband or son of the family. The extension of the loans to Bangladeshi women could have very unfavourable consequences for them. The microfinance bodies in fact exploit the social code of honour and shame in force in Bangladesh, women being the guarantors of family honour. As women are held responsible in case of non repayment, the recovery agents don't hesitate to humiliate them publicly to obtain repayment of the unpaid instalments.

What alternatives?

Independent studies help to demystify the slick speeches on microcredit while the waves of suicides that took place in Andhra Pradesh illustrate that its affects can be dramatically negative. Recent experiences of struggle against poverty in countries like Mexico or Brazil have involved a transfer of income with counterparts. The “Oportunidades” programmes begun in Mexico in 1997 or the “Bolsa Familia” launched in Brazil in the last decade involve giving poor families small sums of money in exchange for the regular school attendance for children and a monitoring of their health. These policies have cost little in terms of GDP, around 0.4 or 0.5 % in the case of Brazil. They have thus not had a negative impact on growth as it too often affirmed by those who advocate orthodox policies to control inflation and reduce public debt.

The results of these income transfer policies are however controversial. According to the most favourable evaluations [7] Bolsa Familia would have reduced poverty by 17% since 2001 and had a positive impact on the reduction of child labour and child poverty in the countryside [8].

But these policies of income transfer with counterparts as well as microcredit do not attack the roots of poverty: the absence of jobs or low wages which keep the poor in poverty. Microcredit is in no case an instrument which would create the tens of millions of jobs necessary in a country like Brazil.

Other instruments for redistribution of income, less popularized than “Bolsa Familia” or microcredit, have been implemented, notably the increase of the minimum wage and access to equal pensions at a minimum wage for handicapped persons over 65 and the poorest peasants. These measures are more effective in terms of the breadth of poverty, while instruments such as Oportunidades or Bolsa Familia only attack it at its depth [9]

Contrary to the affirmations of neoliberal thinkers, the state should remain or become an instrument for the reduction of poverty. It should develop social policies or public services to satisfy social needs, notably education and health. It should implement policies favourable to employment and higher wages. These policies should be financed by progressive taxation on the wealthiest and a tax on financial transactions.

, Danielle Sabai is a member of the NPA and the Fourth International. She is one of IV's correspondents for Asia and has a blog “Asia Left Observer” at <http://daniellesabai1.wordpress.com/>.

NOTES

[2] "Transgresser les préjugés économiques", Muhammad Yunus, "Le Monde Diplomatique", December 1997

[4] from the article "Muhammad Yunus : Prix Nobel de l'ambiguïté ou du cynisme?" Denise Comane – CADTM

[5] "The Miracle of Microfinance? Evidence from a Randomised Evaluation". Abhijit Banerjee, Esther Duflo, Rachel Glennester and Cynthia Kinnan, May 2009. "Expanding Microenterprise Credit Access: Using Randomized Supply Decisions to Estimate the Impact in Manila". Dean Karlan and Jonathan Zinman, July 2009

[6] Jacquemont Stéphanie. "Les promesses non tenues du microcredit: nouvelles preuves à charge" <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article23467>

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Fukushima - "The Japanese population won't accept it any longer"

Interview with Satoko Kishimoto

[David Dessers](#)

On March 11, it's exactly one year ago that North-Eastern Japan was hit by a major earthquake and a tsunami with giant 15 meter waves. One of the devastating consequences was a meltdown in the Fukushima nuclear power plant – the biggest nuclear disaster in 25 years. How is the situation today? Is everything under control? What about the population of Fukushima? How does the disaster influence the nuclear power debate in Japan? David Dessers of De Wereld Mogen asked Satoko Kishimoto, a Japanese climate activist who works for the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam: "People no longer believe what the government tells them. They now measure radiation levels themselves, search for alternative sources of information and take their own safety precautions. The government has abandoned people to their fate". This interview was made in the run up to the demonstration "No more Fukushima" scheduled to take place on 11 March 2012 in Brussels.

What is the situation in the Fukushima power plant today?

Satoko: "The power station is now in a state of 'cold shutdown', which supposedly means that there is no further risk of a new nuclear meltdown. A constant stream of cold water insures that the temperature of the four reactors damaged by the tsunami of 11 March 2011 is constantly kept below 100 degrees. Overheating that can lead to explosions and a nuclear meltdown has been averted. However, it appears that cracks in the foundations still cause leaking of limited quantities of contaminated water and the question remains what consequences this will have for the environment, especially marine life. Moreover, a considerable number of people work in the Fukushima power plant on a daily basis. It remains a very hazardous undertaking but someone has to do it. These people risk their lives because they expose themselves to radiation in one way or another. This is the dilemma of a nuclear disaster: you have to sacrifice lives to prevent even worse things from happening."

How did the disaster affect the citizens of Fukushima?

Satoko: "It's shocking how a nuclear disaster like this divides the population and sets people against one another. The prefecture of Fukushima is the size of Flanders and has approximately two million inhabitants. Many people depend on agriculture for a livelihood. Naturally, the farmers would like nothing better than to resume work and provide for themselves and their families. However, it's clear that their produce is contaminated by radiation. Much of these crops are therefore banned from the market. During the past year, many mothers with children have left Fukushima to seek accommodation in one of the larger cities like Tokyo or Osaka. The fathers usually stay put. They watch over the house and want to resume work, seeing as the compensation offered by the government is too meager to cover incurred losses. The nuclear disaster drives a rift between families, reduces mothers and children to poverty and sets farmers against one another. Growing tension between consumers in the cities and the farmers of Fukushima only aggravates the situation. Is it safe to eat farm produce from Fukushima? It's not easy to

find reliable information on this topic. Some experts say it's not harmful for adults. Children and certainly babies, but also women who breastfeed, run a higher risk. This has to do with cell division. The impact is much greater when you're still growing. That also causes discord. Fortunately many Japanese people show their solidarity with the farmers of Fukushima by continuing to buy their produce. And that's just as well because otherwise Fukushima's entire economy would grind to a halt resulting in even more hardship. But how far dare you go in eating contaminated food?"

How did the Japanese government react to the catastrophe?

Satoko: "After the disaster, an official "danger zone" was declared within a 20 kilometer radius of the power station. A month after the disaster, the zone was extended to 30 kilometers. All inhabitants of the zone, some 170.000 people, were evacuated with financial support from the government. But it's clear that the designated zone is far too small. In the mean time, people were prudent enough to measure the level of radio activity at their own location. Even though they found themselves outside the 20 or 30 kilometer zone, a considerable number of people registered high levels of radio activity and decided to evacuate even though they could not count on help from the government. Farmers from areas just outside the official danger zone received a sort of economic compensation for suffered losses, but this was far from sufficient. Fukushima today is a totally dislocated community and neither the government nor TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company, which exploits the Fukushima power plant) will pick up the tab. They've abandoned the people of Fukushima to their fate."

How does Fukushima influence the nuclear power debate in Japan?

Satoko: "That's very interesting. Japan has 54 nuclear power plants. Today only three are active. In Japan, nuclear power plants must undergo periodic safety checks. This is a normal procedure even if there are no evident problems. After a comprehensive inspection the power plant is restarted. But it seems that local authorities are systematically resisting the restart of nuclear power plants within their jurisdiction, resulting in increasingly more deactivated plants. In particular, this shows that people no longer have faith in current safety procedures. Due to lack of trust, local authorities oppose the restarting of nuclear facilities. Today only three power plants continue to function, but also for these remaining plants a safety check is imminent. The government fears that all of Japan's nuclear power plants might therefore be out of action by the end of April. This is something they want to avoid at all costs. With summer in the offing and temperatures set to rise, the use of air conditioning will cause a peak in power consumption. Considering that Japan relies on nuclear power for more than thirty percent of its energy supply (the remainder comes almost exclusively from fossil fuel), it's understandable that the government fears an energy shortage and is pressurizing local authorities to toe the line. This has sparked a major public debate in Japan, although I fear that several local authorities will give in shortly. At any rate: the public opinion and the media are currently strongly opposed to nuclear power...It will therefore be no easy task to restart the nuclear power plants."

Are there also anti-nuclear power campaigns and demonstrations taking place?

Satoko: "Since Fukushima, a series of large demonstrations have taken place in Japan. The most recent manifestation, some 12.000 people demonstrating against nuclear energy, took to the streets of Tokyo on 11 February. 'Datsu-Genpatsu' is the main slogan which means so much as 'Bye bye nuclear power stations'. Demonstrators also invariably call for a nuclear-free world during these protests. An extensive national campaign has also been set up against nuclear power. Leading the campaign is the writer and Nobel Prize winner, Kenzaburo Ooe, a well-known intellectual with an international following who, despite his 77 years, plays a courageous role in bringing together a large group of fellow intellectuals to act as forerunners in the fight against nuclear power. Within the context of this campaign, numerous protests have been held in different cities throughout Japan. In addition to the demonstrations, many conferences, public debates and meetings centered on this theme have been organized, not only in major cities but also in Fukushima itself. There, a growing grassroots movement against nuclear power is also gaining momentum. That's extremely important in light of the many problems that people here are facing."

What will happen in Japan on 11 March?

Satoko: "That day will certainly not pass unnoticed. New demonstrations and manifestations are planned, among them in Osaka. But in Fukushima too, all kinds of activities are set to take place, including for example, a sort of people's forum. The Japanese anti-nuclear movement has called for a world-wide day of action against nuclear power on 11 March. There is still much discontent in Japan about the government's attitude. From the time the disaster struck, right up till the present day, the government has never been totally honest. Invariably more information was held back than was made public. From the very start they downplayed the catastrophe, continuing to assert that everything was safe...People simply don't believe that anymore. They are searching for their own information channels and try to protect their own health and that of their families. The most important lesson Fukushima teaches us is that after a nuclear disaster you find yourself on unknown terrain, never certain of how things really are, where countless hazards are trivialized. The damage is enormous. Therefore prevention is better than cure..."

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First published on the website of the [Transnational Institute](#).

, David Dessers is a Belgian activist, member of Socialisme 21 and a supporter of the Fourth International.

Japan - One Year after Fukushima Nuclear Disaster

One year has passed since tremendous scale of earthquake and tsunami catastrophe which severely attacked and destroyed towns and villages in North-East coastal region of Japan. Nearly 20,000 people were killed and missing, 341,000 have been evacuated, and many people lived in affected zones lost their fundamental basis of daily existences, such as houses, public transport, health care, jobs, and their communities.

Furthermore, the worst nuclear accident of Fukushima Dai-ichi(No1) has caused increasingly devastating situations among the population in Fukushima prefecture. The number of evacuees from towns and villages near the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant has reached 100,000. They will be not able to return their hometown for several decades, in fact for an indefinite period, because of radioactive contamination of land, river, sea and air.

The Fukushima nuclear disaster has not ended. The radioactive fallout caused by the explosion of the nuclear plant is continuously diffusing radioactive material to the surrounding area which will bring about fatal effects, particularly on the health of pregnant women and children.

Nevertheless, prime minister Yoshihiko Noda of DPJ (Democratic Party of Japan) declared December last year that 'cold shutdown of the melt-downed Fukushima Dai-ichi reactors' was achieved. However, many experts fear that the government declared 'safety' only to appease growing anger among the people over the accident at the nuclear plant so that it may deflect attention from the remaining threats to the reactor's safety.

Now 52 reactors out of a total of 54 across Japan are stopping due to mainly periodic overhaul and safety checks of the reactors. The remaining 2 reactors will also stop their operation after the end of April this year. To avoid such a situation, the government and capitalist class are desperately campaigning over the crisis of 'shortage of electric supply' and stirring up popular anxieties that this would be damaging to economic recovery and worsen unemployment etc.

To survive nuclear plants, the DPJ government and capitalists are very eager to resume reactivation of many reactors and declare 'safety' of nuclear plants through the 'check' of co-opted 'specialist' committee. Under strong pressure from nuclear-related industries, the government also pledged to maintain nuclear-export policies.

Soon after the Fukushima disaster, Japanese people become aware of the lies about 'safety and clean' campaign about nuclear energy. Young people and mothers who never had been involved in demonstration before the accident have been more and more mobilized like a snowball.

Those who have mobilized themselves for the first time in social activities have strong feeling that 'we are deceived by mainstream media' and join demonstrations through new social networks such as twitter or facebook. And anti-nuclear sit-in action at the tent set up in front of the building of the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry from September last year continued for six months attracted people particularly 'Women of Fukushima against nuclear plant. The anti-nuclear tent in the government center of Tokyo thus became one of the symbols of the people's anger against the government and ruling class. These new phenomena represent common context with 'Occupy Movements' all over the world in its very autonomous form.

The demonstration against nuclear plants held on September 11, after six months from the disaster mobilized 60.000 in Tokyo. On March 11 this year, trade unionists, peace activists, civic groups, peasant and fishery organizations in Fukushima are calling a big rally against nuclear plants. They demand to compensate for all the affected people, to shut down nuclear plants etc. There will be many rallies and demonstrations all over the country on same day.

We expect that social movement in Japan, in solidarity with those affected by the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster, would begin to change the relationship of forces through developing anti-nuclear movements.

, Kenji Kunitomi is a member of the secretariat bureau of the Japan Revolutionary Communist League, a permanent observer organization of Fourth International in Japan.

Environment - Land grabbing shows the urgent need to protect peasants' rights

It's a red alert now. The government of Saudi Arabia currently owns 1.6 million hectares (ha) of land in Sudan and Indonesia. In Madagascar around 1.3 million ha were leased, bought or transferred to private corporations of South Korea.

The High Level Group of Experts of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) estimates that between 50 and 80 million ha of land in poor and developing countries have been negotiated, acquired or leased by international investors.

Large-scale land transactions are undermining food security, livelihoods and the environment of local populations. Along with a history-long discrimination against rural people, this wildly spreading global phenomenon has been the reason why there have been so many reports of human rights violations in rural areas recently, especially with regards to land rights.

While the United Nations Human rights Council is planning to discuss a declaration of the rights of peasants in the coming days, FIAN International together with La Via Campesina has organised a parallel event to the 19th session of the UN Human Rights Council on Thursday (8/3).

The event, entitled "Land Grabbing and the Urgent Need to Protect the Rights of Peasants", is acting as a warm up event for the current session of UN Human Rights Council. The objective is to lobby and connect parties who are supportive to the peasants' rights initiative. State members, Advisory Committee members, as well as experts and NGOs are invited to participate in the event.

"Land grabbing is clearly a gross violation of the rights of peasants," said Jean Ziegler, former special rapporteur on the right to food. "Most of these land grabs are not even for food production but for agrofuels, which are destroying our land, society, environment and our food sovereignty." "We have to forbid land grabbing, if we want to protect our food system," concluded Mr. Ziegler, currently a UN Human Rights Council Advisory Committee member.

Henry Saraigh from La Via Campesina argued, "We have been saying this for 11 years already; land grabbing is not a new phenomenon, however it is getting worse." "If this trend continues, it will not only affect rural people in Southern countries, but it will also affect Northern countries, as land grabs will undermine the whole food system," the General Coordinator of La Via Campesina emphasized.

Angelica Navarro, Ambassador of Bolivia to the United Nations has an interesting perspective: "States have an obligation to protect the rights of rural people and peasants. These efforts in Bolivia can act like best practices and the initiative [on the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas] is complementary to our national efforts," she continued. In this 19th session, the Advisory Committee will present final report on the advancement of the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas (document A/HRC/19/75).

Besides the focus on the rights of the most vulnerable people working in rural areas, the study discusses the need to create a new special procedure to improve the promotion and protection of the rights of peasants and develop a new international human rights instrument for these rights. A declaration, based on the La Via Campesina Declaration of the Rights of Peasants Women and Men is attached to the study and could serve as a model.

"The inequalities in land tenure as well as for other productive resources, discrimination against rural women peasants, the increase in hunger and malnutrition, and the difficulties in meeting the Millennium Development Goals are all very good reasons why we need a breakthrough in dealing with the food situation," said Jean Feyder, Ambassador of Luxembourg. The recommendations in the final study are meant to serve this objective; business as usual definitely will not solve the problem.

"Food is not a commodity, food has cultural and social dimensions too," Ana Maria Suarez Franco from FIAN International said. "Therefore, our food, our culture, and our social cohesion will be destroyed should the land grabbing phenomenon persist." Ana Maria further explained, "Food produced by peasants is as important as peace and security in the world." "Peasants and other rural people are now claiming their rights and offer real alternatives to improve the food system and human rights mechanisms. It is about time for the international community to respond to this," she concluded.

The final study will be discussed with states on March 13 and 14 on item 5 in the 19th session of UN Human Rights Council.

Geneva, 11 March 2012

, An international movement of peasants, small- and medium-sized producers, landless, rural women, indigenous people, rural youth and agricultural workers.

Obituary - "Humankind must be able to dream."

Jakob Moneta 1914-2012

[Klaus Engert](#)

He was not a big man, but he was impressive. His ability to speak, to explain difficult subjects in a way that everybody could understand, and his social capabilities attracted me, when I first met him middle of the seventies. And when I afterwards got to know his history, I was even more impressed. Jakob had lived a life, which included a big part of what Jews, Communists, Jewish Communists and especially left Jewish Communists had to endure and survive during the last century. But he had a dream, and he cited Lenin's sentence about dreaming in his memoirs in 1978.

Jakob was born in Blazowa, at the time still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and situated in the region of Eastern Galicia. When the Polish state was founded in 1918, a whole series of pogroms took place. His father, originally from Germany, publicly denounced the leaders of the pogrom and was forced to leave the country. So the family went to Cologne, Germany. Jakob, as a member of the Jewish community, also had to face anti-Semitic assaults there as well. So it was logical that he began his political work in a Zionist-socialist youth organisation. But in 1931 he joined, together with other members of his group, the SJV (Socialist Youth Association), the youth organisation of a left split from the SPD (Social Democratic Party), of which, by the way, also the later chancellor of Germany, Willy Brandt, was a member. During this time Jakob turned to Trotskyism – against the will of his father, who kicked him out of home.

But the victory of the Fascists in 1933 forced the family to emigrate again. While his parents went to Cuba and later on to USA, Jakob decided to live his dream and went to work in a Kibbutz in Palestine. There he worked in producing orange crates. But he was not a Zionist like David Razill, predecessor of Menachem Begin as leader of "Irgun": He fought for a two-nations socialist Palestine.

And so Jakob and some others did not leave the Kibbutz willingly: They were expelled by the Zionist majority in 1938, after beginning a fight for the 8-hour-day. He went to Haifa, where he founded an Arab-Jewish trade union. Shortly afterwards Jakob was imprisoned by the British administration and sentenced to "minimum one year" – at the end it turned out to be more than two years. He writes in his memoirs, that one day a man called Moshe Dayan was entering the prison – he was released soon...

And in prison his life as a journalist began. He was organizing with others a kind of prison-university, learned languages (in the end he spoke ten) and organized a hunger strike. After his release he cooperated with the Arab Left. But after the end of the war he became more and more disillusioned about the politics of the Zionists. He writes in his memoirs: "Here Jews became pogromists."

So in 1948 he went back to Europe, and lived, without a valid passport, a life as a precarious migrant, in France and Belgium.

By the end of 1948 he returned to Germany. That year, he entered the IKD (International Communists of Germany), the German section of the Fourth International, in which he stayed until his death. He, as an autodidact, worked as a journalist at a social democratic newspaper. Finally he was fired, because he repeatedly published articles by a man called Ernest Mandel in the newspaper...

When the FI opted for so-called entrism tactics, he joined the SPD. In 1953, he got a job at the German Embassy in Paris, as an attaché for social affairs, and stayed until 1962. In this time he worked clandestine in the support of the FI for the liberation war in Algeria.

In 1962 his old friends from the former SAP, who in the meantime became members of the SPD, and had leading positions in the Trade Unions, called him to work as chief editor of "Metall", the newspaper of the members of the Metal Workers Union, and at the same time of the magazine for the trade union officials, "Der Gewerkschafter". In his time Gunter Wallraff, the undercover journalist, published his first articles (there) about the working conditions in German factories, and in the seventies, Moneta organized the famous concert with the East German songwriter Wolf Biermann, which caused the expatriation of the latter. Until his retirement in 1978 he ran the newspaper, which grew in this time from 1,8 to 2,2 million copies.

At the same time, still a member of the SPD, he was doing clandestine work for the German section of the Fourth International, first inside the SPD, then, after the exit of the section and the foundation of GIM (Group International Marxists) in 1968 for their newspaper "Was tun". Until his retirement he was writing continuously for it under the pseudonym "Anna Armand", later under his name, and continued to do so after the merger of GIM with a post-Maoist group to the VSP (United Socialist Party) in the newspaper SOZ, in which he had a monthly column until he was more than ninety years old.

And during all these years he was not only engaged in the work in the Trade Unions, but at the same time in political movements, such as against the Vietnam War, Nuclear Power – and Stalinism. As early as 1952, he published a book about the history of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of USSR.

After the Biermann concert the East German government issued a denial of entry until the year 2000 against Jakob...

After the fall of the wall he was kicked out of the SPD after 40 years of membership and, like other comrades of German section, in 1991 joined the PDS (Democratic Socialist Party, the former East German Communist Party), Until the age of 80 he a was member of its Executive Committee.

Jakob was dedicated to the workers' movement and to the Fourth International until the end of his life. And his very personal reasons, which are deeply rooted in the experiences of a Jewish Communist, he described in a biographical essay from 1978 as follows:

"Who was not murdered in the Concentration Camps, not killed in the gas chambers, who did not fall in imperialist wars, has no right to give up the struggle for Socialism."

