



International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV434 March 2011



Nuclear Disaster
Women
Cuba
Economic Crisis
Environment
Japan
South Africa

Car Industry
Stieg Larsson
Britain
Portugal
Indian sub-continent
Ivory Coast
Germany

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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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CONTENTS

Fourth International - Report on the International Situation	P1
Greece - The very symbol of illegitimate debt	P6
Portugal - Precarious generation on the march	P10
Portugal - Against the marriage of convenience	P11
Britain - Massive demonstration in London against government austerity	P12
Economic crisis - The crisis of capitalism is used as a pretext to attack collective rights	P13
USA - The New American Workers Movement at the Crossroads	P19
International Womens Day - A message from the World March of Women	P21
Women - Launch of Via Campesina campaign against violence against women in Africa	P22
Spanish State - Women's Crises	P22
Pakistan - Pakistan's Dark Journey	P24
USA/ Women - Women at the sharp end	P25
USA - Policing women's bodies	P27
Feminism - Interrogating the Feminine Mystique	P27
Japan - Japan: a natural, nuclear, human and social disaster	P30
Nuclear disaster - Japan's unnecessary and predictable nuclear crisis	P31
Environment - The evidence from Fukushima: nuclear power means nuclear catastrophe	P33
Environment - The worst is unleashed in Fukushima!	P36
Japan - Japanese organisations call for solidarity	P38

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CONTENTS continued

Germany - Mobilisations against Nuclear Power Plants	P39
Environment - The truth behind India's nuclear renaissance	P39
Environment - Bali Seed Declaration	P41
Environment - Alternatives to the dominant agricultural model	P43
South Africa - The ANC government's 'talk left, walk right' climate policy	P45
Cuba - Neoliberal strategy failing in Cuba	P47
Cuba - What Cuba's reforms may bring	P49
USA - Detroit: Disappearing city	P54
Indian sub-continent - Baght Singh day in Pakistan	P57
Ivory Coast - Two oligarchic factions tear the country apart	P60
Britain - Renewed interest in class struggle?	P62
Car industry - Fiat: Building unity between workers in Poland and Italy	P63
Review - Arabs and the Holocaust	P68
Review - Towards a Queer Marxism?	P72
Sweden - Stieg Larsson in the Struggle	P77

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INTERNATIONAL VIEWPOINT

Fourth International - Report on the International Situation



Report approved by the IC of the Fourth International
François Sabado

The revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt constitute a historic turning point in the international situation. These revolutions change the rules of the game. There will be a before and after the revolutions of Tunisia and Egypt. It is too early to appreciate the depth and all the implications of this change, but we are confronted with historical upheavals. They are the first revolutions of this 21st century, more exactly - because there were also revolutions in Bolivia in 2003 and 2005 - the first revolutions in the Arab world but also the first revolutions resulting from the crisis of the world capitalist system.

They have exploded in the weak links of capitalist globalisation. They concern a double process, a political process of rejection of the dictatorships but also a social process, where millions of people can no longer stand the consequences of the food crises with the explosion of prices of basic food products or more generally a system which gives only unemployment and misery as a prospect to millions of young people. These revolutions - because they are revolutions in the sense that there has been an eruption of the mass movement on the social and political scene and an open crisis of the regime - combine democratic questions, national questions - of national sovereignty against imperialism - and social questions.

It is a major turning point in the Arab world with a shock wave, in Libya, in Bahrain, in Algeria,

in Yemen, in Jordan, in Palestine, but it is also revealing of the social instability and upheavals to come. These are the first stages of a gigantic battle between dictatorships and popular mobilisations, a confrontation between forces, which under all forms, seeks to ensure the continuity of the power of the dominant classes and that of the rupture which aspires to democracy and the satisfaction of the basic social needs of the popular classes.

The massacres in Lybia also show that repression is unleashed against these revolutionary movements. This wave is felt as far as China. It will, in specific ways, have repercussions across the whole world.

In this sense, and even though we must take into account the specific dimensions of these movements - mobilisation against dictatorships, the type of class contradictions, the fractures within these States - these movements fall under a new historical period marked by the crisis of the capitalist system.

The crisis today and its tipping point

The world crisis continues. It has entered its fourth year. Its unfolding takes the form of financial crises, crises on the food product or raw material markets and crises of the public debt, notably in Europe. Its combined character - economic, financial, social and climatic - is confirmed. The notion of "crisis of civilisation" reflects aptly the depth of this crisis. At the level of the world economy, some, like Paul Krugman (an economist identified with the left of the US Democratic Party) suggest that this Third Depression resembles both the stagnation that began in Europe and the United States in the 1870s - he calls it the Long Depression - and the stagnation of the 1930s, which he calls the Great Depression.

Current growth rates and those predicted for the long term are weak: 3% in 2011 and 3.5 % in 2012. This breaks down as follows in the various zones: 1 to 2 % in Europe, 2 to 3 % in the USA; and 6 to 7% in the so-called emergent countries. Unemployment rates in the main capitalist countries remain high, around official figures 10%, in fact much higher. Poverty is increasing, hitting in particular women, youth and immigrants.

The model of accumulation established in the late 1970s is in crisis. The generalised indebtedness

which has dominated economic policy in the USA and Europe in the 1980s, 90s and 2000s can no longer compensate for the saturation of production in the key sectors of the economy and can no longer compensate for the limits of acquisitive capacities in terms of the purchasing power of the economies of the imperialist centres. On the other hand, there is no revival of production and mass consumption. All the talk of emergence from crisis or claims that the "the worst of the crisis is behind us" does not hide the slide into crisis and the absence of upturn of the world economy, notably in the USA and Europe. Crisis is establishing itself in the imperialist centres but it is also sharpening the tipping point of the world.

While the crisis hits the countries of the centre, China has for the past five years maintained growth rates of 10%. India and Brazil, to a lesser extent are undergoing similar processes of development. We could say that the crisis is above all that of the Western world and that China, India, and a series of countries in Asia and Latin America have avoided crisis or developed despite the crisis. China is already the second biggest world power. It has even conquered first place in such key sectors as computers. Its military strength and arms expenditure have increased considerably, seeking to make it a power of the first order in the coming years.

The presence of China in the world is undergoing a real expansion: big work projects in Africa and Latin America, large scale exploitation of lands for the production of raw materials and food products, purchase of the debt of countries "in difficulty" in Europe - Greece, Portugal, Spain.

Certainly, there is no "decoupling" of the emergent countries in the course of the crisis. China and the emergent countries are not in a position to relaunch the world economy. The structure of insertion of these countries in the world economy is fragile. Don't forget that 42% of China's GDP originates from its exports, and that in the medium term the solidity of Chinese growth will depend on its capacities to construct an internal market, with new infrastructures, wage increases and social security.

The economic dynamism of these countries poses the question of whether the world economy today is not a single locomotive with the USA but several, with China, India and other emergent countries. China's dynamism is such that it can draw other exporting economies, whether in raw materials like Brazil and Argentina, or capital goods like Germany. It is one question but it is key to understanding this tipping point of the world.

The US is in decline but maintains a position of strength thanks to the breadth and unified nature of its economic and financial market, due to the power of the Dollar, but above all due to its political-military hegemony, still felt despite the contradictions in the processes underway in Tunisia or Egypt. But it is no longer the US imperialism of the Bush years. It must make arrangements with

others - in the area of arms with the Russians and tomorrow China or other states - Brazil in Latin America or with the pressure of the peoples.

In this new world equilibrium, the US declines but keeps its political-military power, its huge market and "its dollar", it is Europe which is falling back. Some even speak of the crisis of the Eurocentrism that has dominated the world since 1492- the date of the discovery of America. One of the striking elements of the current historic period and the crisis is the structural weakening of Europe.

A new capitalist neoliberal offensive

In this crisis, there are weak links of capitalist globalisation. We see it today with the contradictions which explode in the Arab countries but also in Europe where, for the dominant classes, in the battle between capital and labour, the crisis is a lever for the dominant classes who use it to destroy a series of social rights and gains. Since profit rates cannot be restored by production and mass consumption, world competition demands further lowering of the cost of labour in Europe and the USA. It is necessary to attack, deregulate, privatise. This capitalist offensive settles the debates and questions on the choice of a Keynesian turn for the dominant classes.

It is about attack, frontal attack, not social compromise. Little reflation, little reconstruction, no "demand" policies, no social and public redeployment of the state, loss of speed also of all the projects of "green capitalism". These Keynesian limits reduce still further the margins of manoeuvre of social democracy. After some weeks of panic, the financialisation of the economy and the power of the financial markets have been restored.

One can even speak of a second wave of the neoliberal offensive after that of the 1980s. In any case, the social destruction waged by the employers and the governments are as indeed stronger than in those days. This new offensive has a global character. Nothing escapes capitalist globalisation, its unequal exchanges, its remodelling of the labour force, the challenge to a whole series of social rights.

This has also brought pressure on the progressive experiences of recent years in Latin America. The measures by the Morales government seeking to increase oil prices being, to a certain extent, one of the consequences of the growing pressure of the world market. It even strikes at the heart of the Cuban economy. What would be the consequences of the "privatisation" of a whole sector of the Cuban work force - nearly 10% of employees - on the relation of socio-political forces in Cuba and in Latin America? But there is no fatality. The attitude of the progressive governments of Latin America and the Cuban leadership in relation to the crisis constitute a key test of the development of these currents.

The crisis in Europe

Despite its technological, social, economic power and its accumulated wealth, Europe is the weak

link in capitalist globalisation, in the sense where it is caught in the pincers between the USA and the rise of the emergent countries. The purchase of a part of the Greek, Portuguese and Spanish public debt by China is, effectively, more than symbolic. From the conjunctural point of view, the crisis manifests itself in the form of a crisis of the "debt". It has passed from the banks to the states with a public debt crisis which results from decades of inegalitarian tax policies and the public intervention into the financial and banking crisis.

The public deficit went from 2 to 6.5% in the Euro zone and from 2.8 to 11% in the USA. The public debts between 2008 and 2009 went from 69.4 to 78.7% of GDP in the Euro zone and from 62 to 83%, from 2007 to 2009 in the USA. The states are now in the front line of the crisis and even if there are differences between the European Union and the USA – the latter having had much more significant reflationary economic policies – the dominant classes and government of the two units deploy austerity policies which in particular asphyxiate public policies.

The specificity of crisis in Europe results from the type of construction of the European Union: an entity dominated by the markets, of unfinished political content, without democracy, without popular participation, without political and economic unity. This neoliberal construction far from coordinating economic policies encourages the "divergent dynamics" of the European economy, divergences between the industrial (Germany) and financial (British) dynamics, highly developed economies – former common market – and averagely developed – south and east of Europe.

The Euro effectively covers countries at different levels of development and productivity. And far from constituting an instrument for an economic coordination of the so-called "Euro zone", it now functions as an instrument to discipline economies and peoples in the service of the strongest. Which leads to tensions between Germany or similar countries and the other, with a pressure that has become unbearable for Spain, Portugal and Greece. At this stage, the governments of the Euro zone have created mechanisms of assistance in return for radical neoliberal structural reforms, notably with the creation of a "European stabilisation fund" in 2013 for the countries in difficulties, a fund of 750 billion Euros. There is already debate on whether that will suffice. A debate which stimulates speculation.

But beyond this question of the debt, there is another central issue: in current world competition, the dominant classes in Europe are convinced that the "European social model" is a major handicap in the competition with the USA and China. It is necessary to destroy the social gains and conquests won in recent decades. There is a real "social war" in Europe today: freezing – indeed nominal lowering – of wages of public employees, drastic reduction of social and public budgets,

destruction of whole layers of the social state, extension of the working day – pension reforms, challenges to the 35 hour week, destr of millions of public sector jobs, attacks and privatisations on social security, health, schools (the explosion of student fees in Britain).

The most recent example of these attacks is the referendum at the FIAT Mirafiori plant in Turin, where the results of approval of the management proposals open the road to the liquidation of collective bargaining, not only in engineering but also in all the professional branches and sectors. National collective agreements of branches or sectors are totally undermined. They collapse before the employment contract "negotiated" between the employee and the boss. The policy of the FIAT directorate also imposes a worsening of work conditions: team work, night work, crackdowns on absenteeism, wage freezes and so on.

Attacks of this type are tending to generalise across Europe. Combined with the policy of cutting deficits, they not only worsen the working and living conditions of millions of people but increasingly limits final demand, with the consequence of stifling growth and bringing about new recessions. The deficit cutting policies limit final demand and can only have consequences which will restrain growth indeed provoke new recessions. This is not yet another austerity plan, the objective is to reduce in the coming years the purchasing power of employees, by 15 to 20%. The dismantling of the welfare state or what remains of it will receive an unprecedented boost.

The right and the neoliberal offensive

The difference between this offensive, linked to the historic and systemic crisis capitalism is undergoing, and that of the 1980s, lies in the destabilising consequences for the whole of the system, its dominant classes, its parties, its institutions. All the dominant parties but also the others are destabilised by decades of neoliberal counter reforms and the crisis of the system. The crises of political representation, the historic crisis of socialism, the phenomena of popular abstention, the feeling of corruption of the political elites: all this feeds the general crisis of politics.

On the right, the neoliberal social counter reforms undermine the social bases of the traditional parties, so the latter seek this base by deploying authoritarian, racist, populist, police, attacking immigrants, Roma and Muslims. They accentuate their reactionary course like the Republican Party in the USA. Tendencies to "populist bonapartism" with Sarkozy or Berlusconi reflect a certain instability. Populist or neo fascist movements gain ground, notably in Sweden, the Netherlands, France, or Hungary. In all the recent elections in Europe, the right and far right have increased their vote.

Social Democracy and the crisis

On the left, the crisis has not led to any "Keynesian turn". The presence of a socialist president at

the head of the IMF expresses the degree of integration of social democracy in the institutions of capitalist globalisation. Unlike in the 1930s, there is no turn to the left from social democracy. The social liberal choice is confirmed. The policies of Papandreou, Zapatero and Socrates show that. The broad direction of the Party of European Socialists at the European level comfort them and show that beyond the tactical positioning of each Socialist Party in the opposition against the right, social democracy has turned into social liberalism.

Even if there are differences between left and right, differences of social base, of history, of political relations with the workers', trade union, associative movement – the summits of social democracy, relayed by the trade union apparatuses, have deliberately chosen the adaptation to dominant modes of management of the crisis. We should also note the evolution of the big Green formations on orientations increasingly marked by the centre left.

The dynamic of social resistance

It is too soon to analyse and predict the consequences of the Arab revolutions on social resistance at the international scale. But these revolutions should be put in perspective with the resistance linked not only to the crisis but also the upheavals in the Arab world with the emergence of struggles and new organisations among workers and peoples, in China, Asia and Africa, but also in this configuration in Europe.

The most notable element of recent months has been the struggles of *résistance* to the austerity plans. Days of general strikes have taken place in Greece, Portugal, Spain, and France. In France, nearly 3 million people demonstrated and participated in strike movements eight times in two months... the Spanish and Portuguese strikes had a historic breadth. One of our tasks is to analyse the forms, content and dynamic of these conflicts. In Britain and Italy, the student demonstrations show the degree of explosiveness of the social struggles. In Germany there have been impressive anti-nuclear mobilisations. The crisis will continue. The attacks will redouble.

If there is a new social situation in Europe where people's resistance is being heard, we should note two major political facts:

a) the struggles, even the biggest ones, do not lead at this stage to partial defeats for the dominant classes or victories for the workers and their organisation. We have not blocked the capitalist offensive and still less sent it into reverse. What we can note is that, if the neoliberal counter-reform continues to advance, the workers who have gone on strike and demonstrated in Greece, France, Portugal, or Spain, and the students who have demonstrated in Britain, do not have the feeling of having experienced major defeats. They feel in a confused way that there will be further battles.

b) the second political fact to highlight is that in the countries where there is social struggle of a certain breadth, a gap exists between social combativeness and its political reflection. We should consider the specificities of the situation in each country. In some countries the level of social struggle is weak. But even in the countries where there is a social mobilisation, there is no equivalent at the trade union or political level: there is no organic growth of the trade unions, parties, or left currents in the social movements. How many members or supporters? There may be here and there a movement of members into trade unions and parties but there is, for example a difference between the 1930s and the current situation. In the 1930s the crisis and social resistance led, for example, to the growth by hundreds of thousands in membership of unions, socialist and communist parties, left movements within social democracy. The social liberal evolution renders these parties increasingly "impermeable" to the rises in the class struggle.

But nor have we seen any massive qualitative growth of the trade unions. We might then have expected the development of currents or parties outside the traditional left organisations. At this stage we note no notable progress. Today in France, after an exceptional social mobilisation, we could have expected that the PS candidate for the presidential election of 2012 could be one with a more "social-democratic" profile. Well no, the SP candidate for the 2012 presidential elections is likely to be IMF president Dominique Strauss-Kahn, one of the most right-wing representatives of international social-democracy!!!

The effects of the historical crisis of the workers' movement of the last century are still felt. The building of a revolutionary socialist consciousness needs new experiences to take shape. We have to note that the level of current struggles even if it is rising in reactions to the attacks of the ruling classes and government has not got a sufficient political dynamic to turn back the decades of neoliberal counter-reforms and lay the basis of an overall counter-offensive and a new revolutionary socialist project. The processes of building radical left or anticapitalist parties, in Europe, thus meet a series of difficulties.

First consequences of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions

The conséquences are first and foremost for the Arab world. These are the first revolutions for half a century: after Nasserism, the rise of Arab nationalism and the Algerian revolution. It is a *démocratic* and social shockwave across the Arab world, with mobilisations in Jordan, Yemen, Algeria, and growing tensions in Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine.

These are movements or mobilisations which are democratic, radical democratic and social. A knowledgeable historian of the Arab world characterises them as "post-Islamist revolutions". The reference is no longer Iran. These are new

generations, of youths and now workers with their organisations and strikes who want to find their way to self-determination. There will be, on the basis of these revolutions, a redistribution and reorganisation of forces: the emergence of new organisations linked to the radicalisation of the youth- radical social and democratic movements, differentiations inside the Islamist movements – as in Egypt now among the Muslim Brotherhood, revival and reorganisation of the workers' movement and the trade unions. We should stress the role of the UGTT, and in particular of its combative sectors - in Tunisia and the importance of the movement seeking to replace the unions linked to the Mubarak regime by independent unions.

In the revolutions underway, democratic, national and social demands should be combined with self-organisation. In Libya or Bahrain we demand an end to the massacres and all repression. In Tunisia and in Egypt we support democratic demands, the liberation of all political prisoners, the dismantling of the dictatorship and all its institutions, the dissolution of the RCD and PND and all repressive apparatuses, the formation of a provisional government without any representative of the régime, representing the popular uprising and the convening of a constituent assembly.

In this context the Tunisian comrades are discussing the proposal against all "continuist" formulas, of a government of the UGTT applying a radical democratic programme and satisfying popular social needs. The key problem is to move from "getting rid of Ben Ali and Mubarak" to the rupture with the dictatorship. At the same time, the anti-capitalists should support all strikes, all democratic movements of youth and women, the embryos of self-organisation underway in the struggle against high prices and for the protection of the population.

This revolutionary upsurge in the Arab will also have medium and long term repercussions on the crisis in the Middle East, the political situation in Palestine, and relations with Israel. Beyond the manoeuvres of US imperialism, the general dynamic of this popular mobilisation weakens the imperialist grip on the region. It weakens the Zionist leadership which can no longer count on one of its main allies Mubarak. But this leadership is above all totally destabilised by the Arab democratic wave. Its representation of the Arab world as an undemocratic whole – authoritarian or Islamist regimes- has been thoroughly challenged by the dynamic of these revolutions. Finally the Tunisian, Egyptian, Libyan revolutions can encourage the emergence of radical or radical nationalist democratic currents opposed to the Palestinian Authority of Mahmoud Abbas and to Hamas.

For the peoples of the world, these revolutions will constitute examples. Of course, without mechanical effects, but they will stimulate reflection on the rejection of dictatorships, democratic aspirations,

forms of struggle. The shock wave spreads as far as Beijing, even if for the moment only in symbolic form. It is necessary to see the fear of the Chinese authorities of the propagatory effects of these revolutions. In the rest of the world, these revolutions break the infernal circle which confined Arab societies-dictatorship or Islamic state-. They break the wall of all theories of the "clash of civilisations". They create the conditions for the democratic and social alliance of the workers' movement with the young Arab generations, in particular in the countries with large Arab immigrant populations. They are a point of support to strengthen all anti-racist mobilisations.

Elements of discussion on the tasks of revolutionaries

In these conditions what are our tasks? Does the reply depend on the diagnosis made of the crisis that broke out in 2007? Is it a financial episode analogous to all those that capitalism has known in the past, followed by temporary recessions? Or is it a systemic crisis at two levels: because the regime of financial accumulation developed over more than thirty years is exhausted, and because world capitalism has reached a limit linked to the finite nature of the planet and its natural resources. If we take the second hypothesis we cannot be content with policies of reflation through demand and more regulation in the financial system, what is needed is a radical reorganisation of the economy turned to social needs, an ecological reconversion of industry and agriculture, quality non-commodified public services, in short a rupture with capitalist logic, the private ownership of capital and the current system of distribution of wealth.

We need then a plan combining immediate demands with anti-capitalist counter-crisis demands. It is not the workers who should pay for the crisis but the capitalists: defence of social gains, demands, rights, taxation of financial transactions, and cancellation of the public debt. This plan can be financed from the banking and financial profits and those of the big capitalist groups. This programme should be accompanied by the nationalisation or public socialisation of the entire banking system, posing the question of inroads into the ownership of capital. This question of ownership should also be posed through the struggle against privatisation and the creation of big public sectors under workers' and users' control in the key sectors of the economy.

It is also posed through the ecological question and the necessary reorganisation and ecological planning in the medium and long term. The ecological dimension has an increasingly significant place, given the natural disasters taking place around the planet, and with the increasing frequency of floods, climatic chaos, landslides, and should take an increasing place in our activity. All proposals of social and organisational reorganisation of production, reorganisation of urban space, transport, energy serving the needs

of workers and peoples should be stressed in our agitation.

In Europe, this plan should have a continental dimension. In Europe, the response to the crisis is not nationalist protectionism and exit from the Euro. That would lead to an exacerbated competition between European countries and new attacks against the peoples so that the countries in most difficulties take the blows; not to mention the development of chauvinistic and xenophobic movements. A response is needed that which is European, social, democratic, and ecologist, but which breaks with the European policies and institutions. In this sense, saving the Euro or the European Union cannot serve as an alibi to redouble the attacks and austerity plans against the peoples.

Our response should start from the defence of the rights and demands of the workers and peoples in each country and at the European level. That means the rejection of any policy of austerity, even if there is the blackmail of expulsion from the EU. So what is needed is a coordination of the policies and struggles of the peoples in Europe to build a European, internationalist response which prioritises harmonisation upwards, coordination and cooperation to help the peoples hit hardest by the crisis, a policy which makes the capitalists and the bankers pay through a fiscal and social policy benefiting the people and European large scale public services, particularly banking.

In an anti-capitalist action plan, the question of democratic rights and demands takes on an important character, notably in the defence of democratic liberties and the defence of immigrants and the undocumented.

These objectives can only be attained by the social and political mobilisation of millions of workers and citizens and a confrontation with the dominant classes and governments.

More generally, our orientation should stimulate and orient this mobilisation which should combine, social, trade union and ecological struggles, unity of social, trade union and political action of all left forces, calls for and leadership of experiences of social self-organisation. Proposals for a European campaign for the cancellation of the debt or on employment through the coordination of associations and trade unions. It is necessary to relay the initiatives of the Dakar WSF.

At the political level, unitary struggles should go together with the systematic search for independence in relation to social democracy, notably through electoral policies in the big cities, regions, parliament and government. The crisis confirms the indispensable character of a global political alternative to social liberalism and the parties of the traditional left. Finally, we should encourage unity and anti-capitalist alliances encouraging all initiatives of anti-capitalist coordination at the level of sectors, struggles or

parties, European or Mediterranean anti-capitalist conferences.

February 22, 2011

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Greece - The very symbol of illegitimate debt

The Greek public debt made the headlines when the country's leaders accepted the austerity measures demanded by the IMF and the European Union, sparking very significant social struggles throughout 2010. But where does this Greek debt come from? As regards the debt incurred by the private sector, the increase has been recent: the first surge came about with the integration of Greece into the eurozone in 2001.

A second debt explosion was triggered in 2007 when financial aid granted to banks by the US Federal Reserve, European governments and the European Central Bank was recycled by bankers towards Greece and other countries like Spain and Portugal. As regards public debt, the increase stretches over a longer period. In addition to the debt inherited from the dictatorship of the colonels, borrowing since the 1990s has served to fill the void created in public finances by lower taxation on companies and high incomes. Furthermore, for decades, many loans have financed the purchasing of military equipment, mainly from France, Germany and the United States. And one must not forget the colossal debt incurred by the public authorities for the organization of the Olympic Games in 2004. The spiraling of public debt was further fueled by bribes from major transnationals to obtain contracts, Siemens being an emblematic example.

This is why the legitimacy and legality of Greece's debts should be the subject of rigorous scrutiny, following the example of Ecuador's comprehensive audit commission of public debts in 2007-2008. Debts defined as illegitimate, odious or illegal would be declared null and void and Greece could refuse to repay, while demanding that those who contracted these debts be brought to justice. Some encouraging signs from Greece indicate that the re-challenging of debt has become a central issue and the demand for an audit commission is gaining ground.

Factors proving the illegitimacy of Greece's public debt

Firstly, there is the debt contracted by the military dictatorship and which quadrupled between 1967 and 1974. This obviously qualifies as odious debt [1].

Following on, we have the Olympic Games scandal of 2004. According to Dave Zirin, when the government proudly announced to Greek citizens in 1997 that Greece would have the honour of hosting the Olympic Games seven years hence, the authorities of Athens and the International Olympic Committee planned on spending 1.3 billion dollars. A few years later, the cost had increased fourfold to 5.3 billion dollars. Just after the Games, the official cost had reached 14.2 billion dollars. [2] Today, according to different sources, the real cost is over 20 billion dollars.

Many contracts signed between the Greek authorities and major private foreign companies have been the subject of scandal for several years in Greece. These contracts have led to an increase in debt. Here are some examples which have made the main news in Greece:

- several contracts were signed with the German transnational Siemens, accused - both by the German as well as the Greek courts - of having paid commissions and other bribes to various political, military and administrative Greek officials amounting to almost one billion euros. The top executive of the firm Siemens-Hellas, [3] who admitted to having "financed" the two main Greek political parties, fled in 2010 to Germany and the German courts rejected Greece's demand for extradition. These scandals include the sales, made by Siemens and their international associates, of Patriot antimissile systems (1999, 10 million euros in bribes), the digitalization of the OTE - the Hellenic Telecommunications Organization - telephone centres (bribes of 100 million euros), the "C41" security system bought on the occasion of the 2004 Olympics and which never worked, sales of equipment to the Greek railway (SEK), of the Hermes telecommunications system to the Greek army, of very expensive equipment sold to Greek hospitals.

- the scandal of German submarines (produced by HDW, later taken over by Thyssen) for a total value of 5 billion euros, submarines which from the beginning had the defect of listing to the left (!) and which were equipped with faulty electronics. A judicial enquiry on possible charges (of corruption) against the former defence ministers is currently under way.

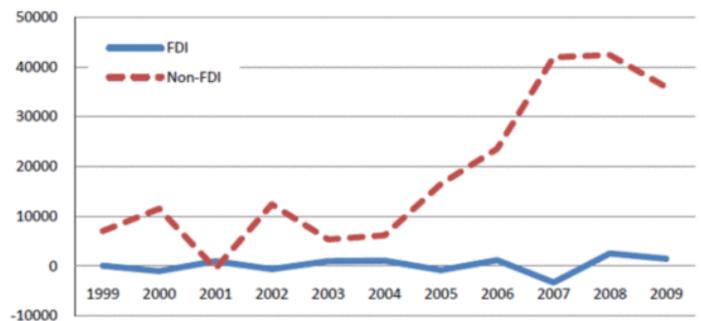
It is absolutely reasonable to presume that the debts incurred to clinch these deals are founded in illegitimacy, if not illegality. They must be cancelled.

Beside the above-mentioned cases, one must also consider the recent evolution of the Greek debt.

The rapid rise in debt over the last decade

Debt in the private sector has largely developed over the decade of the noughties. Households, to whom the banks and the whole private commercial sector (mass distribution, the automobile and construction industries, etc.) offered very tempting conditions, went massively into debt, as did the non-financial companies and the banks which

could borrow at low cost (low interest rates and higher inflation than for the most industrialized countries of the European Union like Germany, France, the Benelux countries and Great Britain). This private debt was the driving force of the Greek economy. The Greek banks (and the Greek branches of foreign banks), thanks to a strong euro, could expand their international activities and cheaply finance their national activities. They took out loans by the dozen. The chart below shows that Greece's accession to the eurozone in 2001 has boosted an inflow of financial capital, which can be in the form of loans or portfolio investments (Non-FDI in the chart, i.e. inflows which do not correspond to long term investments) while the long term investments (FDI- Foreign Direct Investment) have remained stagnant.

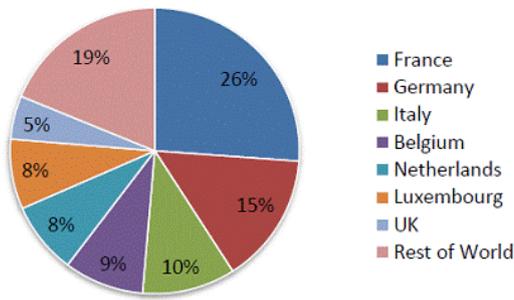


In \$ million. Source: IMF [4]

With the vast amounts of liquidity made available by the central banks in 2007-2009, the Western European banks (above all the German and French banks, but also the Belgian, Dutch, British, Luxembourg and Irish banks) lent extensively to Greece (to the private sector and to the public authorities). One must also take into account that the accession of Greece to the euro bolstered the faith of Western European bankers who thought that the big European countries would come to their aid in case of a problem. They did not worry about Greece's ability to repay the capital lent in the medium term. The bankers considered that they could take very high risks in Greece. History seems to have proved them right up to that point. The European Commission and, in particular, the French and German governments have given their unflinching support to the private banks of Western Europe. In doing so, the European governments have placed their own public finances in a parlous state.

In the chart below we see that the countries of Western Europe first increased their loans to Greece between December 2005 and March 2007 (during this period, the volume of loans grew by 50%, from less than 80 billion to 120 billion dollars). After the subprime crisis started in the United States, the loans increased dramatically once again (+33%) between June 2007 and the summer of 2008 (from 120 to 160 billion dollars). Then they stayed at a very high level (about 120 billion dollars). This means that the private banks of Western Europe used the money which was lent in vast quantities and at low cost by the European

Central Bank and the US Federal Reserve in order to increase their own loans to countries such as Greece. [5] Over there, where the rates were higher, they could make juicy profits. Private banks are therefore in large part responsible for Greece's excessive debt.



Evolution of Western European banks' exposure to Greece (in billion dollars)

Source: BIS consolidated statistics, ultimate risk basis [6]

As shown in the chart below, Greek debts are overwhelmingly held by European banks, mostly French, German, Italian, Belgian, Dutch, Luxembourg and British banks.

Foreign holders (almost exclusively foreign banks and other financial companies) of Greek debt securities (end of 2008) [7]

Greek citizens have every right to expect the debt burden to be radically reduced, which means that the bankers must be forced to write off debts from their ledgers.

The odious attitude of the European Commission

After the crisis broke, the military-industrial lobby supported by the German and French governments and the European Commission saw to it that hardly a dent was made in the defense budget while at the same time, the PASOK (Socialist Party) government set about trimming social spending (see the box on austerity measures below). Yet at the beginning of 2010, at the height of the Greek crisis, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Prime Minister of Turkey, a country which has a tense relationship with its Greek neighbour, visited Athens and proposed a 20% cut in the military budget of both countries. The Greek government failed to grab the line thrown to them. They were under pressure from the French and German authorities who were anxious to safeguard their weapons exports. In proportion to the size of its economy, Greece spends far more on armaments than the other EU countries. Greek military spending represents 4% of its GDP, as compared to 2.4% for France, 2.7% for the United Kingdom, 2.0% for Portugal, 1.4% for Germany, 1.3% for Spain, and 1.1% for Belgium. [8]

In 2010, Greece bought six frigates (2.5 billion euros) and armed helicopters (400 million euros) from France. From Germany it bought six submarines for 5 billion euros. Between 2005 and 2009, Greece was one of Europe's five largest

weapons importers. The purchase of fighter aircraft alone accounted for 38% of its import volume, with, for instance, the purchase of sixteen F-16 (from the United States) and twenty-five Mirage 2000 (from France) – the latter contract amounting to 1.6 billion euros. The list of French equipment sold to Greece goes on: armoured vehicles (70 VBL), NH90 helicopters, MICA, Exocet and Scalp missiles as well as Sperwer drones. Greece's purchases have made it the third biggest client of the French military industry over the past decade. [9]

From 2010, increasingly high interest rates charged by bankers and other players in the financial markets, supported by the European Commission and the IMF, have triggered the usual "snowball effect" : the Greek debt has followed an upward trend as the country's authorities take out loans in order to repay interest (and part of the previously borrowed capital).

The loans granted as from 2010 to Greece by EU member countries and the IMF will not serve the interests of the Greek people - quite the opposite. The austerity measures implemented entail numerous infringements of the people's social rights. On that grounds, [10] the notion of "illegitimate debt" should be applied and its repayment contested.

Infringement of social rights and neo-liberal measures implemented in Greece since 2010

Reduction of public sector wages by 20 to 30 %. Cuts in nominal wages that could reach 20%, 13th and 14th month salaries replaced by an annual lump sum, the amount of which varies according to wages. A freeze on wages over the next 3 years. In the public sector, 4 out of 5 workers who retire will not be replaced. In the private sector, massive wage cuts up to 25%.

Unemployment benefits have been cut, and a poverty support scheme implemented in 2009 has been suspended. Drastic cuts in benefits for large families.

Plans to end collective bargaining and impose individualized contracts instead. The existing practice of extended very low paid or even unpaid internships has been legalized. Resorting to temporary workers is now permitted in the public sector.

Employment

Drastic cuts in subsidies to municipalities, leading to mass lay-offs of workers. Sacking of 10,000 workers under fixed term contracts in the public sector. Public companies showing a loss to be closed down.

Taxes

Increase in indirect taxation (VAT raised from 19% to 23% and special taxes on fuels, alcohol and tobacco introduced). Increase from 11% to 13% of the lower VAT rate (this concerns staple goods,

electricity, water, etc.). Increased income tax for the middle brackets, but reduced corporate tax.

Privatizations

Intention to privatize the ports, airports, railways, water and electricity supply, the financial sector and the lands owned by the State.

Pension schemes

Pensions are to be cut and then frozen. The legal retirement age has been increased, the number of years' contributions required to be entitled to full pension benefits will be set at 40 in 2015 up from 37, and the amount of pension will be calculated on the average wages of the total working years and no longer on the last pay. For retired workers in the private sectors, the 13th and 14th month pension payments have been abolished. Spending related to pension has been capped to a maximum level of 2.5% of GDP.

Public transport fares

Price of all public transport fares increased by 30%.

The demand for an audit is gathering momentum

In December 2010, the independent MP Sophia Sakorafa made a speech in the Greek Parliament proposing the creation of a Parliamentary Commission to audit the Greek public debt. This proposal attracted a great deal of attention. [11] Sophia Sakorafa, who was a member of the government party PASOK until a few months ago, voted against the 2011 budget [12] partly because of the heavy debt repayments. When justifying her brave position, she extensively referred to the audit carried out in Ecuador in 2007-2008 which resulted in a significant reduction of the country's debt. She proposed that Greece should follow the Ecuadorian example and asserted that there was an alternative to submitting to creditors, whether IMF or bankers. In making her case she placed stress on the "odious debt" that should not be repaid. This stance was widely covered by the media. Again in the Greek parliament, the leader of Synaspismos (one of the radical left parties) Alexis Tsipras also asked for an audit commission to be set up "so that we know which part of the debt is odious, illegitimate and illegal." Greek public opinion is changing and the media are watching.

On 5 December 2010, a leading Greek daily published an op-ed by the Greek economist Costas Lapavistas entitled: "International Audit Commission on the Greek Debt: an Imperative Request". In his conclusion, the author writes: "The international commission will have a privileged scope of activity in our country. You only need to think about the debt agreements made with Goldman Sachs's mediation or intended to finance the purchase of weapons to see how badly an independent audit is needed. If they are proved to be odious or illegal, these debts will thus be declared null and our country could refuse to repay

them, while taking the people who incurred them to court."

On 3 March 2011, Economists, activists, academics and parliamentarians from across the world have supported a call to audit Greece's public debts. The call demands the establishment of a public commission to examine the legality and legitimacy of debts with a view to dealing with them as well holding those responsible for unjust debts to account. There is widespread anger in Greece because debt has ballooned since the crisis of 2007-9. There is also belief that the debt is unsustainable and that austerity measures are forcing the poorest in society to pay for the economic problems caused by the crisis. The Greek campaign for a public audit has obvious importance for Ireland, Portugal, and Spain, and could lead to broader European action against debt. Trade unions, several political parties and many intellectuals support this proposal as a means of finding a solution to debt through cancellation on the one hand, and penalization of companies and people responsible for this illegitimate debt on the other. It should be noted that a Greek anti-debt committee was set up in 2010. [13] These elements are encouraging. 2011 could mark the start of a welcome change as regards the Left's ability to devise solutions to resist the diktat of creditors.

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NOTES

[1] According to Alexander Sack, who theorized the doctrine of odious debt, "If a despotic power incurs a debt not for the needs or in the interest of the State, but to strengthen its despotic regime, to repress the population that fights against it, etc, this debt is odious to the population of all the State. This debt is not an obligation for the nation; it is a regime's debt, a personal debt of the power that has incurred it, consequently it falls with the fall of this power" (Sack, 1927). For a concise overview, see (in French) "La dette odieuse ou la nullité de la dette", a contribution to the second seminar on International law and Debt organized by CADTM in Amsterdam in December 2002, <http://www.cadtm.org/La-dette-odieuse-ou-la-nullite-de>. See also "Topicality of the odious debt doctrine", <http://www.cadtm.org/Topicality-of-the-odious-debt,3515> and <http://www.cadtm.org/Topicality-of-the-odious-debt>

[2] Dave Zirin, "The Great Olympics Scam, Cities Should Just Say No", www.counterpunch.org/zirin07052005.html : "But for those with shorter memories, one need only look to the 2004 Summer Games in Athens, which gutted the Greek economy. In 1997 when Athens "won" the games, city leaders and the International Olympic Committee estimated a cost of 1.3 billion. When the actual detailed planning was done, the price jumped to \$5.3 billion. By the time the Games were over, Greece had spent some \$14.2 billion, pushing the country's budget deficit to record levels."

[3] See a detailed summary of the Siemens-Hellas scandal at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/14433472/Siemens-Scandal-Siemens-Hellas> . The charges made by the German courts against Siemens were so undeniable that in order to avoid a sentence in due form, the company agreed to pay a fine of 201 million euros to the German authorities in October 2007. The scandal has tarnished Siemens's image to such an extent that, in an attempt to redress the situation, the transnational company conspicuously announces on its web page that it has contributed 100 million euros to an anti-corruption fund. See : http://www.siemens.com/sustainability/en/compliance/collective_action/integrity_initiative.php

[4] Taken from C. Lapavitsas, A. Kaltenbrunner, G. Lambrinidis, D. Lindo, J. Meadway, J. Michell, J.P. Paineira, E. Pires, J. Powell, A. Stenfors, N. Teles : "The eurozone between austerity and default", September 2010. <http://www.researchonmoneyandfinance.org/media/reports/RMF-Eurozone-Austerity-and-Default.pdf>

[5] The same occurred at the time for Portugal, Spain, and countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

[6] Taken from C. Lapavitsas et al., op. cit.

[7] Taken from C. Lapavitsas et al., op. cit. According to the BIS in December 2009, the French banks owned 31 billion dollars of the Greek public debt, the German banks 23 billion dollars.

[8] 2009 figures. Among the NATO members, only the United States spends more than Greece (4.7%) in proportion to its GDP.

[9] Some of the data mentioned is taken from François Chesnais, "Répudiation des dettes publiques européennes !" in *Revue Contretemps* n°7, 2010, which is itself based on the data of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), www.sipri.org/yearbook

[10] At least one argument can be added for that new debt to be declared illegitimate or void, and it goes as follows: for a contract between two parties to be valid, according to Common Law, the principle of contractual autonomy, of the voluntary consent of both parties, must be fully respected, meaning that each party to the contract must be in a position to say no or refuse any clauses of the contract which go against its interests. When in March-April 2010 the financial

markets started to blackmail Greece and when then the European Commission and the IMF united to impose draconian conditions on Greece (very harsh austerity measures that infringe social and economic rights), it can be considered that Greece was not really in a position to exert its autonomy and refuse them.

[11] See <http://tvxs.gr/node/73861/450287>

[13] See its website <http://www.contra-xreos.gr/>. This committee joined the CADTM international network in December 2010.

Portugal - Precarious generation on the march

300,000 on the streets

Bloco de Esquerda

On Saturday 12 March 2011, shouting "With casualised jobs there can be no freedom!" 200,000 people gathered in Lisbon and 80,000 in Porto. The protests marked an extraordinary mobilisation that spread to all 11 other cities across the country, and even to other European countries.

In Lisbon, a sea of people which never stopped growing filled the Avenida da Liberdade, from the Marques de Pombal Square to the Rossio.

Participation in the demonstration of the "breadline generation" far exceeded the numbers originally expected, with about 300 000 people taking part across the country, said Lusa Paula Gil, one of the organisers. "Hopefully it is the first step in a participatory democracy in Portugal," he said.

Thousands of people in several cities joined the protest of "the casualised generation," convened by four youths, in protest against the lack of a future for young people in Portugal. The announcement of the numbers participating to the crowds in Rossio Square, Lisbon, was accompanied by cries of "the street is ours".

The "ant on the path," a song by Zeca Afonso and a commercial slogan of a supermarket chain were taken up by the organizers of the protest of the "Generation of junk." The two songs were adapted to sing as the main theme of the demonstration and resistance. The songs were sung as a rap while leaflets were handed to the demonstrators outlining the criticisms of the current system and proposals for change. Then three of the organizers read the manifesto. First Alexandre Carvalho, with a red rose in hand, followed after John and Paula Gil Labrincha.

Jel and Falâncio, from the group Homens da Luta whose song the "The Struggle is Joy" is Portugal's entry to the Eurovision song contest, attended the event and were joined by singer and composer Fernando Tordo, who joined the group at Avenida da Liberdade.

On the street there were several generations, whole families or single persons, all sharing the

idea that "the country is on the junk," as read the banner that led the march in Lisbon.

In Porto, the size of the crowd forced a plan B to bypass the protest parade on Avenue of the Allies. The demonstration was scheduled to end in square D. João I, but the influx of people was so great that the participants of all ages, went to the Avenue of the Allies, which had an extensive platform of speakers. One of the most exciting moments came when a 25 year-old sang the words of a song made famous by Simone de Oliveira who won the Eurovision Song Contest in 1969.

In Coimbra a diversity of generations that came together marked the event. Students, teachers, parents or siblings of threatened workers, were taking turns to speak at Republic Square,. By mid-afternoon, they began a march chanting the slogan raised during the Portuguese revolution of 1974 : "The people united will never be defeated."

Hundreds of young people spontaneously joined the march in Rossio Square. André Carvalho, 18, told the Portuguese news channel why he was there: "Now I am carrying the weight of books on my back, but I want to contribute, as I can, so that tomorrow I will not have to carry on my back the burden of unemployment."

The protests spread to seven other cities like Faro (6000 people), Leiria (500 people), Guimaraes, Braga (over 2 000 people), Castelo Branco (200 people), Funchal and Ponta Delgada (400 people).

In other European cities, young immigrants have joined protests in front of Portuguese embassies in London, Barcelona and The Hague.

Deolinda, the band, whose song "Parva que sou" expresses the hopelessness of the young, poor and unemployed, sympathized with the protest of the "generation of junk, announced through Facebook that they would be present" in consciousness. The group members were on their way to Galicia for a concert.

This is the manifesto under which the march was convened:

The Precarious Generation Manifesto

We, unemployed, "five hundred-eurists" and other underpaid workers, disguised slaves, those who are underemployment or on fixed term contracts, self employed, casual workers, trainees, scholarship holders, working students, students, mothers, fathers and young people of Portugal.

We, who have up to now been complacent about the conditions imposed upon us, stand here, today, to contribute to a qualitative change in our country. We stand here, today, because we can no longer accept the situation that we have been dragged into. We stand here, today, because every day, we strive hard to be deemed worthy of a dignified future, with stability and safety in all areas of our lives.

We protest so that those responsible for our uncertain situation – politicians, employers, and

ourselves – act together towards a rapid change in this reality that has become unsustainable.

Otherwise:

a) The present is betrayed because we are not given the chance to show our potential, thus blocking the improvement of the country's social and economic conditions. The aspirations of a whole generation, which cannot prosper, are wasted.

b) The past is insulted, because previous generations have worked hard for our rights, our access to education, our security, labour rights and our freedom. Decades of effort, investment and dedication, risk being compromised.

c) The future is mortgaged, and we foresee it without quality education for all and no fair retirement pensions for those who have worked their whole lives. The resources and skills that could put the country back on track of economic success will be wasted.

We are the highest-qualified generation in the history of our country. So do not let us down with the prospect of exhaustion, frustration or lack of future perspectives. We do believe we have all the resources and tools to provide a bright future for our country and ourselves.

This is not a protest against other generations. Quite simply, we are not, nor do we want to, wait passively for problems to sort themselves out. We protest because we want a solution, and we want to be part of it.

↳ *Bloco de Esquerda is a radical left political party in Portugal formed in 2000 as a coalition of the formerly Maoist UDP; Política XX1, a current that had left the Communist Party; and the PSR, Portuguese section of the Fourth International. Today it is a recognised political party with elected representatives in the national and European parliaments.*

Portugal - Against the marriage of convenience

On Wednesday 23rd March the Portuguese Prime Minister, Socialist Party member Jose Socrates, resigned after opposition parties overwhelmingly rejected his last-ditch round of austerity measures aimed at preventing the Portuguese economy, considered the weakest in the eurozone, from plunging into chaos. All the opposition parties united to defeat the government's proposals in a parliamentary vote. The question now is what will be proposed on the forthcoming elections, to be held in May or June. A proposal for a broad Socialist Party (PS)-Social Democratic Party (PSD) (centre-right) coalition is being discussed. Francisco Louçã, national spokesperson for the Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc) stated "The solution for the country is not to put together the PS and PSD to implement IMF policies and impoverish workers, pensioners and casualised youth,"

and said that elections in such conditions would "defraud the electors".

The choice is not between the austerity of the PS, with or without 'D' or with or without the CDS. The choice is between the deficit and the people, between jobs and usury, between economic growth and recession.

Europe has been agreeing a new austerity package. Empress Merkel presented it to the world as a pact for competitiveness and it was baptised with the name of the Euro-Zone Stability Pact. Any similarity with the electoral program of both of Portugal's main political forces, increasingly referred to as the 'central block' (should that perchance not be the right-wing block?!) is of course purely coincidental.

The blackmail has started and the threats are building up. Appeals for a coalition between the Socialist Party and the Social Democratic Party, with or without the right-wing CDS, are growing. From within both parties voices have called for such an agreement but also several contenders are emerging as potential best man at this marriage of convenience, such as veteran ex-President Mario Soares, former Socialist Party ministers Luis Amado and Antonio Vitorino, and leading right-wing PSD figures Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa and Alberto Joao Jardim.

Recently-resigned Socialist Party Prime Minister José Socrates has no program beyond austerity. He has made a promise to carry it out; that's what happened in Brussels, where he voted to approve the agreement on Euro-Zone Stability. The latest of his four rejected austerity programmes included many elements of that agreement. They constitute an attack on the people and the economy, with wage controls, the adoption of limits on public debt in national legislation, an increase in the retirement age to relate it to life expectancy together with harmonisation of corporate taxes, etc. . . . It is a commitment that in the future will make Portugal and Europe even more unequal and which will further reduce social protection. It is also the highway to a prolonged recession.

PSD leader Passos Coelho has written a statement to the international markets. He wrote it in English but his intended audience was German; he wanted to show that that his austerity programme is not so different from that of Socrates. The contradictions in his promises are in plain view and demonstrate the same subservience to the will of Merkel. He had said that he would not touch the level of VAT, but now promises to increase it by 25%. And after the PSD had voted against the Programme for Stability and Growth IV in the National Assembly, Passos Coelho was in Brussels saying that such a plan would serve as the basis of his own programme.

The PS will talk of the danger of the right taking power, but it is with the right that it wants to stay in government after the elections. The PSD will say that the PS is incompetent, but plans to follow the

same policies and has no qualms about achieving the great majority which former Finance Minister Teixeira dos Santos has called for. PSD President Cavaco Silva has already met with the parties and is set to propose elections by early June. He is yearning for that great central block between the PS and PSD.

The scenario is becoming clearer with each day that passes. Cavaco, the PS and the right want a strong government to impose austerity. The left is mobilising itself to fight that austerity at the ballot box. The choice is not between the austerity of the PS, with or without 'D' or with or without the right-wing CDS. The choice is between the deficit and the people, between jobs and usury, between economic growth and recession. No one on the left can shirk this fight!

March 25, 2011

„ Pedro Filipe Soares is a member of parliament and the member of the Left Bloc leadership.

Britain - Massive demonstration in London against government austerity

The largest political demonstration in Britain in a decade happened in London on March 26th. Estimate range from 250 000 to 400 000 people taking part in the March for the Alternative organised by the national union federation, the Trades Union Congress (TUC). Coming almost a full year after the election of a Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition which has been clear right from the start about its determination to cut public spending by £81bn you can't accuse the TUC of being hasty.



The cuts are class warfare. £7bn is being cut from welfare and social security spending. Local government is having its budget reduced by up to 9% in some areas and all the data show that the poorer an area is the more money it will lose. This translates into cuts in spending for the young, the elderly and the vulnerable. It also means tens of thousands of job losses in the heavily unionised public sector.

The demonstration itself proved that the unions are able to organise massive numbers of people in a way that no other social force can. Coaches and trains brought trade unionists, families and groups of friends from all over England, Scotland and Wales. It was demonstration with the organised labour movement at its heart. Missing perhaps were large numbers of the people who use the libraries, swimming pools and youth clubs which are being closed. It felt like the majority of those there were the public service providers.

The Coalition of Resistance, which has the support of unions like UNITE and the UCU, as well as the People's Charter and the Right to Work campaign, has been putting out the message that all cuts must be opposed as we are not responsible for the debt, and that mass action by trade unions, local anti-cuts groups and community organisations can force the government to retreat. The placards of the Coalition with the simple message of "no cuts" were to be seen everywhere on the demonstration.

Much of the subsequent press coverage concentrated on a small number of actions by handfuls of people. These fell into two categories. The first was an organised, marginal anarchist intervention which sought conflict with the police and attacked a few shops and banks. The second was evidence of a new radicalisation. UK Uncut specialises in peaceful propaganda stunts in the premises of firms like Vodafone which avoid paying their full tax bill. Their direct action tactics are gaining in popularity and have begun to inspire imitators.

The demonstration has presented the unions' bureaucratic leaderships with a problem. 165,000 jobs in local councils and 50,000 in the NHS are going under the axe. Many of these jobs will cease to exist just days after demonstration as tens of thousands are made redundant. The national unions fear having their funds confiscated and the anti-union laws so much that they will organise no national action. At the moment there are only a few isolated ballots for strikes. We can't win with such a low level of strike action. You might "win the argument", but that does not stop the Tories' plans.

The bureaucratic leaderships are willing to sacrifice tens of thousands of their members' jobs rather than put up a real fight. The link between the unions and the Labour Party is now the most effective means of controlling working class militancy in workplaces even though the evidence from recent elections is showing that working class people are voting Labour as a protective reflex. However the leadership of both the Labour Party and many unions hold the view that industrial action to protect jobs and services will be electorally damaging. Not just that. If workers acquire a habit of fighting for their own interests against the Con Dems they will probably be willing to do it against Labour councils and a future Labour government which will have its own programme of cuts.

The Con Dems will be demanding even more job losses, pay cuts, destruction and privatisation of public services in the very near future. The inertia of the TUC meant that our class entered the ring and was hammered all through round one. We have to learn from this experience. The demonstration was a display of the strength of organised workers and the fact that millions of other people are looking for them to take action which is at least as bold and decisive as that of the Con Dems.

There are some things those that want to defeat the government should insist the TUC do:

It must mobilise support for every group of workers who take any sort of action to defend jobs, salaries, pensions or working conditions. It has to do this with at least the same determination that the Con Dems are bringing to the fight. This means that it does basic things like organising speaking tours and encouraging branches to make solidarity donations when industrial action takes place.

It has to explain to union branches the importance of making links with communities and service users who are being hit by the cuts. This is something it has abjectly failed to do but is something any leadership worth its salt should be pushing hard.

The TUC decision of their September Congress that there should be "nationally co-ordinated action" against the cuts must be implemented without delay.

It has to launch a major campaign in defence of pension provision in the public sector and for an uplift in private sector pension provision. This is something that will affect every working person in the country and could put the TUC at the forefront of the fight against what the ruling class is trying to do. On this issue it is still skulking in the changing room.

None of these are particularly radical things to ask for. They are an absolute bottom line around which the largest possible unity can be built and which just might see the working class movement start round two of the fight looking like it has remembered what it is supposed to do when the bell rings. If the movement loses on the cuts in local government now, then it will set in demoralisation and despair making defeat over the governments other attacks – such as their plans to destroy the National Health service and the major attacks on pensions – even more likely.

Billy Curtis, a supporter of Socialist Resistance, wrote this report for *La Gauche*, the newspaper of the Revolutionary Communist League in Belgium.

Economic crisis - The crisis of capitalism is used as a pretext to attack collective rights

The systemic crisis of capitalism puts on the agenda draconian measures which are supposed to

make it possible for the capitalists to restore their rate of profit. The counter-reform of pensions in France is just one illustration of this policy. It sums up the economic objectives (to make the workers and the people pay for the crisis) and the social and political objectives (looking for consensus, for ways to get the victims themselves or their representatives to accept such counter-reforms).

Under the whip of the crisis

In the workplaces, the employers have for a long time now been advancing in two directions. On the one hand, they multiply attacks against all the gains that have been won in the course of social struggles throughout the industrialized countries. On the other hand, in the name of the crisis, they try to get accepted, to even make legitimate in the eyes of the workers themselves, these elements of social regression.

Unable to deal with the repeated crises of the system from the end of the 1970s onwards, the bourgeoisie sought ways of re-establishing its profit margins. No tactic was ruled out, depending on the gravity of the situation and the character of national politics in each country. In the Anglo-Saxon countries (the United States, Britain) the choice was for the "strong" manner, the ultraliberal policies of Reagan and Thatcher, with simultaneously privatizations and fierce repression of the trade union movement. Elsewhere it was the presence of social democracy in the government (with alliances more or less red or green) that was used as a Trojan horse, against the European working classes in particular.

Although it is all social gains that are the target of the attacks of the national bourgeoisies, the offensive has concentrated on a policy of restructurations on a world scale as the essential tool to drive down the cost of labour.

The crises of the capitalist system are generally the occasion and the result of a phase of reorganization of production on an increasingly international scale, with as a result a redistribution of sites of production across the world. This can obviously be combined with temporary overproduction in the long term in this or that sector.

The crisis of the iron and steel industry from 1960 to 1980 thus led to the virtual disappearance of the industry in France and in Europe, with specialization and modernization of sites which led to tens of thousands of job losses. The fact that there was a strong trade-union presence and the emblematic character of this industry for organized labour led to great efforts being made to avoid social explosions. The injection of millions of francs, massive subsidies from the European Community and from national governments, the creation of industries capable of at least partially providing a substitute in terms of employment did not, certainly, prevent massive and violent struggles, but it limited the extent of the political consequences. At the end of the day,

nationalizations made it possible to respond to the objective of the end of the crisis: nationalization of losses and privatization of profits.

The paradox of the situation lies in the fact that the car industry - then still in full expansion, with the creation of new sites and more jobs - is a sector that is at the heart of the present crisis. This is expressed in the multiplication, over a period of years, of restructurations of the industry, accompanied by closing down sites and laying off workers.

But having had their fingers burnt by the strength of the first reactions to the brutal closure of the Renault factory at Vilvoorde in Belgium, the economic and social strategists of the industry tried to refine their strategy. They are not the only ones to have worked on this question, but the industry is a particularly significant testing ground for the strategies implemented.

For countries like France, which have a relatively autonomous trade union movement, less linked to political parties while being situated within a network of laws and collective agreements that frame social relations, socio-economic consensuses are still largely dependent on the relationships of forces which can be built during powerful confrontations of a local or national nature, at the level of an industry or an enterprise. The mobilizations around the oil refineries last year and in the framework of the movement against pension reform and the many battles against lay-offs and site closures in recent years have been a permanent illustration of this.

In France, legislation has evolved considerably over the years. From 1973 - the beginning of the economic crisis - it was the employee who was recognized as the main victim and the law of July 13, 1973 established the obligation of a "real and serious cause" in order to be able to lay an employee off, whatever the reason for the dismissal, economic or disciplinary. Before this law, it was up to the employee to show that the employer had acted abusively. So it was now up to the employer to provide "evidence" beforehand. The search for higher productivity, better organization, and better management was no longer accepted as a reason. Only serious economic difficulties justified a lay-off. The search for alternative work for the employee was a prerequisite for dismissal, whatever the number of employees laid off and the size of the company. Employers sought to circumvent these obligations by a considerable development of voluntary redundancies and of negotiations which made it possible to escape from the law covering the dismissal of employees.

The Aubry law "legalised" the obligation of seeking alternative employment: the procedure of dismissal is null and void if the social plan does not "correspond to the regulations in force" and any dismissals announced within the application of the plan are also null and void. This "administrative authorisation of dismissal" has since been replaced

by control by a judge, in particular in the event of lay-offs.

How to circumvent legislative or conventional rules?

The European and even world dimension of the restructurations that are taking place raises on the same level the strategic questions of the workers' movement. It also permanently opens the possibility of "contagion" of mobilizations within the same geographical framework. The closure of a factory of 250 workers at Valéo in Korea led to inexhaustible social guerrilla warfare outside the company's head offices and at its many sites in France, where the head office which directs this gigantic industrial and social game of Monopoly is situated. It is this spectre which nourishes and justifies the employers' thinking. And their ever more exacerbated and renewed drive to muzzle the workers' movement. And that is what employers are getting down to with imagination and determination.

So we have seen the birth and the development in recent years of a new tactic by the employers': consultation of the workers. The ideological gibberish which covers these practices varies. Two ideas are used as justification for their development. The first falls under the logic of the individualization of the relationship between employers and workers. Instead of the work contract being based on collective rights, it is now a question of establishing a relationship of "equality", an equitable contract between the employer and the employee. When the employer cannot provide the employee with any more work, he can lay them off without any more ado. This is the direction in which all of labour legislation is evolving, with in particular the installation of the procedure of negotiated rupture of contract, which is a considerable "success", making it possible for employers to avoid any dispute.

The other idea, related to the concept of individualization of the work contract, tends to put the employee in a situation of having to decide in isolation. There is no longer any need to be encumbered with bodies representative of the personnel and even less trade unions which claim to defend collective rights. More especially as in the most favourable cases the employers will also manage to create conflict, sometimes frontal, between trade unions and workers.

Over the last few years powerful and radical workers' mobilizations, built with the trade unions of the companies concerned, have seemed to push back the employers' inclinations to get workers and trade-union organizations to share responsibility for social regression. In France, the workers of New Fabris, Continental, Sodimatex and PTPM rediscovered the forms of struggle of those of Cellatex and Metaleurop who, by threatening to pollute a whole region, had obtained from public authorities and/or employers conditions of dismissal or closure of sites which were undoubtedly better than the legal requirements. Even though all these battles could not prevent

the closure of the sites, they spread a climate of revolt that was worrying for employers and the government.

To try to avoid these fightbacks, whose coordination or extension could become dangerous, the employers' strategy evolved further. Progressive closures, spread out in time, announced several months, even years in advance, promises of partial takeovers of sites: it was a question of instilling anxiety and division among workers, to prepare the ground for acceptance of economic "fate", for renouncement of revolt. So company managements subsequently inaugurated a strategy aimed at winning approval of social regression by the workers themselves, in particular through "direct" consultation of workers or by a referendum.

In another field, the attack conducted by Manuel Valls, mayor of Evry and leading member of the French Socialist Party, against the 35-hour week, illustrates once again the permanent drive of employers to obtain deregulation of working time. For years the daily, weekly and annual limitations on working time have been under discussion between the European Commission, the Parliament and the European Council. Certain governments, in particular that of Britain, seek to get approved on the European level the possibilities of going beyond the present maximum (10 hours a day, 48 hours a week). But faced with the opposition, even timid, of the European Trade Union Confederation, their objective is apparently more modest but quite as dangerous. The idea is to generalize the provision known as "opt out" [1].

The essential problem for national governments remains the possibility of obtaining exemption from the 48-hour weekly maximum in certain delicate sectors, like health or security services. Following the example of a former proposal for revision, which remained a dead letter, a new directive could authorize the member states to evaluate the respect of the 48 hours maximum per week starting from an average calculated over twelve months, and no longer over four months. This new form of annualisation, taking into account the holiday periods, would in practice soften the 48 hours weekly maximum. The employers could thus organize working time according to the peaks of demand in the year.

The Commission is also thinking about an industry by industry approach to working time and workers' safety in order to adapt the legislation in the cases of the professions related to health and civil protection. These possibilities of exemption could be supplemented by the development of the "opt out". This provision, made possible by community legislation, on a contractual basis between the employer and the employee, was obtained by the United Kingdom, where employers fiercely defend its maintenance. This is leading to a real individualization of working time, escaping from all legal frameworks and conventions by "free" agreement between the employer and the

employee. The maintenance and the generalization of the "opt-out" would make it possible to increase the weekly maximum work period to 60 hours and would make 48 hours a European norm and not a maximum. The "flexicurity" so highly praised by the European authorities and the national governments could develop at full speed.

Overall, the two pillars of the work contract, which are working time and wages, are right at the centre of the employers' attacks. These attacks are multiform - from the traditional forms of lockout and blackmail through threats of closure - but with a drive to circumvent legality, collective agreements, workers representation and the trade unions, while seeking to get social regression accepted by the workers themselves.

Some examples

1. Bosch.

The first important example in France concerned the Bosch factory in Venissieux, in the suburbs of Lyons, where 820 workers agreed in 2004 to give up the 35-hour week, to lose six days (out of twenty) of extra holidays, without wage compensation, to no longer be paid for the bank holidays of Ascension and Pentecost, to have their wages kept "moderate" for three years, to reduce extra payments for night work. All of this in exchange for the installation of a new production line. Faced with the threat of losing their jobs, 98 per cent of the workers accepted these measures in order for there to be a reduction of 12 per cent of wage costs.

The Bosch group had decided to invest in the manufacture of new pumps in the Puglia region of Italy (where aid from Europe and the Italian government is cumulative) and in Jihlava in the Czech Republic (where labour is cheap). The wages in Venissieux are higher than on the other sites of the group: 1,400 euros net per month. Whereas labour costs are 22 euros per hour in Lyons, they fall to 13 euros per hour in Bari (Puglia) and 4.40 in Jihlava. The president of the board of Bosch, Franz Ferhenbach, then proposed: "Lower your wage costs and become attractive". The blackmail of management concerning the investment was effective, recognized the representative of the CGT who was opposed to the agreement: "The workers really believed that if they did not agree to give up their rights, Bosch would not have the means of maintaining production at the site and they would lose their jobs."

Representing 30 per cent of the personnel, the CGT had a chance to stop the process, since, to be validated, the agreement signed between the CFDT, the CGC and management had to be approved by more than 50 per cent of the personnel. "We tried to mobilize, but the pressure on the workers was too great" the CGT representative explained. To the collective blackmail over investment there followed individual blackmail, with the threat of dismissal: "whoever did not sign the modification of their contract was

to be sacked. They were afraid". In the end, only 18 workers out of 820 rejected the agreement. Twelve of the refusals concerned people close to retirement who had an interest in benefiting from severance pay. Six concerned young people.

2. Nestlé.

In January 2004, the management of Nestlé Waters France announced a plan envisaging the departure via early retirement of workers over 55 between then and April 2007, without corresponding hiring of new workers. This plan was to affect 1,047 workers in France (out of a total workforce of 4,100) including 356 out of 1,650 on the site of Vergèze in the Gard department. It threatened the 540 jobs at La Verrerie de Languedoc and announced the transfer of 250 jobs to other sites. Faced with increasingly strong competition, the logic of the company was to reduce production costs, i.e. to lay off part of the personnel and to modernize the industrial sites in order to be more competitive. At the end of July 2004, Nestlé Waters proposed a brutal plan of redundancies in exchange for the modernization of the Vergèze site. The management of the group then obtained initially the signatures of the CFDT and CFE-CGC unions. But the CGT, the union supported by a big majority of workers in the company (83 per cent of votes in elections for representatives of the personnel), was opposed to it.

The management, supported by all the local elected representatives and by the government, exerted a permanent and violent pressure on the union through the public opinion of the local population and part of the workers. In the middle of September, the management confronted the declared opposition of the CGT to its "rescue plan" and threatened to hold it responsible for the sale of the enterprise, which would mean dismantling the production sites and laying off the entire workforce. The CGT hesitated and asked for "a delay" to give its answer so as to consult its members and to convene a general meeting to decide its position. After a stormy general meeting during which the different unions clashed violently, the CGT withdrew its right of opposition and the workers in fact accepted the plan for early retirement.

3. Opel Poland.

The production of the Zafira model at Gliwice had started in 2005. In 2004, the Solidarnosc trade union, which had the support of the majority of the workforce, had signed an agreement accompanying the launching of the model: freezing wages and limitation of the wages of new recruits. Seven hundred new workers were hired, bringing to nearly 3000 the number of jobs in the factory. "Solidarnosc" had justified the acceptance of the sacrifices in these terms: "We hoped that would help the international competitiveness of our company".

As time went on the workers wanted to get management to accept that the time had come to make up for the wages they had lost. They asked for a monthly bonus of 500 zlotys gross for everyone [the equivalent of 125 euros]. The economic situation of the firm fully justified these claims and the bonus proposed made it possible to increase wages without affecting the agreement signed at the time of the launching of the Zafira. The tough negotiations that followed led twice to strike action. All of a sudden, in 2008, the world economic crisis struck. To maintain the production of the Zafira in the factory, the workers have even had to give up wage increases, including those linked to inflation. The management guaranteed the maintenance of production until July 2011 and on December 11, 2009 it promised, in return for a new wage freeze, that the enterprise would not close. All of this was supported and defended by Solidarnosc.

And in May 2010, the decision of GM to stop the production of the Zafira was brutally announced to the workers. The free trade union "August 80" of GM Gliwice drew the balance sheet of this policy in these terms: "Now they brutally announce to us the end of the production of the Zafira model - the model which has cost us everything, not forgetting our families, so many renouncements.

In the name of the safeguarding of the production of this model, our wages were frozen, our colleagues laid off. If we have decided once more to support so many renouncements, why are they taking away from us this model that is so important for our company? There is a rumour that the production of the Astra IV will be reduced by 30 per cent and there is no new model in sight. What will happen when we get to the same point as the Antwerp factory? Will we be guaranteed redundancy payments of 150,000 euros? At present the German trade unionists are starting to demand the return of the production of the Astra IV to Germany. If that continues we can expect a new loss of jobs and the return to working in two shifts."

4. Continental.

In April 2007, right in the thick of the presidential campaign, the management of the Continental factory in Clairoux seemed to be providing a pioneering example of the application of "working more to earn more" praised by Sarkozy. It proposed, by a referendum, an agreement to move to the 40-hour week, failing which the factory would be threatened with closure. The 1,210 employees, mainly blue-collar workers operating on a three-shift system and therefore working nights one week in three, narrowly rejected the proposal, by a majority of only 16 votes. A few months later, the CFTC, the majority union, signed, along with the CGC, an agreement for a 40-hour week, in exchange for 130 new workers being taken on and the promise that the site would be safe until 2012. And in March 2009 the management decided to close the site.

After several months of a radical struggle conducted through general meetings, the workers won redundancy payments and a process of lay-offs that were considerable better than those guaranteed by common law. Contacts with the workers of the German head office in Hanover led to nothing. The attempts at coordination with the workers of other factories which were involved in struggles at the time (New Fabris, Goodyear, Philips, etc.) remained in an embryonic state.

It was on Monday September 13, 2010 that the 2,500 workers of the German automobile equipment firm were invited to decide for or against the social plan which stipulated a wage freeze in 2011, a cut in the profit-sharing bonus and suppression of two days of extra holiday per annum. On the other hand, the direction of Continental promised to maintain employment in France until 2015. This plan would lead to a reduction of 8 per cent of labour costs in the French factories, according to the management. The enterprise also produces batteries for electric vehicles as well as all sorts of spare parts, which makes it the fifth-ranking supplier of automobile equipment in the world.

The French factories manufacture cases and tyre pressure gauges in Toulouse, petrol and diesel injectors and gear boxes in Foix and sensors in Boussens. Continental employs 135,000 workers in 39 countries. Its management justified the plan by explaining why it anticipated a drop in orders in 2012 and 2013. It confirmed in addition that the company was currently in good health and would end the year with a profit. Last July, Continental announced pre-tax profits for the first six months of 2010 of more than a billion euros, whereas the company had made losses in 2009. Continental, whose head office is in Hanover, Germany, is the fourth-ranking global manufacturer of tyres.

The vote was organized in the three Continental factories of Toulouse, Boussens (Haute-Garonne) and Foix (Ariège), as well as in a small commercial antenna in Rambouillet (Yvelines). The majority unions (CGT and CFDT) had called for a boycott of the consultation. But 83 per cent of the employees chose to take part in the vote, and 52 per cent of those who voted approved the plan. The two unions failed to convince the workers to boycott the consultation. But they continued to be opposed to the plan. The minority trade unions (CFTC, FO, CFE-CGC) on the other hand agreed to sign up to the plan.

5. General Motors Strasbourg.

It all started in 2008 with a first plan to "save" jobs (PSE), suppression of 168 work stations, at the moment when the American car manufacturer planned to get rid of this site specialized in the manufacture of gear boxes. One year later, General Motors, which was bankrupt, was restructured, with American federal government aid, around two entities: Motors Liquidation (!) Company - an entity for the liquidation of enterprises, to which the factory in Strasbourg was attached - and

General Motors Company, which took over Opel in particular.

In September 2009 a new PSE which suppressed 200 more work stations, with a restructuration of the company to prepare it to be sold off by the end of 2010. In February, two potential buyers announced that they were interested and the conditions of the sell-off were put under discussion in the committees of representatives of the personnel. And in June, surprise, GMC resurfaced and proposed to take over the company again, on condition of a reduction of 10 per cent of the wage bill: wages frozen for two years and only increases linked to inflation in the third year, 7 days fewer extra holidays for the shifts working unsocial hours, 15 minutes more working time per day for the "normal" shifts and suppression of the profit-sharing bonus for three years. As counterpart the group promised to maintain "a certain" level of production until 2014, with promises of investments for new production later.

This enterprise agreement had to be subject to the signature of the trade-union organizations after a referendum. The whole thing was to be settled by Wednesday July 21. The only question in the referendum was: "Do you want GMC to repurchase the enterprise?"! All the trade-union organizations (CFDT, CFTC and FO) of the enterprise called for a "Yes" vote, except the CGT whose secretary affirmed: "We will not sign. The role of a trade-union organization is not to negotiate social regression". After the result of the vote, where 70 per cent of the workers voted in favour of the plan, there began a campaign of intimidation of the CGT at the same time as there was added to the agreement the annualisation of working time, which had not been envisaged in the preliminary discussions.

The indignation and the anger of the workers and the rather tardy hesitations of the unions that had signed made the management back down. But it continued to say that the signature of the CGT was an essential condition for the repurchase of the factory by GMC. Without legal foundation, this demand was aimed only at making the only ones who dared to resist GMC capitulate, so as to discourage any possibility of a later fightback.

To obtain this signature the management, using company executives, some foremen, administrative staff and even some disoriented and anxious workers, organized a demonstration in the factory to the office of the CGT, blocking, jostling, making death threats and attacking activists and elected representatives. At that point the leadership of the CGT Metalworkers' Federation broke its silence and challenged the Ministry of Labour to put a stop to the pressures exerted on the CGT union at GMC.

Many trade unions in the industry, and even beyond, expressed their support by motions of solidarity and demands for the Ministry of Labour to put an end to the pressures. The UIMM (employers' federation for the metal industries) called on the CGT Federation to exert pressure

on the union at GMC. Everyone got in on the act of exerting pressure (the RG - special branch of the police that keeps an eye on the workers' movement, the ordinary police, the local press, and political parties from right to left). Finally the CGT refused until the end to approve the agreement but was forced to sign a text that specified: "The CGT is opposed to the measures of rationalization of labour costs contained in these agreements. That is why it reaffirms that it will not sign them. However (...), it undertakes not to contest, in any form or by any means, the contents and the implementation of these agreements from now until the end of 2013".

The need for an international fightback

If the old slogan, "the workers have no country" still remains valid today, it is urgent to bring it up to date it by the formula "workers' struggles must not stop at borders". Activists have always argued that solidarity is necessary between workers of different countries, that it is necessary to support struggles across borders. But at the time of real globalization, not only of finance and of the exploitation of natural wealth, but of the chains of production of all the big groups, it is almost every day that there is a pressing need to centralise information, to coordinate struggles so as to prevent workers of the same group or of the same industry being put into permanent competition with each other.

Faced with the game of industrial Monopoly that the big groups are engaged in, the workers cannot hope to save jobs, working conditions and now even collective rights without organizing the fightback at the transnational level. Any weakening of rights in a factory, in a country, will necessarily have consequences on all the workers of the group concerned, even the workers of an entire industry.

In spite of more or less critical statements of principle, the leaderships of the international trade unions (European Trade Union Confederation, European Metalworkers' Federation, International Metalworkers' Federation, International Trade Union Confederation, etc.) do not concretely organize the coordination of struggles. They are satisfied with their positions as trade-union bureaucrats in international institutions or in European and even international Works Councils, without being either able or willing to combat the employers' policies. Even on a national level, such coordination is not implemented by the federations concerned. The attempts of the trade unions of Total around the fight against the closing of the site of Dunkirk were quickly put a stop to by the CFDT and CGT confederations.

For all these reasons, it is not only the responsibility of combative and revolutionary activists to deal with these tasks; it is probable that for a long time they will be the only ones to take them on. The danger of nationalism, even of chauvinism, although it does not leave workers unaffected, is firmly anchored in the mentalities of the trade-union bureaucracies. Factors like

inertia, the multitude of tasks and the language barrier are not negligible problems. So we have to be determined to organise more and more meetings, at rank-and-file level, between trade-union activists of the same industry, the same group, the same chains of production, and to do it now, and not only on the day when the employers' policies strike a blow against us.

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Extract from the letter addressed on January 11, 2011 by John Monks, general secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation, to the European Commission:

"The specific charge is that the Commission officials are ignoring social dialogue and collective bargaining processes and intervening directly in the labour markets of these countries. Diktats are being issued which are designed to lower living standards. Thus proposals are coming from the Commission which are designed to cut minimum wages and reduce wage "rigidities", cut pension entitlements, make labour markets more flexible and in Ireland's case, provide for wages to reflect "market conditions" (the words in quotation marks are quotes from correspondence from Mr. Szekely of DG Economic and Financial Affairs).

"I should not have to remind you that this policy of detailed interference in labour markets tramples all over pious Commission statements about the autonomy of the social partners, the importance of social dialogue and the specific exclusion in the EU treaties of a European competence on pay.

"Indeed, it is an attack on Social Europe and is in marked contrast to the relaxed, non-interfering view on rapidly increasing levels of top pay, including bank bonuses.

"It is now clear that this attack is a prime case of Commission-promoted downward pressure on Europe's social conditions. The proposals on economic governance are likely to generalize these pressures in the euro area and beyond, and not just apply to the countries in difficulties on the world's bond markets.

"In these circumstances, I request an emergency meeting with you to clarify matters and to warn you that the ETUC will find it impossible to support action by the EU along these lines, or proposals on economic governance, and any new treaty which contains them, which resemble in some aspects the reparation (punishment) provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, and reduce member states to quasi colonial status. "

, Robert Pelletier is a member of the secretariat of the Commission on Intervention in Workplaces of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA, France). He has been central union delegate for the CGT at Schindler, organizer of the CGT's intervention in the elevator industry and secretary of the Committee of the European Group of Schindler, as well as CGT expert on the Council of Orientation on Working Conditions (formerly Council for

the Prevention of Occupational Hazards) for the elevator industry.

NOTES

[1] "Opt out" refers here to article 18 of the European directive 93-104 which made it possible for Britain to derogate from the length of working time fixed in Europe. There were three conditions: the employee was to be "free" to "choose" to work beyond 48 hours per week, an up-to-date record of the hours worked beyond the 48-hour week limit was to be kept by the employer and this category of the workers was to be followed "in a particular way" by the occupational medical services. This provision was to be re-examined in 2003. The enlargement of the EU to countries where legislation protecting workers had already been dismantled made it possible to envisage challenging the 48-hour week limit ... if not in the whole of the EU simultaneously, at least country by country.

USA - The New American Workers Movement at the Crossroads



The new American workers movement, which has developed so rapidly in the last couple of months in the struggle against rightwing legislative proposals to abolish public employee unions, suddenly finds itself at a crossroads. Madison, Wisconsin, where rank-and-file workers, community members, and social movement activists converged to create the new movement, remains the center of the struggle. In Ohio, which faces similar legislation, unions have also gone into motion, while working people around the country have been drawn into the fight

In both states, things are coming to a head. In Wisconsin the courts have ordered the capitol building closed and the governor is threatening layoffs to begin next week. In both Wisconsin and Ohio the legislators are threatening to push the bills through one way or another. And now, in the fight to win, the movement has come to a fork in the road.

Two different tendencies in the labor movement point in two quite different directions. The top leaders of the AFL-CIO and Change to Win

unions like SEIU have thrown their weight into the struggle in the only way that they know how. Following the model they use in political campaigns, they have reached out to established organizations to build coalitions. They have sent organizers into take charge and to reach out to communities. Their goal is to rebuild their institutional power and their relationship with the Democratic Party, hoping to turn the upsurge in support for public employees into a political victory.

The Union Leaders' Approach

In both Wisconsin and Ohio, while not publicly giving up the fight to defeat the anti-union legislation, the top union officials quietly suggest that the bills cannot be stopped in the legislatures. So the unions in Wisconsin and Ohio indicate they will be turning respectively to efforts at recall and referendum. With their usual orientation toward political solutions, the unions' Central Labor Councils in Ohio return to their reliance on the Democratic Party and prepare for the contest in the coming elections.

The unions' top leaders at the national level shy away from mobilizing the social and economic power of the unions to win this thing, turning instead to their allies in the Democratic Party. It is not that the union officials don't want to win in Wisconsin and Ohio, but their notions about how to win and what winning means represent a particular conception of the role of the labor movement. For the AFL-CIO and other major unions, winning means preserving, through political influence, the existing model of collective bargaining—even though we know that under the existing model unions have been losing for the last 40 years.

The Workers Power Tendency

There is, however, another tendency in the new workers' movement which presents a different alternative. This alternative, which is not so easy to name but which might be called workers' power tendency, is made up of those rank-and-file workers and their union stewards and local officials, together with the community groups and social movement activists who have rallied to the cause. This group includes the teachers who called in sick and produced a virtual shutdown of the schools in Madison and other parts of Wisconsin. It is made up of firemen, policemen and other public employees who have spent every available minute surrounding the capitol in spirited demonstrations. And it includes the union, community and student activists who have occupied the capitol building and made it the center and the symbol of the new workers' movement.

This tendency has demonstrated—even it is has not yet worked out an elaborate position on paper or issued some sort of manifesto—that for them winning means using workers' power to stop the anti-union bills and to stop concessions offered up by some of the union leaders. Some of these workers have been holding on to the capitol risking

arrest. Others are considering some form of direct action or civil disobedience.

These are the workers and their supporters who taken seriously the call for a general strike issued by the South Central Federation of Labor. Taking seriously the idea of a general strike of Wisconsin workers doesn't mean jumping into it. A general strike issue from the ranks isn't simply called—as some activists have been trying to do. A general strike is mulled over, it is prepared through conversation, discussion and debate. It is organized. And finally (but soon), when the moment is right, it is begun when one crucial group of workers has the courage to make the first move drawing others into the process.

How We Win Makes all the Difference

One might argue that the anti-labor legislation might be stopped either way, either by the union officials' program of working from the top down to build coalitions and create the alliances that will return the Democrats to power or by the workers' use of their economic and social power. Through either course, one could argue, the anti-union legislation will be stopped, unions and collective bargaining preserved, and the movement vindicated. But the lessons of the two courses and the results would be quite different.

The lesson of a victory organized by the union officials and won by the Democratic Party in the legislatures would be that workers must rely on the Democratic Party to defend themselves, returning unions and workers to their usual dependence on a political party dominated by big business. We might remember that it was the Democratic Party's failure in Wisconsin and nationally to defend unions and workers' interests which has been responsible for getting us here. The result of the top union officials' strategy would be a return to the situation we were in yesterday, where employers forced the unions into retreat and where workers were losing ground. And so, it being yesterday again, the assault on workers in both the private and the public sector would resume—in truth, it would never have ceased.

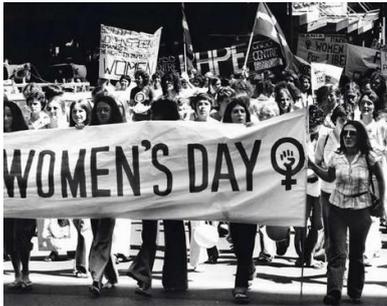
The other alternative is that workers in Wisconsin, Ohio and other states engaged in this battle—and almost all of them are—exert their economic and social power, through direct action, civil disobedience, and economic and political strikes, reasserting the power of workers in our society. The lesson of such an experience would be that workers do have power and that workers can lead. Such an upheaval—which would necessarily be met by the employers with resistance and repression and which would entail both defeats and successes—would necessarily lead to new tactics and strategies, to new leaders, to new organizational forms.

We would come out of the experience with a new and revitalized labor movement. Such a new workers' movement might even create independent political campaigns, and, if it grew in breadth and

depth, might even raise the question of a workers' political party. We would through the experience of fighting and winning this thing on our own, really have a new American workers movement and we would continue the fight on new and higher ground.

, Dan La Botz is the author of several books on Mexican labor unions, social movements and politics. He also edits Mexican Labor News and Analysis, an on-line publication of the United Electrical Workers Union (UE) and the Authentic Labor Front (FAT), at: <http://www.ueinternational.org/>.

International Womens Day - A message from the World March of Women



We have started 2011 with hope and revolution in our hearts and minds, as we support the struggle for self-determination and participatory democracy in northern Africa and the Arab world. The peoples of Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and Syria have demonstrated that mass uprisings of women and men do have the power to topple governments and dictatorships. Women's voices and actions are crucial to the construction of people power, and on International Women's Day we commit ourselves to struggle alongside our sisters to ensure their active participation in their country's transition processes.

One year on from the launch of our 3rd International Action, we – feminists and activists of the World March of Women – continue to march, resist and construct alternatives. We renew our commitment to organise collectively until all of us are free from the oppressions and discriminations that we face as women. We are committed to strengthening, consolidating and expanding our permanent, grassroots movement around the world.

We continue to be challenged by the need to analyse, build and strengthen the links between our Action Areas – Violence against women, Peace and demilitarisation, the Common good and public services, Women's work – in our struggle for autonomy over our lives, bodies, sexualities and territories. The actions we carried out as part of our 3rd International Action have made these links ever more explicit and visible: the economic interests of transnational corporations and geo-political interests of governments that fuel conflicts (such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Colombia); the systematic use of violence against women as a weapon of war in these conflicts;

the exploitation of women's productive and reproductive work and of the environment in order to strengthen patriarchy and racism and buffer capitalism from its systemic crisis; the privatisation of public services and natural resources, and the promotion of 'green capitalism' in order to continue maximising wealth and profit.

It is the concrete local, national and regional actions in diverse countries that give meaning to the links between our Action Areas. When we demonstrate outside foreign military bases or installations in our countries, or when we take direct action to pressurise our governments to reduce military spending, we are saying "enough!" to the militarisation of our communities and societies. When we mobilise outside embassies, our international solidarity is translated into action on behalf of sisters who are imprisoned, tortured, raped and criminalised in other countries. When we are loud, visible and irreverent in the streets, we challenge the patriarchal system within which a woman's "natural" space is the home and the family.

When we demand equal salaries for equal work and workers rights, we are struggling for fair working conditions for all sisters exploited in the globalised, capitalist system. When we resist false solutions to climate change (the carbon market, agrofuels, REDD, etc) we are demonstrating that we not accept the destruction of peoples and of our planet while big business continues to pollute and destroy. When we mobilise against transnational mining corporations with their headoffices in European and North American countries, we are showing that we refuse to accept the exploitation of the environment and of peoples in countries whose economy is dependant on the exportation of metals and minerals.

In a globalised, free-market world, the patriarchal and capitalist systems are borderless, while peoples are controlled within confined spaces, or else forced to flee from their ancestral territories. We stand in solidarity with our sisters and brothers – in Western Sahara, Palestine, the Arab world and middle East, the Ivory Coast, Honduras, Kurdistan – struggling for the control and decolonialisation of their land and natural resources, for an end to the exploitation of their peoples, for peace, and against conflict and militarisation.

We will not be silenced by bullets, bombs and aggression! The 8th March is a historic day of women's struggle and an integral part of our feminist calendar and we will once again be out in the streets in protest, in denouncement and in comemoration of victories to come in 2011!

Women on the March until we are All Free!

Women - Launch of Via Campesina campaign against violence against women in Africa



At the 2011 World Social Forum held in Dakar, we, the African peasant organisations members of la Vía Campesina, have decided to launch and communicate on behalf of our continent the campaign of our movement condemning violence against women, a campaign which was officially launched on an international scale at our fifth international conference in Maputo, in 2008.

In all societies, to varying extents, women and girls are victims of economic discrimination and physical, sexual and psychological violence, in both public and private spheres. Domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual harassment, genital mutilation, women being deprived of food, forced or early marriage, "honour" killings, femicide and rape as war weapons are all part of this horrific scenario. Furthermore, on the world scale, 70% of people who live in extreme poverty are women.

Women farmers are subjected to acute social and economic exclusion and oppression. That is why La Via Campesina has decided, as a farmer's movement, to mobilise against this injustice. We cannot remain silent! By averting our gaze and saying nothing we show our complicity in this violence. By mobilising against it we help to eradicate it and to build a society based on equality and justice.

To this end we undertake, as member organisations of La Vía Campesina, to carry out, during the coming years, activities on a national and regional scale, including:

- Starting or taking part in national campaigns in order to pass legislation guaranteeing women's rights and denying impunity to those who commit violence against women and children.
- Organising public actions condemning violence and its causes, in order to prevent violence before it occurs.
- Reinforcing alliances and partnerships with national, regional and international organisations which fight violence against women and for the defence and respect of women's rights, particularly the World Women's March.
- Fight for parity in our organisations, guarantee women's participation in decision making and

their visibility in public events, and encourage the creation of specific women's areas.

Violence against women, whether it occurs in the workplace, within our organisations, in the home or in the community is also the business of farmers' organisations.

To end it we must understand the causes, break the silence and organise ourselves in order to fight it collectively, men and women together, by striving to create a new society based on equal rights for both sexes.

The right to live and grow up in safety, peace and dignity, as well as the right to work and education are fundamental human rights. If they are threatened or flouted it is our duty to condemn it and to break the silence.

Let's globalise the fight! Let's globalise hope!

Dakar, 9 February 2011

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

Spanish State - Women's Crises

Over the past three years there have been numerous debates within the Spanish political and social left about the impact of the current economic crisis on working people, and the (in)efficacy of the measures the government adopted to ameliorate them. There has not been much talk, however, about the specific consequences that both the crisis and governmental response have had on women.

Before the initial worsening of male unemployment — the result of the massive job loss within the construction and industrial sectors — the mass media often stated that the crisis hit men more severely. In early 2007 male unemployment stood at 5.55% while female unemployment was 8.21%. By the end of 2009 the rates stood at 18.15% and 15.63% respectively.

A Feminist Approach

Yet the masculine crisis discourse masks women's specific situation. As a result the government has proven unable to examine the economic crisis from a gender perspective; it has failed to notice the real impact on the lives of women. The lower unemployment figure has led to trumpeting the achievement of gender equality in the job market without examining the feminization of occupations that have supposedly turned male jobs into female ones. This highly counterproductive conclusion dismisses the need for gender equality policies.

The increase in male unemployment has resulted in more families depending on the woman's salary, which is usually the lower of the two. In addition many women have important care-giving responsibilities, and these are not being redistributed.

While 2008 was characterized by the bursting of the real state bubble and severe decline in the industrial sector, within a few months the contraction hit the service sector, where 88.5% of Spanish women work. This skyrocketed the rate of female unemployment, now standing at 20.4%, slightly higher than the male rate of 19.29%.

But beyond the evolution of unemployment rates, women's labor conditions before and during the crisis are different than those of men. Despite the fact that women are more than 50% of the country's population, we are currently 44% of the active population and nearly half of the unemployed.

More importantly, 43% of the indefinite work contracts and 77% of the part-time workers are women. Ninety-seven percent of women take part-time work because of their care-giving responsibilities and 94.16% because of other family obligations. Women are in more vulnerable positions in the job market — particularly young women, immigrant women and single mothers.

Yet the average salary of employed women is 22% lower than that of male workers, and we continue to suffer both vertical and horizontal segregation in the labor market. We also suffer discrimination due to a reduction of working hours during our pregnancy and maternity leave. Women also have a higher presence in the underground economy, and this in turn has a big impact on our both social and labor rights.

Women have higher rates of temporary and part-time jobs as well as underemployment. We are 57.3% of those who receive welfare benefits and 37% of those who get unemployment compensation or retirement benefits. Generally speaking, when women are unemployed, we receive 15% less than our male counterparts and do so for shorter periods of time due to less stable employment patterns. Fully 80% of the "economically active" who do not receive any benefits or compensation are women.

According to numerous feminist authors, in order to cut down on family expenses women's domestic workload has increased. We are constantly juggling our time in order to fulfill our responsibilities in the job market and in the private household.

Many others are unable to join the formal labor market because of care-giving responsibilities. This feeds "underground unemployment," where thousands of "unemployed" women are not captured in official unemployment statistics.

It would be interesting to know what percentage of the 9,392,400 currently "economically inactive" women in Spain (61.13% of the total) have made a choice, and what percentage are unable to make a formal job compatible with their care-giving.

Lastly, we need to incorporate into a feminist and anti-capitalist analysis other social categories. If we examine current unemployment data in relationship to national origin, unemployment clearly affects non-European immigrants

more severely than natives: The former show unemployment rates of 30.67%, in contrast to 17.98% for Spanish-born workers.

In clear contrast with the message the mass media has been sending, the unemployment figure for Spanish-born men is half that of foreign-born males (34%). The rate for foreign-born women is more than 7% higher than their counterparts.

Male unemployment in Spain can be traced to the big cuts immigrant men have suffered due to their concentration in the construction sector. Consequently it would be more accurate to state that the economic crisis has affected immigrants, both male and female. Moreover, official statistics don't reveal the full force of the crisis. This is particularly true because immigrant women are concentrated in the informal economy, where their unemployment goes unrecorded.

Government Responses

The lack of a gender perspective in analyzing unemployment rates leads to the PSOE (Socialist Party) government reproducing and reinforcing inequalities between men and women. At the very beginning of the crisis, the publicly funded rescue of banks was followed by a set of measures aimed at creating public employment.

While in the government's recovery program (Plan EEE) there was a mention of social investments, its implementation focused on funding infrastructure-building projects that would quickly lead to job creation. This occurred despite the fact that the construction sector has proven to be highly economically, socially, and ecologically unsustainable. It also has a masculine profile, since it employs 16% of men and only 1.9% of women.

During the first year of the crisis most of the 11 billion Euros injected into public employment went to infrastructure. Only 400 million were used for in-home support services. Moreover, this short-term funding had no target that set aside jobs for women.

In early 2010, the fiscal crisis led to a frantic race toward austerity. This led to enormous cutbacks in public social spending and a reduction in the salary of government employees. Since women are concentrated in education, social services and health, these "reforms" have had a big impact on us.

We have been the main victims of wage cuts and job elimination. We also suffer more severely as the social services are reduced. As these disappear, we are the ones who, through our invisible and altruistic work, end up carrying out this work without any compensation.

Beyond its disastrous effects on the working class in Spain, the recently approved Labor Reform erases bonuses for female hires. These have not been replaced by measures that could address the structural factors behind the discrimination we suffer in the labor market. In addition, the Reform keeps the employer incentives for part-time hiring,

the main cause behind gender stratification in the job market.

The greater internal and geographical mobility that the Reform introduces also affects women disproportionately, since we are usually less flexible than men.

The Labor Reform does not include household service employees and therefore perpetuates the discrimination against an historically female labor activity, today primarily performed by foreign-born women. In addition, the freezing of pensions and the widening of the time period used to determine the amount, if approved, will again particularly affect women.

Due to our concentration in the informal economy and to the frequent interruption of our professional life for care-giving, women will face greater handicaps.

Conclusion

I do not aim to minimize the impact of the economic system and its crises on male workers or other popular sectors. Rather, my purpose has been to shed light on the fact that women continue to be second-class workers and citizens.

The current crisis perpetuates and strengthens our secondary presence and our specific exploitation in the job market, continually justified by our responsibility for the care of everyone surrounding us. The vicious cycle of patriarchal capitalism condemns us to our half-way entry into the labor market and our half-way exit out of the household, with both frozen processes permanently reinforcing each other.

The government response shows a lack of interest in transferring and reducing our vulnerability and subordination. The measures supposedly adopted to fight the crisis have been designed, debated and approved in order to strengthen the neoliberal obsession of zero-deficit budgets, but whatever gender and equal opportunities policies and programs existed have become its main victims. The recent suppression of the Ministry of Equality, the government's refusal to broaden parental leaves for fathers and the government's support to the European blockage on improving maternal leaves are only a few examples.

To expose and denounce the effects that the systemic crisis and the measures applied by its managers have on women does not mean we should look away from the totality of the working class. Rather, it constitutes an additional effort to achieve greater rigor and complexity in our everyday work to build a just society. This effort stems from a constant revision of our way of viewing, describing, and understanding the world. Perhaps it could also change our method of transforming it.

Against the Current 151, March-April 2011

Pakistan - Pakistan's Dark Journey

The recent verdict of a lower court sentencing a Christian woman to death in a "blasphemy" case, and the subsequent murder of the Punjab Governor and then the Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti of who both supported the imprisoned woman, have posed the very vital question of whether Pakistani society has become intolerant, violent and extremist to the point of incorrigible.

The Asia Bibi case occurred in June 2009 in Pakistan's Punjab province when a group of female Muslim laborers complained that Bibi, a Christian woman and a fellow farm laborer, had made derogatory remarks against the Islamic holy book and Prophet Mohammed. A police investigation was opened, which led to a trial and guilty verdict for Asia. The verdict has attracted worldwide attention.

Asia Bibi reportedly was asked to fetch water by her co-workers. She complied, but some of her Muslim fellow workers refused to drink the water as they consider Christians to be "untouchable." Apparently arguments ensued. There had already been a running feud between Asia and a neighbor about property damage. Later some co-workers complained to a local cleric that Asia Bibi had made derogatory remarks.

A mob came to her house, beating her and members of her family before she was rescued by the police. However, the police initiated an investigation about her remarks resulting in her arrest and prosecution under blasphemy charges. She spent more than a year and a half in jail. In November 2010, a judge of the lower court sentenced her to death by hanging. Additionally, a fine equivalent to \$1,100 was imposed.

During the trial many from her village (in fact, almost the entire village council) testified against her, saying they heard her make the remarks and reaffirmed them twice. The exact words allegedly used by Asia Bibi, although central to the accusation, remain unknown, as under the Pakistani blasphemy law to repeat them, even in accusation, would be to commit the same offense.

It may be recalled that blasphemy laws were introduced by U.S.-supported dictator General Zia ul Haq in the 1980s. [Zia seized power in a 1977 coup and oversaw the execution of the former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Proclaiming himself president, he ruled Pakistan until his death in a plane crash in 1988. During the 1980s he was warmly supported by the Reagan administration, while he launched the brutal suppression of Ahmadiyya and Shia Muslims, as well as Christians in Pakistan, in the name of "Islamicization." Needless to say, in those days there was no rhetoric about "Islamofascism" from U.S. neoconservatives; quite the contrary, Islamic fundamentalists were lauded as anti-Communist warriors against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan — ed.]

Since then hundreds of persons faced blasphemy charges and were convicted under the law, with death penalty sentences in most of the cases. Between 1986 and 2007 over 647 people, half of whom were non-Muslims, were charged with offenses under the blasphemy laws. Twenty of those charged were murdered during their trial process and on prison premises.

Punjab Governor Assassinated The latest incident, the assassination of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer, indicates the growing domination of religious extremism in Pakistani society. Although not accused of blasphemy, Taseer's "crime" was seeking a presidential pardon for an illiterate peasant Christian woman accused of blasphemy, and speaking out against the law.

The murderer of Taseer, a bodyguard assigned to him by the security forces in Islamabad, proudly declared in court that he was "executing Allah's will." Hundreds of lawyers showered the killer with rose petals while he was in police custody. Two hundred lawyers signed a pledge vowing to defend him for free. This kind of mass frenzy, with religious extremism rising to new heights, is a matter of great concern for the progressive forces in Pakistan.

The local intelligentsia, which always claims that Pakistan's silent majority is fundamentally secular and tolerant, also finds this hard to prove in the aftermath of the murder of the governor, who dared defend an alleged blasphemer. The frequent argument that the religious parties don't get a large vote, and so cannot really be popular, also needs to be reviewed as rising public support to the extreme right is an alarm bell for the radical, left and progressive forces in Pakistan.

Even without winning elections, Islamist parties are in a powerful position, influencing major social and political issues more than election-winning mainstream bourgeois political parties. For a long time the religious right has dictated what we can or cannot teach in our public and private schools. No government has had the guts to dilute the hate materials being forced down young throats. Their unchallenged power has led to Pakistan's cultural desertification because they violently oppose music, dance, theatre, art and intellectual inquiry.

The current Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) government has capitulated and totally bowed to extremists' pressure. The prime minister has announced that the blasphemy laws are not to be touched. The post-assassination situation has totally swung to the religious parties. Religious fanatics are going to be powerful enough to dictate their terms even without any parliamentary representation.

Ms. Sherry Rahman, the brave parliamentarian who dared to put forward a bill to reform the blasphemy law, is now bunkered down. She is said to be receiving two death threats an hour. Although her own party is in power, the Minister of Interior has advised her to leave the country

as the government cannot protect her. The Army high command made no public statement on the governor's assassination, although it is vocal on much else.

The Pakistani media also reflects the public mood dominated by religious extremism. This was apparent from the unwillingness and hesitation of TV anchors to condemn the assassination of the governor by a fanatic, as well as from images of the smiling murderer being feted all around. Mullah spokesmen filled the screens of most TV channels.

Against Extremism and Occupation The dominant opinion in Pakistani civil society is that the recent incident has helped the rise of extremism, adversely impacting the women's rights movement throughout the country. Many believe that the octopus of religious extremism is getting bigger and bigger, especially after the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan and the Pakistan government joining the "war on terror." Secular sections of society consider that if the United States had never come to Afghanistan, Pakistan would not be the violent mess that it is today.

The widening socio-economic gap also plays an important role in sliding the poor sections of society towards the fundamentalist political parties. Pakistan has become a society where the justice system does not work, education is as rotten as it can be, and visible corruption goes unpunished. Add to all this a million mullahs in a million mosques who exploit people's frustrations.

Americans must get out of Afghanistan. The sooner they can withdraw, the better. But Pakistani intellectuals also realize that the situation has become so serious that even U.S. withdrawal will not end Pakistan's problems. Those fighting the Americans aren't exactly Vietnamese-type socialists or nationalists. The Taliban types want a full cultural revolution: beards, burqas, five daily prayers, no music, no art, no entertainment, and no contact with modernity except its weapons.

The situation has become a colossal challenge for the already feeble progressive forces and women's rights movement in Pakistan. The mullahs will continue to get stronger as long as the U.S. presence in the region, in the name of war on terrorism, continues.

ATC 151, March-April 2011

• Bushra Khaliq is General Secretary of the Women Workers Help Line based in Lahore Pakistan. Web: www.wwhl.org.pk

USA/ Women - Women at the sharp end

Women make up the majority of teachers, municipal and state government workers - an interview with some of those involved in organising an International Womens Day March in Madison, Wisconsin where women are on the sharp end of Walker's union busting attacks.

How did the idea of helping plan an International Women's Day (IWD) march come about?

Kate: We had a Solidarity meeting on Sunday March 6. I brought the idea to hold a rally on Tuesday, International Women's Day. Tessa, Rebecca, Colin, and myself got together decided to throw something together and make something happen. This IWD was particularly special because it was the 100th anniversary of its first celebration. This year is also the 100-year anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire. I thought it was very important to make the connection between IWD and what is happening in Wisconsin right now.

In Wisconsin, women make up the majority of teachers, municipal and state government workers. Women dominate the public sector in Wisconsin. Gov. Walker's bill is an attack on women because the bill itself, not just the a few aspects of it, attacks so many social programs. Every disadvantaged community is going to be devastated. This struggle is more than just unions trying to be paid a half-decent wage. It is a broader issue than that because they are trying to give money to the rich and the corporations on the backs of everyone else.

So I saw lots of connections between the current battle and IWD. IWD is supposed to be a day that we recognize women's struggle in terms of rights and gains. I can only draw one correlation: this whole thing is an attack on women. Clara Zetkin, the founder of the day, said that it is not about women and men; it is about women's equality and especially with the proletarian movement, women and men struggling together. When I say women, I mean every woman, not just white women. It's really important for me to emphasize this.

How did the march and rally unfold?

Kate: The whole rally was promoted through word-of-mouth. We had a lineup of speakers and spoken word artists. Our march started out with around 150 people, we picked up another 150 people on the route, and when we reached the Capitol, there was another 300-400 people waiting at the Capitol. There was that wonderful moment when the two groups merged together at the Capitol. The march itself was very spirited and people were very happy to be there.

We didn't have a permit for anything, because what went into effect on Tuesday was you have to now give 72 hour notice if you hold any rally or anything. We started the march at a square and when reached the first street the cops were nervous, but then we took over the street, where buses had to wait for us. Traffic had to stop for us for five to six blocks. We had several bus drivers put their fists up, and car passengers put their fists up too. This was during rush-hour traffic, around 5:30pm, which is quite amazing.

At the Capitol, we set up our sound system. We brought red carnations and purple daisies; red carnations signify international women's day, especially for radical communities. The

LGBTQ movement, decades ago, initially had some problems with the mainstream women's movement, so they started carrying purple flowers during IWD to signify queer people and people who reject gender binaries. There were flowers scattered throughout the march.

There were three firefighters in the crowd, two men, one woman. They asked us, "Can we play a song?" They were really respectful about it. I said, "sure, yeah", so they played "God Bless America". Up at the front, Tessa was invited to hold a rainbow flag between two firefighters. The solidarity that was there was important and how respectful they were. I thought it was very moving.

One of the Democratic Assembly members that people have been having problems with, Brett Hulsey, showed up and we didn't let him speak to the crowd. At the end of the rally, we put our carnations on the Forward statue, which is a bronze stature showing a woman pointing forward by the capitol.

We tried to get a diverse crowd with the speakers. I thought that we did an okay job with the time that we had. We had one of my high school teachers, who radicalized me, give an amazing speech on the history of women's struggle in the U.S., especially socialist women labor activists. We had a spoken word artist that slammed Gov. Scott Walker. We had an Israeli-American woman, who served in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and has since become radicalized give an anti-imperialist perspective on this whole thing. We asked students from Student Labor Action Coalition (SLAC) to speak. Everyone was really awesome.

What could have been done better and where do you think this rally leads from here?

Kate: I think we could have done better if we had more time. We all worked so hard in a 50-hour period to make it happen. We also produced literature that we passed out at the rally, but made it relevant to the entire struggle. Women are most affected by Gov. Walker's bill. These issues do not go away because it is no longer IWD. People are already thinking about this stuff in Madison without our help. For instance, on the morning of the rally, I was at work and a friend of mine was telling me that teachers in Madison are already working together on a write-up on how this is an attack on women. The level of discussion these last three weeks has been amazing.

I'm happy to provide this flyer and maybe this rally inspired people, but I think that many people were already there. People felt that we were in a stagnation period and were becoming a little pessimistic, so the rally helped get people's spirits up and got them energized. I know that the rally energized me. Tessa, Rebecca, Nicole, and myself all sang "Solidarity Forever", but with altered lyrics that emphasize the struggles of women, at the rally too.

From Against the Current

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

USA - Policing women's bodies

Since the beginning of February Live Action has released several videos shot at different Planned Parenthood clinics. The sting operation seems designed to reveal that the organization is not complying with federal legislation. They claim to show Planned Parenthood staff offering advice to those in sex trafficking of teenagers. Planned Parenthood responded by announcing it is retraining staff, but it also claims the videos have been doctored.

Meanwhile U.S. Rep Mike Pence (R-IN), proposed denying Title X funding to any organization that provides abortions. Pence's target is clearly Planned Parenthood, whose network of clinics offers a variety of health services and remains the country's largest abortion provider. Title X was enacted in 1970 to provide sex education and contraceptive services for low-income women. Funding covers pelvic and breast examinations as well as testing for high blood pressure, anemia and diabetes, but specifically excludes abortions. Currently the program costs \$318 million and serves five million women. In 2009 Planned Parenthood received \$16.9 million Title X funding.

Another federal bill, introduced by Christopher Smith (R-NJ), is designed to bar the use of subsidies to underwrite health insurance covering abortion. For example, tax credits that encourage small businesses to cover their workers' health insurance would bar abortion. It would also restrict people who buy their own insurance from claiming a reduction if the policy covered abortion, nor could they deduct expenses for the cost of the procedure itself. The bill would allow federal financing for abortion in the case of forcible rape, but would not cover statutory or coerced rape. It would allow the use of federal money where a woman might die if her pregnancy continued, but would not cover other serious health problems.

At the state level anti-abortionists are continuing to chip away at a woman's access to abortion. Five states prohibit abortion coverage in the health insurance plans to be offered by the new state exchanges, which are to go into effect in 2014. Thirty-six have active legislation requiring either parental consent or notification before a minor can obtain an abortion. Eighteen others have enacted burdensome counseling requirements. Five include materials claiming a link between abortion and breast cancer, which researchers have discredited. Ten require making ultrasound images available to women during counseling. Arizona, which requires two counseling visits to the clinic before the abortion, instructs physicians to tell patients that state funding is available if the woman continues her pregnancy-although no such funding exists!

Last year Nebraska banned abortions after 20 weeks and did not make any exception for the discovery of severe fetal anomalies. In Montana legislators are currently proposing a state constitutional amendment that declares life begins when the egg is fertilized. Although this failed twice before, chances of passage this time seem higher. Of course the fact that 87% of all the counties in the United States have no abortion provider is one of the biggest factors limiting access. Nonetheless one-third of all U.S. women have an abortion before the age of 45 and 90% of all procedures occur within the first trimester.

Nonetheless the right wing continues to patrol women's bodies. Last year they introduced 600 bills into the state legislature, securing passage of 34. This year they will be busier, and they expect more wins. While they attempt to outlaw abortion, stamp out information about contraception, and paint providers as evil, their new motivation is based on the necessity of an austerity budget.

Feb 11

, *Dianne Feeley is a socialist feminist and an editor of "Against the Current". Feeley is a retired autoworker from the parts industry. She is a member of USW Local 235.*

Feminism - Interrogating the Feminine Mystique



STEPHANIE COONTZ

TEACHES history and family studies at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. Dianne Feeley interviewed Stephanie about her new book, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s*. Her earlier books on the social history of the family include *Marriage, A History; The Way We Really Are; The Way We Never Were; and The Social Origins of Private Life*.

ATC: Why did you write this book, and what were your reactions to re-reading Betty's Friedan's classic *The Feminine Mystique*?

Stephanie Coontz: I was approached by an editor at Basic Books who said they were doing a series of biographies, not of individuals but of books, and asked if I'd like to write one on *The Feminine Mystique*. Having a distinct memory of reading it in the 1960s, I thought that would be very interesting.

But I hadn't gotten very far in the book when I realized, in fact, that I had never read it. I

later found that this was true for many women I interviewed. The *Feminine Mystique* was so talked about, and the title so catchy, in those days before we had words like sexism to describe what we faced, that many women eventually came to believe they'd read it, and used the phrase to describe whatever was bothering them about their situation as women.

So I sat down to read the book and got another surprise: I did not like it. The book was repetitive. It exaggerated the gains of feminism in the 1920s and the hegemony of the anti-feminist homemaker mythology in the 1950s. I was horrified by Friedan's uncritical prejudices against homosexuality and her diatribes against permissive parenting. I thought her focus on educated white women was elitist. And I was surprised to hear how limited her proposals for change were.

I learned from reading Dan Horowitz's marvelous book, *Betty Friedan and the Making of The Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism*, that she had misrepresented her own political history, but I could also see for myself that she had misrepresented her indebtedness to others. Her only mention of Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, for example, to which she was clearly heavily indebted, was a throwaway line in the introduction about how while Friedan on her own had uncovered women's hidden history, this other book did have some helpful comments about French women.

The more I researched the publication history of *The Feminine Mystique* the more I became convinced she had misrepresented that as well, making herself more of a lone and unappreciated "battler for her sex" than she actually was. This was a pattern in Friedan's life, though eventually I came to see it in part as a result of her own battles with the feminine mystique. Afraid she wouldn't be taken seriously, she tended to exaggerate her intellectual originality and political indispensability.

ATC: You said in your introduction and your interview with Terry Gross on "Fresh Air" that eventually you came to really appreciate the book, and that each time you reread it you appreciated it more.

SC: What turned me around was the response I got when I advertised for people who had read *The Feminine Mystique* at or near the time of publication. Their stories were so moving, and the depth of despair they felt so striking, that it made me reexamine the 1940s, '50s, and early '60s. I came to see that despite the existence of opposition to the feminine mystique that historians such as Joann Meyerowitz have documented, there really was something especially demoralizing about that period, particularly for a certain group of women. I began to think of Friedan's main audience as the sidelined wives of the Greatest Generation. Their daughters would probably have found feminism anyway, but many of these women might have been lost — to the movement, to the

women's centers and academic departments they often helped found, or even to themselves.

Friedan didn't speak to all women, and initially I was turned off by her focus on white, middle-class housewives. But the more I went back to the period, the more I realized that these women faced some unique problems in this era, and although their material, physical deprivation and societal oppression were clearly nothing like those faced by working-class and minority women, their pain should count too.

The people who got the most from Friedan's book were women who had tried very hard to find complete fulfillment in being wives and mothers but felt there was something missing in their lives. Many had married upwardly mobile men and were seemingly living the American Dream, so they felt guilty for not being more grateful. They thought something must be wrong with them for not being completely satisfied with their lives.

Many of them had more education than the average women in those days, although they often had dropped out after getting their "Mrs." Degree. But unlike today, that very education was in some ways a disadvantage, because they were actually more exposed than working-class women to Freudian ideas that made them doubt their own "femininity" and wonder if their worries were "neurotic."

A lot of people don't remember that 1950s anti-feminism was directed as much against suburban homemakers as against career women, and many of these middle-class women had internalized the critique of "moms" that was so fashionable at that time.

There is a lot of evidence that although working-class wives and mothers in that era had much tougher lives in terms of economic and physical insecurity, they were actually less likely than middle-class homemakers to second-guess their child-raising and doubt their own normality. So to have Friedan's book excerpted in three of the most widely read middle-class women's magazines of the time was a godsend to these women. Many could still remember, half a century later, what a relief it was to be told that it was not neurotic to want more out of life than a modern kitchen and a husband who earned a decent living — that the problem they could not name was a result of the way society had constricted their options and identity, not a result of some sexual or gender pathology.

ATC: You also say there are a lot of myths about the origins and history of the book. Can you address some of those?

SC: For many years, until Dan Horowitz published his exhaustive study of the origins of Friedan's views in 1998, people believed Friedan's own claim that she herself was a homemaker who had also been a victim of "the feminine mystique." In fact, she had been a leftist who as a student participated in antiwar activities, civil rights

struggles, and campus fights such as trying to organize the maids in the student dorms.

She was already a strong critic of Freudian theories. After graduating, she worked for a leftwing union newspaper, writing articles about working-women's rights, civil rights, and the "struggles of oppressed workers." But she either lost that job or left it after having kids, and though she continued to be active in integration struggles she did move into a more middle-class milieu and tried to develop a career as a freelance writer for women's magazines.

I think it's understandable that she wanted to play down her past in this period of rampant red-baiting, blacklisting and guilt-by-association. She wanted to swim — if you'll excuse the reference — with the current rather than against the current.

But she refused to the end of her life to change her story. And she also perpetuated other myths, such as the idea that she was the one who discovered the discontent of American housewives and that the feminist movement had died out in the 1950s. I explain in my book how much more complex the real story was. Friedan caught a rising wave of discontent with the 1950s ideology about homemaking, and she rode it into shore to much applause, but she didn't create the wave.

Another myth is that Friedan's book launched the women's movement. In fact, the proposals Friedan raised in the book were very moderate, and very much aimed at individualistic solutions, though she did propose a GI Bill for housewives, to provide them with education and job training after their children had gotten to school age.

It wasn't until three years later that Friedan was invited to join a group of feminists who were already agitating for change and get fed up with working through the existing political channels. Together they formed the National Organization for Women. A few years later, a slightly younger group of women began to build their own organizations and informal groups, largely as a result of their disillusion with the sexism of the New Left. Many of these never even read *The Feminine Mystique*.

But having said all that, it's important to give Friedan credit for what she did do. She reached out to a layer of women who probably would have slipped through the cracks with her, and many of these women went on to found the first Women's Studies Departments and Women's Centers. The women's Strike for Equality in 1970 was also her idea, and it was a brilliant one. And she did eventually repudiate the anti-lesbian views that marred the early years of her work in NOW.

ATC: What are the strengths of *The Feminine Mystique*? What are its weaknesses?

SC: Friedan was a skilled polemicist. Using the language of the women's magazines, she reached into the homes of these middle-class wives and mothers, caught between two worlds and paralyzed by the mixed messages they were

hearing, and helped them stop blaming themselves for their distress.

Many of the women I interviewed for this book can still remember exactly where they were and how they felt when they read the book. They said it was like a "light bulb," a "click," an overwhelming wave of relief. One woman said "I suddenly realized that all the things I thought were wrong about myself might in fact be right about myself."

Friedan used what have become the classic techniques of self-help books, but she used them to introduce her readers to a political analysis of their pain. So for many, it was not just the first self-help book they ever saw, but the last one they ever needed. And for modern women, it's a real eye-opener to go back and listen to the voices of these women.

And for another group of women — women who had just tentatively started to break with the ideology of the day, who were gathering the courage to defy the pressures on them — Friedan's research into how women were manipulated by the advertising industry and misled by psychiatrists and sociologists was just the ammunition they needed. "I carried that book around me like a shield," said one woman who was resisting her parents' pressure to take "ladylike" subjects in college and focus on finding a husband.

ATC: Many people believe the book is irrelevant to working women, and especially to African-American Women. Do you agree?

SC: That's true in some ways, though I found some fascinating research into the psychological reactions of working-class women in this period, both homemakers and employed, that complicates this question. But Friedan did ignore the issues facing women who worked at demeaning, low-quality jobs. At the same time, ironically, she underestimated the rewards and self-confidence that women could get from jobs that she dismissed as "beneath" her target audience.

The book's neglect of Black women is striking, and really sad, given her own history of support for the civil rights movement. But I have a different take than those who have argued that "Black women would have loved to be homemakers."

Yes, many Black wives and mothers had to work, and at jobs that were truly horrible. But the upper middle-class wives and mothers who were least likely to have to work for financial necessity were already — long before this was also true of white women — the most likely to work, suggesting that something more than dire necessity was involved. And Black leaders of both sexes had a long tradition of supporting women's roles as co-providers for their families and as activist leaders of the community.

So I argue that although Friedan's discussion of work was indeed elitist, the biggest problem with her book's neglect of Black women is that she missed the chance to show her white middle-class audience that some women were able to

combine their identities as wives, mothers, family co-providers, and activists with interests beyond the home.

ATC: How does the movement today stand on Friedan's shoulders? Move beyond her?

SC: Women have educational and career opportunities that were unthinkable in the 1950s and early 1960s. More women graduate from college than men, and women recently pulled ahead as recipients of Ph.D.s as well. In 1972, only three percent of licensed attorneys were female; today women represent one-third of all practicing attorneys and half of all law students.

The stay-at-home housewife has also benefited from feminist reforms that gave her a legal claim to share the income her husband accumulates while she is raising the children, keeping the home, and otherwise supporting his career.

Single women and lesbians have more options than in the past, but marriages have also become more equal. As late as 1980, 30% of wives reported that their husbands did no housework. By the early 21st century, this had shrunk to 16%. Thirty-four percent of wives now say their husbands do half or more of the childcare. Domestic violence has fallen dramatically over the past 45 years, although the financial strain of the recession may have produced a recent uptick.

On the down side, women pay a higher price for having children than men do. One study found that more than 25% of women who quit work for family reasons were unable to find jobs when they returned to the job market. Others had to settle for part-time work even though they wanted fulltime. Even women who regained fulltime jobs in their own field never caught up to their salary and promotion schedule.

Another study found that among women with identical resumes in all respects but one — membership in the PTA (a sign that these women had children) — the mothers were much less likely to be offered a job than the other women, were less likely to be recommended for promotion, and were held to higher performance and punctuality standards than non-mothers.

The flip side of discrimination against mothers is a different kind of bias against fathers. Even when men have formal access to family-friendly policies, they are looked down upon if they use them. Because of these pressures, men are now even more likely than women to report high levels of work-family conflict.

Another down side is that even as the marriages of college-educated couples have become more stable and more egalitarian, marriage has begun to seem less achievable — and more fragile — for working-class men and women.

This raises the issue that in retrospect is the most glaring omission in Friedan's book, and still gets lost in many discussions of women: the issue of class. Overall, gender is no longer such a powerful

master category for assigning status and options as it once was. Up until 1970, gender outweighed education and class background in the average distribution of wages. Not any more.

Just as Michael Omi and Howard Winant talk about a newly "messy" hegemony when it comes to race, gender hierarchies are also messier and less clear-cut than they used to be. There are more complex interactions between gender dynamics, class constraints and family situations. This is one reason why low-income males have higher rates of educational failure than low-income females. So we really have to pay more attention to the class differences among women that create different strategies for coping with gender vulnerabilities or concerns.

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

Japan - Japan: a natural, nuclear, human and social disaster

Lying as it does at the meeting point of four tectonic plates, the Japanese archipelago is no stranger to natural disasters. Without being able to predict the date, Japanese seismologists knew that a major earthquake threatened the coast of Miyagi and Ibaraki Prefecture. It happened on March 11.

Natural disaster

An earthquake of rare power, it caused a devastating tsunami and has surpassed the worst disasters in modern Japanese history. Over several hundred kilometers, the coast has been completely devastated, with entire villages and towns wiped out. The number of dead and missing is increasing and it will undoubtedly exceed the twenty thousand already announced.

The determination and endurance of the Japanese have largely been highlighted by the international press eclipsing all other realities. The inhabitants of the prefectures affected feel abandoned by the central authorities. Relief has been slow to arrive. The humanitarian disaster looming in Japan, in addition to recent disasters in Pakistan, Australia, the Indian Ocean, Haiti, and New Orleans, reminds us that it is not possible to rely upon governments to manage such crises.

Nuclear disaster

And if this disaster were not bad enough, Japan also faces another one that is not remotely natural. The question is not whether a nuclear catastrophe will happen: it is already happening. The entire area around the plant in Fukushima has been condemned, and will remain so for a very long time. The radioactivity released day after day in the atmosphere has begun to contaminate parts of the archipelago, depending on the direction of the the winds and precipitation. Contrary to what

the Japanese authorities claim, there is already an accident of level 6 or 7, much worse than Three Mile Island in the United States (1979, level 5), and closer to Chernobyl in Ukraine (1986, level 7). At the time of writing, the situation remains out of control.

The question now is how far the nuclear disaster - or rather disasters - will develop. It is hoped that the plant workers, firefighters and soldiers sent to the front to try to cool radioactive storage pools and reactors manage to avoid the worst. Many 'liquidators' in Fukushima have already paid with their lives for the criminal irresponsibility of the nuclear lobby, as was the case for tens of thousands of 'liquidators' of Chernobyl without whom it would have been impossible to prevent a level 8 accident. In 2011, as in 1986, we owe them a great deal.

Humanitarian catastrophe

Throughout its history, Japan has faced many destructive earthquakes and tidal waves. In 1995, an earthquake measuring 8 on the Richter scale destroyed much of Kobe city in southern Honshu. The ineffectiveness of the emergency response was then seen as a national tragedy. It was believed that Japan was now better prepared. However, one of the most striking aspects of the current crisis is the government's inability to provide a rapid and adequate response to the plight of populations in affected areas. Relief for the victims has only arrived in dribs and drabs. Nearly 500,000 people who were evacuated from high-risk areas around the nuclear power plant in Fukushima and who themselves crammed into shelters could count themselves lucky when the temperature dropped below zero degrees. Tens of thousands of people remain isolated in the devastated towns without water or food or electricity. Hospitals in the region are severely damaged and are no longer able to care for those rescued. The threat of an epidemic is ever-present.

It is doubtful that the lessons of previous disasters have been drawn. Japan, however, is not Haiti or Pakistan but the third largest economy in the world. But let us remember the tragic helplessness of the government of the United States after Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005.

Social disaster

Inequality increases instead of being reduced in times of humanitarian crisis. This has been the case during every major disaster experienced in recent years whether tsunamis, earthquakes, wars, or economic collapses ... By undermining public services, demonizing solidarity and making insecurity into a virtue, capitalist globalisation and neoliberal policies throw more oil on the fire of injustice. Whatever one might say about its traditions, Japan is no exception to the rule. The propertied and powerful try to make workers, the poor, the powerless pick up the bill.

The government of Naoto Kan is at its lowest point in the polls (17.8%). A year and a half after his

historic victory against the Conservatives, who had been in power since 1955, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) has abandoned any intention to pursue a policy focused on improving living conditions, protection of pensions, the creation of a social safety net, and reforming the political system as announced in his election campaign. The current disaster gives him temporary respite, but his handling of the crisis should not give anyone any illusions. Witness the way he has clearly and in concert with the company responsible for the Fukushima plant - Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) - consistently downplayed the nuclear "accident", which was officially considered a level 4 and then eventually, level 5, when everyone could see that it was more serious than Three Mile Island.

↳ *Danielle Sabai is one of IV's correspondents for Asia.*

↳ *Pierre Rousset is a member of the leadership of the Fourth International particularly involved in solidarity with Asia. He is a member of the NPA in France.*

Nuclear disaster - Japan's unnecessary and predictable nuclear crisis



Where the first two catastrophes were natural and unpredictable, a nuclear meltdown is entirely unnatural and entirely predictable. Whereas the 2010 Gulf Oil spill showed the inherent dangers of the oil economy, the current nuclear crisis in Japan shows that nuclear power is not a solution. As we approach the 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, it's time to shift away from both oil and nuclear and towards good green jobs for all.

Triple catastrophe – but one was avoidable

Japan has been hit by the worst crisis since 1945, as an earthquake and tsunami have killed at least 10,000, destroyed tens of thousands of buildings, displaced hundreds of thousands, and left millions without power or water. As the nation braces for more aftershocks, people have resorted to using sea water in an attempt to prevent a nuclear meltdown, with radiation having already leaked, leading to a mass evacuation.

According to Greenpeace :

"We are told by the nuclear industry that things like this cannot happen with modern reactors, yet Japan is in the middle of a nuclear crisis with potentially devastating consequences... The

evolving situation at Fukushima remains far from clear, but what we do know is that contamination from the release of Cesium-137 poses a significant health risk to anyone exposed. Cesium-137 has been one of the isotopes causing the greatest health impacts following the Chernobyl disaster, because it can remain in the environment and food chain for 300 years."

Where the first two catastrophes were natural and unpredictable, a nuclear meltdown is entirely unnatural and entirely predictable. According to the local anti-nuclear group, Citizens' Nuclear Information Centre :

"A nuclear disaster which the promoters of nuclear power in Japan said wouldn't happen is in progress. It is occurring as a result of an earthquake that they said would not happen...and we warned that Japan's nuclear power plants could be subjected to much stronger earthquakes and much bigger tsunamis than they were designed to withstand."

Health meltdown

The nuclear crisis comes a month before the 25th anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, the largest nuclear meltdown in history, which showered Europe in a radioactive cloud causing a quarter of a million cancers, 100,000 of them fatal. As of this writing, the disaster in Japan is already the third worst in history, behind Chernobyl and the Three Mile Island partial meltdown in 1979, and comes only 12 years after a fatal overexposure of workers at a nuclear plant in Tokaimura, Japan.

Even without the inherent risk of a meltdown, nuclear power is a threat to health. As climate campaigner George Monbiot wrote more than a decade ago :

"The children of women who have worked in nuclear installations, according to a study by the National Radiological Protection Board, are eleven times more likely to contract cancer than the children of workers in non-radioactive industries. You can tell how close to [the nuclear plant in] Sellafield children live by the amount of plutonium in their teeth."

Add to this the morbidity and mortality of working in uranium mines and the dangers of disposing of radioactive waste, and you have negative health impacts at every stage of nuclear power [1]. Despite this, governments have invested massively in the nuclear industry and globalized the risk. Canada has exported nuclear reactors while building seven of its own, and despite concerns about safety the Ontario government plans on investing \$36 billion into nuclear power at the same time as it is backing off wind power.

Reasons and excuses

While nuclear power is a clear and present danger to the health of the planet and its people, it is a thriving industry driven by economic and military competition. Dr. Vandana Shiva — who studied as a nuclear physicist and now leads the climate justice

movement in India—has exposed the hypocrisy of U.S. hostility to Iranian nuclear power when it is doing the same thing to promote nuclear power and weapons in India as a bulwark against China : "The nuclear deal with India, in fact, shows the double standards of U.S. nuclear policy, because for the same things that Iran does — Iran is "axis of evil" — but India here, through this nuclear agreement, is being told, we will separate civilian use and military use. Military use will be India's sovereign decision. I don't think it will be India's sovereign decision, because I think in this deal is a strategic use of India for Asia, for a containment for China. But in addition to that, there is turning India into a nuclear market : a sale of nuclear technologies, of nuclear fuel... Not only will it spread nuclear risks and hazards in India, it will also allow corporations, like General Electric and others who pollute with carbon dioxide, as well as them, get quotas through emissions trading and markets for nuclear technology."

As Shiva summarized in her book *Soil Not Oil* :

"nuclear winter is not an alternative to global warming", and it is a tragedy that Japan has become the test case against both military and civilian arms of the nuclear industry — from the atomic bomb 65 years ago to the nuclear meltdown today. But instead of admitting the problems of nuclear power, the nuclear industry and its supporters have greenwashed it and presented it as a solution to global warming. Some environmentalists, such as Gaia theorist James Lovelock, have fallen prey to these claims. Lovelock, whose ideas are driven by apocalyptic predictions and an extreme pessimism, has gone so far as to claim that "nuclear power is the only green solution."

While former U.S. president George Bush defended his country's 103 nuclear power plants as not producing "a single pound of air pollution or greenhouse gases," Dr. Helen Caldicott has refuted the claim in her important book *Nuclear Power is Not the Answer*, which proves that even without meltdowns nuclear power is a threat to the planet :

"Nuclear power is not 'clean and green,' as the industry claims, because large amounts of traditional fossil fuels are required to mine and refine the uranium needed to run nuclear power reactors, to construct the massive concrete reactor buildings, and to transport and store the toxic radioactive waste created by the nuclear process. Burning of this fossil fuel emits significant quantities of carbon dioxide (CO₂) — the primary "greenhouse gas" — into the atmosphere.

"In addition, large amounts of the now-banned chlorofluorocarbon gas (CFC) are emitted during the enrichment of uranium. CFC gas is not only 10,000 to 20,000 times more efficient as an atmospheric heat trapper ('greenhouse gas') than CO₂, but it is a classic "pollutant" and a potent destroyer of the ozone layer. While currently

the creation of nuclear electricity produces only one-third the amount of CO2 emitted from a similar-sized, conventional gas generator, this is a transitory statistic. Over several decades, as the concentration of available uranium ore declines, more fossil fuels will be required to extract the ore from less concentrated ore veins. Within 10 to 20 years, nuclear reactors will produce no net energy because of the massive amounts of fossil fuel that will be necessary to mine and to enrich the remaining poor grades of uranium."

The false dichotomy between carbon emissions and nuclear power is also refuted by those developing the tar sands, who have proposed using nuclear power to pump tar sands oil.

People power, green jobs

Fortunately there are growing anti-nuclear campaigns uniting indigenous groups, NGOs and the broader climate justice movement to challenge nuclear power in all its stages — from mining to use to waste disposal. As Dr. Shiva writes in *Soil Not Oil* :

"In 2005, the Navajo banned mining on their reservations, which covers 27,000 square miles across part of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. In Australia, where the world's largest deposits of uranium are located, movements have forced companies to restrict mining to 10 per cent of the reserves and the Australian government has recognized the aboriginal owners' right to veto mining on their land."

Meanwhile in Canada, indigenous groups are leading opposition to transportation of nuclear waste through the Great Lakes and their surrounding communities, declaring "what we do to the land, we do to ourselves." Last year the German government extended nuclear power against the will of the majority but after news of the leak in Japan, 50,000 people formed a human chain from a nuclear reactor to Stuttgart demanding an end to nuclear power.

Uniting these campaigns with the labour movement raises the demands of good green jobs for all, to transform our oil and nuclear economy into one based on ecological and social sustainability and justice. Instead of the billions in subsidies for the nuclear industry, governments could be investing in solar, wind and clean electricity, while retrofitting buildings, which could solve the economic and climate crises without the inherent dangers of nuclear power.

As Greenpeace wrote :

"Our thoughts continue to be with the Japanese people as they face the threat of a nuclear disaster, following already devastating earthquake and tsunami. The authorities must focus on keeping people safe, and avoiding any further releases of radioactivity... Greenpeace is calling for the phase out of existing reactors, and no construction of new commercial nuclear reactors. Governments should invest in renewable energy resources that are not

only environmentally sound but also affordable and reliable."

Environment - The evidence from Fukushima: nuclear power means nuclear catastrophe

Once again the evidence shows that nuclear technology can never be 100% secure. The risks are so frightening that the conclusion is obvious: it is imperative to abandon nuclear energy, and to do so as quickly as possible. This is the first lesson of Fukushima, one which raises absolutely fundamental social and political questions, requiring a real social debate about an alternative to the capitalist model of infinite growth.

What has happened is entirely predictable: yet another major nuclear "accident". At the time of writing, it is not yet certain that it will take on the dimensions of a disaster similar to Chernobyl, but that is the direction in which things, alas, look set to evolve. But whether it develops into a major disaster or not, we are once again faced with evidence that the technology can never be 100% secure. The risks are so frightening that the conclusion is obvious: it is imperative to abandon nuclear energy, and to do so as quickly as possible. This is the first lesson of Fukushima, one which raises absolutely fundamental social and political questions, requiring a real debate throughout society about an alternative to the capitalist model of infinite growth.

A dangerous technology

Windscale in 1957, Three Mile Island in 1979, Chernobyl in 1986, Tokai Mura in 2000, and now Fukushima. The list of accidents at nuclear power plants continues to grow. It simply could not be otherwise and it is not necessary to be a doctor of nuclear physics to understand why.

A nuclear plant works somewhat in a similar way to a kettle, with the elements in a kettle corresponding to the fuel rods in a nuclear plant. If there is no water in the kettle and the elements heat up, there is a problem, and in much the same way the central fuel rods must be continuously submerged in water. The steam produced by the resulting boiling water turns turbines that generate electricity. The plant consumes large quantities of water, the circulation of which is ensured by pumps.

If the pumps fail, the water runs out and the overheated bars start to deteriorate. If water is not added quickly, the heat produced by the reaction in the bars is such that they melt and fall to the bottom of the tank (which corresponds to the chamber of a kettle). This tank is in turn enclosed in a double ring of security; we all recognise the outer silhouette of the reactor. If this does not withstand the intense heat of molten bars and it cracks, radioactivity is released into the environment, with fatal consequences.

A fragile technology

The reaction that occurs in a power plant is a chain reaction: uranium nuclei are bombarded with neutrons, and when it absorbs a neutron, a uranium nucleus splits in two and releases a large amount of energy (nuclear fission) while also releasing more neutrons, and each of these can cause the fission of another uranium nucleus. Once the reaction starts, it continues all by itself. The only way to control and monitor the temperature is to insert between the fuel rods bars made of alloy that can absorb neutrons without causing fission. This can cool the core of the reactor. But this cooling takes some time, during which the fuel rods must remain bathed in water, otherwise they might overheat.

The proponents of nuclear power repeat tirelessly that the device is extremely safe, particularly because, in the case of failure of the mains supply, the pumps can be supplied with energy thanks to emergency generators. The accident in Fukushima shows that those assurances are not worth much: because of the earthquake, the stations have automatically triggered a chain reaction, as might be expected in such circumstances. There was therefore no more power to operate the pumps. The generators should have started automatically, but unfortunately they were out of order, drowned by the tsunami. The cooling water is insufficient, as the fuel rods were exposed from 1.8m to over three meters (for a total length of 3.71 meters). This overheating caused an overpressure and a chemical reaction (electrolysis of water cooling) which produced hydrogen. The technicians then released vapor to avoid the explosion of the tank, but hydrogen apparently then exploded in the reactor, causing the collapse of the dome of the building, and steam was released into the environment. This scenario was apparently repeated in a second reactor.

Just like Chernobyl

The distribution of freshwater having been interrupted by the tsunami, the technicians used the water from the nearby sea. Several American experts have said that this was typically an "act of desperation." According to them, it evokes the vain attempts to avoid the melting of the core of the reactor at Chernobyl, when employees of the plant and heroic volunteers poured sand and concrete onto the reactor, paying with their lives. The level of radioactivity measured 80 km from Fukushima is already more than 400 times the permissible levels. Six brave Japanese journalists armed with Geiger counters visited Futaba Town Hall, located 2km from the plant and found that the radioactivity levels exceeded the measuring capacity of some of their devices! Currently, it is estimated that a Japanese citizen is receiving every hour a dose of radioactivity considered acceptable in one year.

As the French network "Sortir du nucléaire" said in a statement, "we are to believe that a dramatically high level of radioactivity in a wide area around

the plant, including the health consequences does not have serious consequences for the health". We should not believe the statements about immunity to the fallout: the precedent of Chernobyl showed that a radioactive cloud could contaminate vast regions. Everything depends on the force with which the particles are sent into the atmosphere. In the case of a very violent explosion, the radioactive elements may rocket to the altitude of jet streams, the strong winds that prevail at high altitudes. In that case, the fallout could affect areas far removed from Fukushima.

Two agonizing questions

The radioactivity comes mainly from two elements: Iodine-131 and Cesium 137. Both are highly carcinogenic, but the former has a lifetime in the atmosphere of about eighty days, while the second remains radioactive for about 300 years. On Sunday March 13, more than 200,000 people were evacuated. The authorities decreed an exclusion zone of 20 km around the first reactor in Fukushima, and 10 km of the latter. The presence of Cesium 137 is particularly worrying.

Precise information is lacking: Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) and the Japanese authorities are more than likely hiding a part of the truth. The two most worrying questions which arise are whether the fusion of the bars is controlled or if it continues, on the one hand, and also if the structure containing the tank will blow up. According to Ken Bergeron, a nuclear physicist who has worked on simulations of accidents in power plants, this structure "is certainly stronger than Chernobyl, but much less so than Three Mile Island. Specialists are not disguising their concern: "If they do not regain control of it all, we will move from partial melting to a full meltdown, it will be a total disaster," said one expert (Le Monde, March 13, 2011).

But the worst of all would be the meltdown of the core of the second reactor, which exploded on March 13. Indeed, the fuel is MOX, a mixture of depleted uranium oxide and plutonium 239. Plutonium 239 is in fact a waste recycling product of conventional uranium power plants. Its radioactivity is extremely high and its "half-life" (the number of years needed to reduce by half the level of radioactivity) is estimated at 24,000 years. The Japanese are familiar with this element and its fearsome consequences: the nuclear bomb dropped on Nagasaki at the end of World War II was based on Plutonium-239 ...

An unacceptable risk

After the Chernobyl disaster, nuclear advocates have said that poor Soviet technology, poor safety standards and the bureaucratic nature of the system were the basis of the accident. If we are to believe them, nothing similar could occur to plants based on good capitalist technology, especially not in "democratic" countries where the legislature shall take all necessary security measures at all

levels. Today we are seeing that these claims are not worth a damn.

Japan is a country of high technology. Fully aware of the seismic risk, the Japanese authorities have imposed strict standards for plant construction. The reactor 1 Fukushima even included a double safety device, with some generators supplied with fuel and others battery operated. Neither has done any good, because the most sophisticated technology and most stringent safety standards will never provide an absolute guarantee, given the possibility of natural disasters or possible criminal acts by insane terrorists (not to mention human error). We can reduce the risks of nuclear power, but we can not remove them entirely. If it is relatively small but the number of plants increases, as is the case now, the absolute risk may increase.

It is very important to make the point that this risk is unacceptable because it is of human origin, it is preventable, and it is the result of investment decisions made by small circles of people, focused on their profits without proper democratic consultation of the people. To write that "nuclear accidents (sic) in Japan are far from causing the loss of as many lives as the tsunami," as it said in Belgium's *Le Soir* editorial (14 March), is to ignore the qualitative difference between a unavoidable natural disaster and completely preventable technological catastrophe. To add that "like any complex industrial process, energy production from the atom has a substantial risk" (ibid.) also ignores the specificity of the nuclear risk, which includes the fact that this technology has the potential to wipe the human race off the face of the earth. We must relentlessly hunt down and expose these types of excuses, which reflect the enormous pressure exerted at all levels by the lobby of the nuclear industry.

The risk on our own doorstep

If specialists do not hide their utmost concern, policies flaunt their stupidity. Asked on the afternoon of March 12, the French Minister of Industry, Mr. Besson, said that what is happening in Fukushima is "a serious accident, not a catastrophe." To justify his own pro-nuclear policy, the British secretary of energy, Chris Huhne, found nothing better to say than to point out the weakness of the seismic risk in the UK, adding that it would draw lessons from what happens in the Land of the Rising Sun so that, ultimately, security will be even better... These same pitiful arguments are used with variations by all governments who have decided either to stay the course (France), or have been converted (Italy) or are challenging the policies of nuclear power which were established under the pressure of public opinion after Chernobyl (Germany, Belgium). Objectives: To prevent panic and thereby to prevent a new mobilization of the anti-nuclear movement from torpedoing the ambitious plans for nuclear development which exist on a global scale.

To call these arguments unconvincing would be something of an understatement. In Western

Europe, in particular, fear is more than justified. In France, a leader in the field of nuclear energy, reactors do not meet seismic standards of reference. According to the Network "Sortir du nucléaire" EDF even went to the lengths of falsifying the seismic data to avoid having to recognize and invest at least 1.9 billion euros to bring the reactor up to safety standards. Most recently, the courts dismissed an application for closure of the nuclear Fessenheim (Alsace), the oldest French nuclear reactor, also situated in an area of high seismic risk. In Belgium, Doel and Tihange are designed to withstand earthquakes of magnitude 5.7 to 5.9 on the Richter scale. However, since the 14th century, these regions have experienced three earthquakes with a magnitude greater than 6.

It is also worth noting that there are no longer enough engineers with specialized training in power plant management, and the nuclear emergency plan only provides for evacuation of an area 10 km around a plant, which is totally inadequate. The prolongation of the active lives of the facilities is another concern. It now stands at in 50 years, whereas incidents are increasing in plants with only twenty years of existence. Thus, because of their age, nineteen of French reactors have unresolved anomalies in their relief systems of cooling ... the same that have failed in Japan. Etc., etc..

A social choice

We have to abandon nuclear energy, as completely and as quickly as possible. This is perfectly possible technically, and it should be noted in passing that the efficiency of nuclear power is very poor (two thirds of the energy is dissipated as heat). The debate is primarily a political one, a debate society must have that ultimately poses a choice of civilization. Because here is the nub of the problem: we must phase out nuclear power and, simultaneously, abandon fossil fuels, the main cause of climate change. In just two generations, renewables must become our sole energy source.

However, the transition to renewables requires huge investments in energy efficient solutions, so sources of greenhouse gas emissions become more and more supplementary. In practice, energy transition is only possible if energy demand decreases dramatically, at least in developed capitalist countries. In Europe, this decrease should be about 50% by 2050. A reduction of this magnitude is not feasible without a significant reduction in material production and transportation. We must produce and carry less, otherwise the equation will not balance. This means that such a transition is impossible in the capitalist system, because the pursuit of profit under the whip of competition inevitably means growth, ie capital accumulation, which inevitably leads to an increasing quantity of goods, putting increased pressure on resources.

This is why all the responses to the climate challenge presented by capitalists rely on

sorcerer's apprentice technology , of which nuclear is the flagship. The "bluemap" energy scenario of the International Energy Agency is telling in this regard: it proposes to triple the number of nuclear power stations by 2050, which would involve building a new gigawatt power plant every week. This is madness, pure and simple.

An alternative to this vicious system is more urgent than ever. It requires that we produce less, which means a radical reduction of working hours, and therefore a redistribution of wealth. It also involves collective ownership of energy and finance, because renewables are more expensive than other sources, and will remain so for twenty years at least. It demands planning at all levels, from local to global, in order to balance the rights of the South to development with the preservation of the ecological balance. It ultimately requires the realisation of the ecosocialist project, of a society producing for the satisfaction of real human needs, democratically determined, in accordance with the rhythms and the functioning of the ecosystem.

Without such an alternative, capitalist growth will always cause more disasters without providing for social needs. That is, ultimately, the terrible lesson of Fukushima.

, Daniel Tanuro, a certified agriculturalist and eco-socialist environmentalist, writes for "La gauche", (the monthly of the LCR-SAP, Belgian section of the Fourth International).

Environment - The worst is unleashed in Fukushima!



The gravity of the situation is worsening by the hour at the site of the nuclear power station at Fukushima, in Japan. The managers of the installations are apparently no longer in control of the sequence of events. The risk is growing of a disaster as serious, indeed more serious, as that of Chernobyl.

The complex at Fukushima Daichi has six boiling water nuclear reactors designed by General Electric. The power of these reactors varies from 439 MW (reactor 1) to 1067 MW (reactor 6). The fuel for reactor 3 is MOX (a mixture of depleted uranium oxide and plutonium), the others function with uranium. The dates of entry into service stretch from March 1971 to October 1979. So they are old machines, generally more than twenty years old, and are increasingly showing signs of wear and tear leading to incidents. In addition to

the reactors, the site comprises silos for storage of solid waste. The operator of the station, the Tepco group, is known for not providing complete and reliable information on the latter.

Reactors 5 and 6 were shut down before the earthquake. The risks seem limited here, but a slight increase in temperature was noted on Tuesday March 15. However, various serious accidents have affected the four other reactors: four hydrogen explosions, a fire, and three partial core meltdowns.

The problems began in reactor Number 1 on Tuesday March 16. It seems that the reactor core melted down by 70%, and that of reactor Number 2 by 33%, according to the operator of the power station (New York Times, March 15). The information on the core meltdown of reactor Number 3 is contradictory but, according to the Japanese government, the reactor vessel of this installation was damaged (Kyodo News, March 15).

According to the French ASN, "there is no doubt that there has been the beginning of a core meltdown on reactors 1 and 3, and it is undoubtedly also the case on reactor Number 2" (Le Monde March 16). The reactor vessel of reactor 2 would not appear to be sealed either (Le Monde, March 15). According to the IAEA, a hydrogen explosion was followed by a violent fire in reactor 4. Here also the reactor vessel was damaged, but this reactor was shut down during the tsunami, so the risk of radioactive leakage was less.

An accident also affected the waste fuel storage ponds. In these installations, as in the power station reactor vessels, the fuel rods need to be constantly cooled by a current of water. As there is no longer enough water, the temperature of the rods has risen to the point of bringing the remaining liquid to boiling point, and the excess pressure has opened a breach in the containment system (BBC News, March 15).

The situation is out of control

The heroic power station workers are currently sacrificing their lives (like the "liquidators" of Chernobyl before them), but they no longer control the situation. They have tried to cool the reactors by using sea water. This was a desperate operation whose possible consequences are unknown (since sea water contains a whole series of components liable to enter into reaction with those of the installations).

Failure. The temperature is such that in some installations (the pools notably) the workers can no longer get close. The attempt to pour water on the reactors by helicopter had to be abandoned as the radioactivity was too high. According to the Japanese safety agency, the dose rate (measure of radioactivity) at the entry to the site is 10 millisievert per hour (10 mSv/h), ten times the level acceptable in a year.

The Chernobyl disaster seems to be replicated before our eyes. The result could even be worse than in the Ukraine twenty five years ago. Indeed, in case of total meltdown of reactor number 3, the reactor vessel would probably break and the fuel in meltdown would spread in the containment system which would not hold. In the nightmare scenario, it would be no longer isotopes of iodine, caesium or even uranium which would be released into the environment, but rather Plutonium 239, which is the most dangerous of all radioactive elements. We would then enter an apocalyptic scenario of death in all the zones affected by radiation, the extent of these being according to the force and altitude with which the particles would be ejected into the environment.

A mass mobilisation to end nuclear power!

Let us hope that we will be spared, the balance sheet is already horrible enough without this. But we are very conscious of the fact that this could happen and we draw the conclusion that it is necessary to put an end to nuclear power, totally and as quickly as possible. Not only civil nuclear power but also military nuclear power (the two sectors are inextricably linked). Mobilise en masse for this, everywhere, around the entire world. Get onto the streets, occupy symbolic places, and sign petitions. Nuclear power is the technology of the sorcerer's apprentice. We should demonstrate our categorical rejection by all means possible, individually and collectively. We should create a wave of indignation and horror so that the powers that be will be obliged to bend to our will.

No credit should be granted to the governments. At worst, they claim that the cause of the Fukushima disaster – the most violent tsunami for around a millennium – is “exceptional”, thus unique, that earthquakes of this magnitude do not threaten other regions of the world and so on. This is the refrain of the French and British partisans of the atom, relayed by their political friends. As if other exceptional and thus unique causes (an air crash, a terrorist attack and so on) could not lead to other disasters in other regions!

At best, governments announce a verification of safety standards, or a freeze on investment, or a moratorium on decisions of extension of existing power stations, indeed even the closure of the most dilapidated installations. This is the line adopted most spectacularly by Angela Merkel, who has made a 180° turn on the question. The risk is great that in most cases this line seeks above all to quieten people down, without radically renouncing nuclear power.

Because capitalism cannot simply renounce nuclear energy in the short term. A system which is congenitally productivist cannot abandon the growth of material production, thus of increasing inroads on natural resources. The relative progress of efficiency in the use of these resources is real, but more than compensated by the absolute increase in production. Given the other threat which weighs –that of climate change, given the

physical and political tensions (the revolutions in the Arab-Muslim world!) which weigh on the supply of fossil fuels, the question of energy is truly the squaring of the circle for this bulimic system.

Dare for the impossible, dare for another society!

Definitively, the only realistic solution is to dare for the impossible: to advance the perspective of a society which does not produce for profit but for the satisfaction of real human needs (not alienated by the commodity), democratically determined, in the prudent respect of natural limits and the functioning of ecosystems. A society where, basic needs being satisfied, human happiness will be measured against a yardstick of that which forms the substance of it: free time. Time to love, play, enjoy, dream, collaborate, create, learn.

The road to this indispensable alternative does not rely only on individuals carrying out in ecologically responsible behaviour (indispensable though such behaviour is), but on the collective and political struggle for ambitious but perfectly realisable demands, such as:

- the radical and collective reduction of working time, without loss of wages, with compensatory hiring and drastic reduction of speed of work. It is necessary to work less and produce less;
- the suppression of the incredible mass of useless or harmful production, aimed at artificially swelling markets (obsolescence of products), or to compensate for the human misery of our existence, or to repress those who revolt against the latter (the manufacture of arms). With reconversion of workers employed in these sectors;
- the nationalisation without compensation of the energy and finance sectors. Energy is a common good of humanity. Its collective reappropriation, breaking with the imperatives of profit, is the indispensable condition for an energy transition which is just, rational and rapid towards renewable sources. This transition will also demand considerable resources, which justifies amply the confiscation of the assets of the bankers, insurers and other capitalist parasites;
- the radical extension of the public sector (free quality public transport, public undertaking of housing insulation and so on) and an equally radical withdrawal from the commodity and from money: free basic goods like water, energy, bread, up to a level corresponding to a reasonable consumption.

Capitalism is a system of death. Fukushima should increase our desire for an eco-socialist society, the society of producers freely associated in the prudent and respectful management of our beautiful planet Earth. There is only one of them.

› *Daniel Tanuro, a certified agriculturalist and eco-socialist environmentalist, writes for “La gauche”, (the monthly of the LCR-SAP, Belgian section of the Fourth International).*

Japan - Japanese organisations call for solidarity

Appeal for financial solidarity with the victims and evacuees of the worst Northeastern-Japan earthquake/tsunami and Fukushima nuclear disaster by Japan Revolutionary Communist League (JRCL) and National Council of Internationalist Workers (NCIW), March 17th 2011.

On March 11, at 2:30 PM (JST), the tremendously powerful earthquake of magnitude 9 hit the vast area of Eastern Japan, comprised of Northeast and Kanto regions. The earthquake gave rise to the formidable tsunami, and the latter devastated numerous cities and towns all along the Pacific coast from the northernmost prefecture of Aomori to the southern Chiba prefecture. At the time of March 17, the number of deaths and missing persons is already close to 20,000, and the number continues to increase.

At the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear plant of the Tokyo Electric Power Co. (TEPCO), the symbol of Japan as a "major nuclear-power nation", all six nuclear reactors from No.1 to No. 6 were damaged and impaired due to the earthquake and tsunami. All the reactors have gone out of control more or less, and dreadful extraordinary phenomena have developing such as gas explosions, fires of housing buildings, reactor-core meltdowns and radiation leaks and spills. The danger of Chernobyl-type nuclear disaster seems to be becoming more and more real. Within a 30-kilometer radius from the nuclear plant, residents have already been ordered to evacuate from the area.

There are now 500,000 evacuees who have lost their houses and/or their dearest family members. Those evacuees have lost their dwellings and foundations of livelihood, due to the threefold sufferings from the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster. Fuel, food, clothing and medicine are terribly in short supply at evacuation sites that have assembled those people who lost their dwellings under the bitter cold.

In this rich and advanced capitalist country of Japan, there have been increase of unemployment and job insecurity, widening social disparity between rich and poor, disintegration of agrarian and fishery rural communities, and discarding of various social securities under the neoliberal policies of the capital. Those victimized social layers are the hardest hit by the earthquake and tsunami.

The earthquake-tsunami damages and the nuclear disaster will widen the structural crisis of Japanese capitalism, and the ruling capitalist regime and its social forces will necessarily expand and strengthen their social, economic and political attacks against the suffered population and the whole working masses.

At the earthquake/tsunami-stricken areas of Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures, our comrades and co-worker union-activists have already begun

activities to support suffered people and to defend their lives and social rights. The pressing priority is to procure food, fuel and housing for the suffered and to secure employment for those who lost their workplaces. Our comrades and co-workers strive to develop and expand popular and autonomous initiatives among working masses and local residents all through their activities.

We call on our international comrades and friends to extend their financial solidarity to the activities of the Miyagi and Fukushima comrades and co-workers.

Furthermore, we call on the international comrades and friends.

The terrible disaster of Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant has made it absolutely clear once again that the nuclear energy is to damage the environment irreparably, to ruin the agriculture and fishery and accelerate the food crisis accordingly, and to put the survival of human being on the earth into a fatal crisis. The capitalist propaganda about "nuclear power generation as efficient and clean resources of energy" has been definitely proved to be an outright lie. The Japanese government and the TEPCO are hiding the truth of the Fukushima disaster and worsening the nuclear crisis further.

Please intensify your global campaigns to oppose the nuclear energy and to abolish nuclear power plants. Advances of your anti-nuclear campaigns are surely to encourage the Japanese sufferers and evacuees and resisting workers and popular masses here.

With our thanks to your encouragements and solidarity to us.

International donations are collected via Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF), Europe in Solidarity Without Borders :

Cheques
cheques to ESSF in euros only to be sent to:
ESSF

2, rue Richard-Lenoir

93100 Montreuil

France

Bank Account:
Crédit lyonnais

Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)

10 boulevard Chanzy

93100 Montreuil

France

ESSF, account number 445757C

International bank account details :

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP

Account holder : ESSF

, *Fourth International organisation in Japan.*

Germany - Mobilisations against Nuclear Power Plants

Shut them all down now
Thadeus Pato

It was a sad coincidence: The German anti-nuclear movement had long been planning a huge mobilisation against the decision of the German government to extend considerably the life of the country's nuclear plants thus to cancel the law, introduced by the former Labour/Green government that they be decommissioned.

On Saturday, March 12, a giant human chain, 45 km long was formed between the nuclear plant at Neckarwestheim and the seat of the regional government of Baden-Württemberg in Stuttgart . 60 000 people took part in the protest in the run up to regional elections. It was the day of the meltdown of the Fukushima-plant after the earthquake in Japan...

A majority against nuclear energy

For decades there has been a stable and absolute majority in the polls in Germany against the use of nuclear energy. And in the last year there was a new upturn of the movement with a new generation of young activists: The mobilisations of last year against the transports of nuclear waste had been the biggest for more than 15 years. But the ruling federal government of Conservatives and Liberals ignored the demonstrations and complaints.

The former government of the Social Democrats and Green Party some years ago passed a law, which limited the running time of the existing nuclear plants. But this was a foul compromise. The "exit" from nuclear energy was planned to be a long one, and, what was worse, this law was made in a way, that it was quite easy for the following government to change it.

So the present government argued, that the nuclear plants are needed in order to fight climate change and the industry now can count on billions of extra-profits from the plants, which are partly almost as old as the Japanese ones in Fukushima..

The movement is growing

The 60,000 on March 12 was a big success. It was also a surprise - not even the most optimistic expected this number of participants. The catastrophe of Fukushima has given the anti-nuclear movement new power. And nobody believes in the hastily made official statements of the government, that something like there cannot

happen in Germany. Many people have very clearly in mind the lies about "no danger" in the first days after the Chernobyl-meltdown.

And there were other mobilisations: In several towns all over the country spontaneous manifestations and demonstrations took place on Saturday, organized by the radical left and local initiatives. For Monday 14th there is a call for nationwide vigils at 6 p.m., and there are already numerous announcements of activities for Monday in the map (<http://www.ausgestrahlt.de/mitmachen/fukushima.html>) of one of the biggest anti-nuclear websites, which shows the towns in which the movement is mobilizing - and the number doubled from Saturday to Sunday already.

Our solidarity is with the people of Japan, hit by the earthquake and the nuclear catastrophe. But the best way, to express it, is, to take part in the reemerging movement against Nuclear energy and to fight for the immediate shut-down of Nuclear power plants worldwide.

, *Thadeus Pato is a leading member of the German RSB (Revolutionary Socialist League) and member of the International Bureau of the Fourth International*

Environment - The truth behind India's nuclear renaissance

Jaitapur's French-built nuclear plant is a disaster in waiting, jeopardising biodiversity and local livelihoods. The global "nuclear renaissance" touted a decade ago has not materialised. The US's nuclear industry remains starved of new reactor orders since 1973, and western Europe's first reactor after Chernobyl (1986) is in serious trouble in Finland - 42 months behind schedule, 90% over budget, and in bitter litigation.

But India is forging ahead to create an artificial nuclear renaissance by quadrupling its nuclear capacity by 2020 and then tripling it by 2030 by pumping billions into reactor imports from France, Russia and America, and further subsidising the domestic Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL).

The first victim of this will be an extraordinarily precious ecosystem in the Konkan region of the mountain range that runs along India's west coast. This is one of the world's biodiversity "hotspots" and home to 6,000 species of flowering plants, mammals, birds and amphibians, including 325 threatened ones. It is the source of two major rivers. Botanists say it's India's richest area for endemic plants. With its magical combination of virgin rainforests, mountains and sea, it puts Goa in the shade.

NPCIL is planning to install six 1,650-MW reactors here, at Jaitapur in Maharashtra's Ratnagiri district, based on the European Pressurised Reactor (EPR) design of the French company Areva - the very same that's in trouble in Finland. The government

has forcibly acquired 2,300 acres under a colonial law, ignoring protests. As construction begins, mountains will be flattened, trees uprooted, harbours razed, and a flourishing farming, horticultural and fisheries economy destroyed, jeopardising 40,000 people's survival.

To rationalise this ecocide, the government declared the area "barren". This is a horrendous lie, says India's best-known ecologist Madhav Gadgil, who heads the environment ministry's expert panel on its ecology. As I discovered during a visit to Jaitapur, there's hardly a patch of land that's not green with paddy, legumes, cashew, pineapple and coconut. So rich are its fisheries that they pay workers three times the statutory minimum wage, a rarity in India.

Jaitapur's villagers are literate. They know about Chernobyl, radiation, and the nuclear waste problem. They have seen films on injuries inflicted on villagers like them by Indian uranium mines and reactors – including cancers, congenital deformities and involuntary abortions. They don't want the Jaitapur plant. Of the 2,275 families whose land was forcibly acquired, 95% have refused to collect compensation, including one job per family. The offer provokes derision, as does Indo-French "co-operation". When Nicolas Sarkozy visited India to sell EPRs, Jaitapur saw the biggest demonstration against him [see below].

The EPR safety design hasn't been approved by nuclear regulators anywhere. Finnish, British and French regulators have raised 3,000 safety issues including control, emergency-cooling and safe shutdown systems. A French government-appointed expert has recommended modifications to overcome the EPR's problems. Modifications will raise its cost beyond €5.7bn. Its unit generation costs will be three times higher than those for wind or coal. India had a nightmarish experience with Enron, which built a white elephant power plant near Jaitapur, nearly bankrupting Maharashtra's electricity board.

Jaitapur's people are more concerned about being treated as sub-humans by the state, which has unleashed savage repression, including hundreds of arrests, illegal detentions and orders prohibiting peaceful assemblies. Eminent citizens keen to express solidarity with protesters were banned, including a former supreme court judge, the Communist party's secretary and a former Navy chief. Gadgil too was prevented. A former high court judge was detained illegally for five days. Worse, a Maharashtra minister recently threatened that "outsiders" who visit Jaitapur wouldn't be "allowed to come out" (alive).

This hasn't broken the people's resolve or resistance. They have launched their own forms of Gandhian non-cooperation and civil disobedience. Elected councillors from 10 villages have resigned. People boycotted a 18 January public hearing in Mumbai convened to clear "misconceptions" about nuclear power. They refused to hoist the national flag, as is traditionally done, on Republic Day (26

January). They have decided not to sell food to officials. When teachers were ordered to teach pupils about the safety of nuclear reactors, parents withdrew children from school for a week.

The peaceful campaign, with all its moral courage, hasn't moved the government. It accepted an extraordinarily sloppy environmental assessment report on Jaitapur, which doesn't consider biodiversity and nuclear safety, or even mention radioactive waste. It subverted the law on environment-related public hearings. It cleared the project six days before Sarkozy's visit.

Why the haste? India's nuclear establishment has persistently missed targets and delivered a fraction of the promised electricity – under 3% – with dubious safety. It was in dire straits till it conducted nuclear explosions in 1998, which raised its status within India's national-chauvinist elite – and its budget. The major powers have "normalised" India's nuclear weapons through special exceptions in global nuclear commerce rules. France used these to drive a bargain for cash-strapped Areva. Its counterpart is the disaster-in-waiting called Jaitapur.

Praful Bidwai Independent Journalist

Villagers, activists protest Nicolas Sarkozy-backed Jaitapur plant Published: Sunday, Dec 5, 2010, 3:20 IST

By Alok Deshpande | Place: Mumbai | Agency: DNA

Coinciding with the visit of French president Nicolas Sarkozy to India, thousands of people on Saturday staged a protest near Jaitapur, the site of the proposed one-trillion-rupee nuclear power project to be built in collaboration with France-based company Areva.

The state-run Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) is expected to sign a deal with Areva in the coming days.

The protesters included environmentalists, villagers and farmers, from the coastal Ratnagiri district. Leaders like Arun Velaskar, were arrested at Madban, around 12km from Jaitapur. The police tried to lock the Bhagwati Temple in Madban, preventing the people from entering inside but eventually had to back down.

Supreme Court retired judge BJ Kolse-Patil was arrested in the Natye village near Madban, after which an angry mob vandalised the police van, injuring three policemen. The mob also targeted two buses used to arrest the protesting villagers. Others arrested included leaders of voluntary groups Konkan Bachao Andolan and Janahit Seva Samiti, which are spearheading the stir, the activists said, adding, the local fishing community also took part in the demonstration.

Greenpeace energy specialist Lauri Myllyvirta said that at least 10,000 people had turned out to protest. In Mumbai, a coalition of trade unions and NGOs has also planned protest.

According to the government, the final contracts are expected to be signed in the first half of 2011. There will be six reactors with a capacity of 1,650mw each. The first unit is expected to become operational by 2018.

The Konkan Bachao Andolan leaders, Velaskar, Madhu Mohite and Mangesh Chavan travelled from Mumbai to take part in the agitation. They will be produced before a court in Rajapur.

* From *The Guardian*, February 2011: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentis...>

Environment - Bali Seed Declaration

Farmers in Resistance to Defend their Right to Peasant Seeds
Via Campesina



Farmers throughout the world are the victims of a war for control over seeds. Our agricultural systems are threatened by industries that seek to control our seeds by all available means. The outcome of this war will determine the future of humanity, as all of us depend on seeds for our daily food.

One actor in this war is the seed industry that uses genetic engineering, hybrid technologies and agrochemicals. Its aim is the ownership of seeds as a source of increased profits. They do this by forcing farmers to consume its seeds and become dependent on them. The other actor is peasants and family farmers who preserve and reproduce seeds within living, local, peasant and indigenous seed systems, seeds that are the heritage of our peoples, cared for and reproduced by men and women peasants. They are a treasure that we farmers generously place at the service of humanity.

Industry has invented many ways of stealing our seeds in order to manipulate them, mark them with property titles, and thereby force us, the farming peoples of the world, to buy new seeds from them every year, instead of saving and selecting them from our harvest to plant the following year. The industry's methods include genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and hybrid seeds, which cannot be reproduced by farmers, as well as industrial property over seeds, including patents and plant variety certificates, all of which are imposed through international treaties and national laws. These are but different forms of theft, as all industrial seeds are the product of thousands of years of selection and breeding by our peoples. It is thanks to us, peasants and farmers, that humanity has at hand the great

diversity of crops that, together with animal breeding, feeds the world today.

In their drive to build monopolies and steal our natural wealth, corporations and the governments who serve them place at risk all of humanity's food and agriculture. A handful of genetically uniform varieties replace thousands of local varieties, eroding the genetic diversity that sustains our food system. Faced with climate change, diversity is a strength, and uniformity a weakness. Commercial seeds drastically reduce the capacity of humanity to face and adapt to climate change. This is why we maintain that peasant agriculture and its peasant seeds contribute to the cooling of the planet.

Our communities know that hybrid and genetically modified seeds require enormous quantities of pesticides, chemical fertilizers and water, driving up production costs and damaging the environment. Such seeds are also more susceptible to droughts, plant diseases and pest attacks, and have already caused hundreds of thousands of cases of crop failures and have left devastated household economies in their wake. The industry has bred seeds that cannot be cultivated without harmful chemicals. They have also been bred to be harvested using large machinery and are kept alive artificially to withstand transport. But the industry has ignored a very important aspect of this breeding: our health. The result is industrial seeds that grow fast have lost nutritional value and are full of chemicals. They cause numerous allergies and chronic illnesses, and contaminate the soil, water and air that we breathe.

In contrast, peasant systems for rediscovering, re-valuing, conserving and exchanging seeds, together with local adaptation due to the local selection and reproduction in farmers' fields, maintain and increase the genetic biodiversity that underlies our world food systems and gives us the required capacity and flexibility to address diverse environments, a changing climate and hunger in the world.

Our peasant seeds are better adapted to local growing conditions. They also produce more nutritious food, and are highly productive in agroecological farming systems without pesticides or other expensive inputs. But GMOs and hybrids contaminate our seeds and put them in danger of extinction. They replace our seeds in their places of origin and lead to their disappearance. Humanity cannot survive without peasant seeds, yet corporate seeds put their very existence at risk.

Let us not be mistaken. We are faced with a war for control over seeds. And our common future depends on its outcome. It is through this lens that we must analyze the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), in order to understand what is at stake and what positions we should take.

The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture

First we must situate the Treaty in its historical context of constant attempts to steal our seeds. The industry and most governments are using the Treaty to legitimate the industry's access to those peasant seeds that are stored in collections around the world. The Treaty recognizes and legitimizes industrial property over seeds, thus creating the required conditions for theft and monopoly control. In the Treaty, the florid language used to describe Farmers' Rights entrusts individual states with the responsibility for their implementation. However, states do not apply them. Therefore the mentioning of these rights is only an attempt to inoculate the Treaty against our possible protests and denunciations.

The result is a treaty that legitimates the World Trade Organization (WTO) and laws on industrial property rights. It is therefore legally binding with respect to industrial property rights and the rights of plant breeders, while allowing states not to respect Farmers' Rights. It is a contradictory and ambiguous treaty, which in the final analysis comes down on the side of theft.

This does not mean that all is lost. The Treaty can be amended from the peasant point of view, but the changes would have to be major and immediate. La Via Campesina affirms that:

We cannot conserve biodiversity and feed the world while our rights to save, use, exchange and sell our seeds are criminalized by laws that legalize the privatization and commodification of seeds. The Seed Treaty is the only treaty to date to contemplate farmers' rights. However states do not respect these rights, in opposition to their respect of industrial property rights. Therefore, the Treaty must give peasant rights the highest priority, and these rights must be legally binding. They must be guaranteed in every one of the 127 countries that have ratified the Treaty.

The Treaty itself contradicts farmers' rights when it promotes patents and other forms of industrial property over seeds. All forms of patents; plant variety protection and its royalties on farm-reproduced seeds; as well as all other forms of industrial property over life must be banned in the Treaty.

Industry incurred an immense debt by appropriating our seeds and by destroying cultivated biodiversity in order to replace it with a few manipulated varieties. Industry must repay this past debt, but doing so by no means gives it the right to continue appropriating our seeds. Industry must pay and it must also stop with the appropriation of seeds and the destruction of biodiversity.

The Treaty proposes the "sharing of the benefits" of the industrial property rights that it recognizes. These "benefits" result from the very theft of our peasant seeds. We do not want to be offered the proceeds from the theft of our seeds; we do not

want benefit sharing because we do not want industrial property rights on seeds.

We demand public policies in favor of living, farmers' seed systems, systems that are in our communities and under our control. These public policies should promote reproducible local seeds, but not non-reproducible seeds, like hybrids. They should prohibit monopolies, and favour instead agroecology, access to land and good care of the soil. These policies should also facilitate participative research in farmers' fields and under the control of farmers' organizations, not the control of the industry. We call on our communities to continue to conserve, care for, develop and share our peasant seeds: this is the best form of resistance against theft and the best way to maintain biodiversity.

Centralized gene banks do not respond to the needs of farmers. They are seed museums for the benefit of biopirate corporations, and offer no real access to peasant peoples. Moreover, our seeds are in danger inside these banks, threatened by genetic contamination and industrial property rights. We cannot trust governments or the Treaty to conserve them. We refuse to turn our seeds over to the gene banks of the multilateral systems and of the industry as long as the following remain in existence: patents on plants, their genes or other plant parts; other industrial property rights systems such as plant variety protection which demand royalties on farm-saved seeds; GMOs.

The commodification of seeds is seriously threatening our peasant seeds in Asia, Latin America and Africa. But in some of our countries, especially in Europe and North America, the commercial monopoly of industrial seeds has already done away with the majority of local varieties. In these countries, we can no longer carry out farmer selection using the varieties that are commercially available, because they are manipulated in such a way that they will not grow well without chemical inputs or industrial processes. They have lost much of their nutritional value and are increasingly modified genetically. We cannot select our new peasant varieties based on the seeds of our parents which are locked up in gene banks. We must have unconditional access to the banks of the multilateral system because it is our seeds that are kept there.

We farmers can keep our seeds first and foremost in our fields, but also in our granaries, seed barns and local community seed saving systems which also constitute small "ex situ collections". We put these "ex situ collections" as close as possible to our fields so that farmers maintain control over them, responsibility for them and access to them. To paraphrase the Treaty, we farmers construct our own "multilateral system". This is the basis upon which we can collaborate with the Treaty by reminding it that it is not the only entity carrying out seed conservation. If the Treaty wants to collaborate with us, it must respect our rules and

our rights, and forbid Industrial Property Rights and GMOs.

Since the process of the Treaty is carried out within the United Nations, it is national states that have the responsibility to protect peasant seed systems. Yet, the World Trade Organization (WTO) renders the rights of plant breeders legally binding, while the rights of farmers are not respected. We demand that farmers' rights be mandatory and that the rights of breeders be subordinated to these farmers' rights. This necessarily entails the repeal of seed laws that privatize and commodify seeds and deny peasant rights. We demand the adoption of national laws that recognize Farmers' Rights. La Via Campesina calls for the rapid approval and ratification of an international convention on peasant rights in the United Nations. Agriculture and seeds have no place in the WTO and Free Trade Agreements.

This Treaty is but part of a series of challenges that peasant and indigenous peoples are facing today. The Rio + 20 process is a clear confrontation between 'greenwashed' capitalism, and peasant agriculture, agroecology and our peasant seeds. La Via Campesina will act to defend agroecology and farmers' seeds which represent hope and are the future of humanity. As we have shown, sustainable peasant agriculture can both contribute to the cooling of the planet and feed the world.

If governments commit to reforming the Treaty by effectively and actively defending Farmers' Rights, we are willing to collaborate with the Treaty, including in a parallel committee, modeled on the Committee for Food Security that accompanies the FAO process in Rome. But we do not want to open the door to a collaboration with the Treaty that will thrust us into interminable discussions while GMOs, hybrids and industrial property rights expel us from our fields. Whether or not the Treaty recognizes those of us who are the stewards of biodiversity, we will continue to work within our own peasant seed systems, which have assured genetic diversity and fed the world in the past, and will continue to do so in the future. We are keeping seeds not only for ourselves, but also for our children. Peasant seeds are the heritage of peasant communities and indigenous peoples in the service of humanity.

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

Environment - Alternatives to the dominant agricultural model

Viento Sur

Esther Vivas

Neoliberal globalization's mission to privatise all areas of life including agriculture and natural

resources threatens to condemn a vast part of the world's population to hunger and poverty. Today it is estimated by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation that worldwide there are 925 million hungry people at a time when, paradoxically, we produce more food than ever before.

According to the international organisation GRAIN, food production has tripled since the 1960's while the world population has only doubled. However, the mechanisms of the production, distribution and consumption of food serve private interests, preventing the poorest from obtaining essential sustenance.

The access of the local peasantry to access to land, water and seeds is not a guaranteed right. Consumers do not know where the food that we eat comes from, which makes it impossible to choose to consume GM-free products. The process of food production has been increasingly alienated from consumption and the increasing industrialisation and concentration of each stage of the agribusiness food chain in the hands of enormous agroindustrial concerns has led to a loss of autonomy for both farmers and consumers.

Opposed to this dominant model of agribusiness, in which the search for profits has been put before the food needs of people and respect for the environment, is the alternative paradigm of food sovereignty. This affirms the right of local peoples to define their own agricultural and food policies, control their own domestic food markets and promote local agriculture by preventing the dumping of surplus products. It encourages diverse and sustainable farming methods that respect the land, and sees international trade as only a complement to local production. Food sovereignty means returning control of natural assets such as land, water and seeds to local communities and fighting against the privatisation of all life.

Beyond food security

This is a concept that goes beyond the food security proposals advocated by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in the 1970's, which had the objective of ensuring the right of access to food for all people. Food security has not served as an alternative paradigm in that it does not question the current model of production, distribution and consumption and has been stripped of its original meaning. Food sovereignty includes this principle that everyone must eat, while also opposing the dominant agro-industrial system and the policies of international institutions that give it support.

Achieving this goal demands a strategy of breaking with the neoliberal agricultural policies imposed by the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These organisations' imposition of free trade agreements, structural adjustment, external debt and so on have served to erode people's food sovereignty.

However, the demand for food sovereignty does not imply a romantic return to the past, but rather a regaining of awareness of traditional practices in order to combine them with new technologies and new knowledge. Neither should it consist of a parochial approach or a romantic idealisation of small producers but rather an entire rethinking of the global food system in order to encourage democratic forms of food production and distribution.

A feminist perspective

Promoting the construction of alternatives to the current agricultural and food model also involves an awareness of the role of gender, recognising the role women play in the cultivation and marketing of what we eat. Between 60% and 80% of the burden of food production in the South, according to FAO data, falls on women. They are the main producers of staple crops like rice, wheat and maize, which feed the poorest populations in the global South. But despite their key role in agriculture and food, they are, along with children, those most affected by hunger.

Women in many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America face enormous difficulties in accessing land, getting credit, etc. But these problems do not only exist in the South. In Europe many farmers have little or no legal status, since most of them work on family farms where administrative rights are the exclusive property of the owner of the farm and women, despite working on it, are not entitled to aid, land for cultivation, milk quotas, etc.

Food sovereignty has to break not only with a capitalist model of agriculture but also with a patriarchal system that is deeply rooted in a society that oppresses and subordinates women. Any notion of food sovereignty which does not include a feminist perspective is doomed to failure.

Via Campesina

The concept of food sovereignty was first proposed in 1996 by the international movement La Via Campesina, which represents about 150 farmers' organizations from 56 countries, in order to coincide with the World Food Summit of the FAO in Rome.

Via Campesina was formed in 1993, at the dawn of the antiglobalization movement, and gradually became one of the key organisations in the critique of neoliberal globalisation. Its rise is an expression of peasant resistance to the collapse of the countryside economy, caused by neoliberal policies and their intensification with the creation of the World Trade Organization.

Membership of Via Campesina is very heterogeneous in terms of the ideological origin of the sectors represented (landless, small farmers), but all belong to the rural sectors hardest hit by the advance of neoliberal globalisation. One of its achievements has been to overcome, with a considerable degree of success, the gap between the rural North and South, articulating joint

resistance to the current model of economic liberalisation.

Since its inception, Via has created a politicised "peasant" identity, linked to land and food production, built in opposition to the current model of agribusiness and based on the defense of food sovereignty. It embodies a new kind of "peasant internationalism" 'that we can regard as "the peasant component" of the new internationalism represented by the global justice movement.

A viable option

One of the arguments used by opponents of food sovereignty is that organic farming is unable to feed the world. However, this claim has been demonstrated to be false by the results of an extensive international consultation led by the World Bank in partnership with the FAO, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) UNESCO, representatives of governments, private institutions, scientists, social interest groups, etc. This project was designed as a hybrid consulting model, involving over 400 scientists and experts in food and rural development over four years.

It is interesting to note that, although the report was supported by these institutions, it concluded that agroecological production provided food and income to the poorest, while also generating surpluses for the market, and was a better guarantor of food security than transgenic production.

The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology (IAASTD) report, published in early 2009, argued for local, peasant and family production of food and the redistribution of land to rural communities. The report was rejected by agribusiness and filed away by the World Bank, while 61 governments approved it quietly, except for the U.S., Canada and Australia, among others.

In the same vein, a study by the University of Michigan, published in June 2007 by the journal *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems*, compared conventional agricultural production to organic. The report concluded that agro-ecological farms were more highly productive and more capable of ensuring food security throughout the world, than systems of industrialised farming and free trade. It estimated that, even according to the most conservative estimates, organic agriculture could provide at least as much food as it produced today, although the researchers considered as a more realistic estimate that organic farming could increase global production food up to 50%.

A number of other studies have demonstrated how small-scale peasant production can have a high performance while using less fossil fuel, especially if food is traded locally or regionally. Consequently, investment in family farm production and ensuring access to natural resources is the best option in terms of combating climate change and ending poverty and hunger, especially given that three-

quarters of the world's poorest people are small peasants.

In the field of trade it has proved crucial to break the monopoly of large retailers, and to avoid large-scale distribution circuits (through the use of local markets, direct sales, consumer groups, Community supported agriculture and so on), thereby avoiding intermediaries and establishing close relationships between producer and consumer.

Alternatives to the dominant agricultural model, which generates poverty, hunger, inequality and climate change, do exist. They necessitate a break with the capitalist logic imposed on the agricultural system and an insistence on the right of the peoples of the world to food sovereignty.

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South Africa - The ANC government's 'talk left, walk right' climate policy

Dumping on Africans. "Durban's methane-electricity conversion at three local landfills shows the futility of the CDM, not to mention the historic injustice of keeping the Bissasar Road dump (Africa's largest) open in spite of resident objections to environmental racism."

It's worth downloading a copy of the South African government's new National Climate Change Response Green Paper [1] to prepare for the local deluge of technical and political debate for the next round of UN climate talks that Durban will host in eight months' time.

As the Kyoto Protocol's Conference of the Parties (also known as the Durban COP 17) draws closer, we will encounter even more frequent public relations blasts than witnessed in the same International Convention Centre district a decade ago, before the World Conference Against Racism in 2001, and again last year during the soccer World Cup.

The Pretoria government's greenwashing challenges this year include distracting its citizens from concern about:

more imminent multibillion dollar financing decisions on Eskom (South Africa's electricity utility) coal-fired mega power plants (with more price increases for the masses);

the conclusion of the energy ministry's multi-decade resource planning exercise, which is run

by a committee dominated by electricity-guzzling corporations; and

Pretoria's contributions to four global climate debates: President Jacob Zuma's co-chairing of a UN sustainable development commission, planning minister Trevor Manuel's role within the UN Advisory Group on Climate Finance seeking \$100 billion/year in North-South flows, the G8-G20 meetings in France and the COP 17 preparatory committee meetings.

Many recall from World Summit on Sustainable Development prep-coms how pressure rose on negotiators to be as unambitious and non-binding as possible. At that 2002 Johannesburg summit, climate change was completely ignored and the main host politicians – President Thabo Mbeki, foreign minister Nkosozana Dlamini-Zuma and environment minister Valli Moosa – were criticised for, as Martin Khor (now head of the South Centre) put it, "the utter lack of transparency and procedure of the political declaration process. Some delegates, familiar with the World Trade Organisation (WTO), remarked in frustration that the infamous WTO Green Room process had now crossed over to the usually open and participatory UN system."

Later this year, their successors Jacob Zuma, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane and Edna Molewa will also surrender democratic principles and let secretive Green Room deal-making sites proliferate.

Two authors of the Green Paper are environment officials Joanne Yawitch and Peter Lukey, both from struggle-era backgrounds in land and environmental NGOs and once dedicated to far-reaching social change. But people like this (yes, me too) are notoriously unreliable, and I was not at all surprised to hear last week that Yawitch is moving to the National Business Initiative, following the path through the state-capital revolving door so many before her also trod.

At the Copenhagen COP in December 2009, lead G77 negotiator Lumumba Di-Aping accused Yawitch of having "actively sought to disrupt the unity of the Africa bloc", a charge she forced him to publicly apologise for, even though within days Zuma proved it true by signing the Africa-frying Copenhagen Accord.

Green paper

Since the public comment period expires in 10 days, let's rapidly glance through the Green Paper. Right from the initial premise – "South Africa is both a contributor to, and potential victim of, global climate change given that it has an energy-intensive, fossil-fuel powered economy and is also highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate variability and change" – this document seems to fit within an all too predictable Pretoria formula: talking left, so as to more rapidly walk right. (And having drafted more than a dozen such policy papers from 1994-2002, I should know.)

This formula means the Green Paper can claim, with a straight face, that "South Africa, as a responsible global citizen, is committed to reducing its own greenhouse gas emissions in order to successfully facilitate the agreement and implementation of an effective and binding global agreement."

My suggestion for a reality-based rephrasing: "South Africa, as an irresponsible global citizen, is committed to rapidly increasing its own greenhouse gas emissions by building the third- and fourth-largest coal-fired power plants in the world (Kusile and Medupi) mainly for the benefit of BHP Billiton and Anglo American, which get the world's cheapest electricity thanks to apartheid-era, 40-year discount deals, and to successfully facilitate the agreement and implementation of an ineffective and non-binding global agreement – the Copenhagen Accord – which is receiving support from other countries only because of coercion, bullying and bribery by the US State Department, as Wikileaks has revealed."

Consistent with Washington's irresponsible climate agenda, Pretoria's Green Paper suggests we "limit the average global temperature increase to at least below 2°C above pre-industrial levels", yet this target is so weak that scientists predict nine out of ten African farmers will lose their ability to grow crops by the end of the century.

In contrast, the 2010 Cochabamba People's Agreement, the document produced by the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth hosted by Bolivia's President Evo Morales last April, demanded no more than a 1-1.5°C rise, a vast difference when it comes to emissions cuts needed to reach back to 350 parts per million of CO₂ equivalents in our atmosphere, as "science requires".

Failing that, the Green Paper acknowledges (using even conservative assumptions), "After 2050, warming is projected to reach around 3-4°C along the coast, and 6-7°C in the interior. With these kinds of temperature increases, life as we know it will change completely." As one example, "the frequency of storm-flow events and dry spells is projected to increase over much of the country, especially in the east, over much of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, including some of the most crucial source regions of stream-flows in southern Africa such as the Lesotho highlands."

Climate impact on South Africa

In the COP17 host city itself, Durban's sea-level rise is anticipated to be nearly double as fast – close to 3 mm per year – as the South African south coast's in the immediate future, but new research models suggest several more metres of seawater height are possible by the end of the century, swamping central Durban.

Another sure hit to Durban is via its port, Africa's biggest, because of a growing "reluctance to trade in goods with a high carbon footprint", the Green Paper admits. "The term 'food miles' is

used to refer to the distance food is transported from the point of production to the point of consumption, and is increasingly being used as a carbon emission label for food products."

Further "economic risks" include "the impacts of climate change regulation, the application of trade barriers, a shift in consumer preferences, and a shift in investor priorities". Already, Europe's "directive on aviation and moves to bring maritime emissions into an international emissions reduction regime could significantly impact" South African air freight and shipping.

"Tourism is not just a potential victim of climate change, it also contributes to the causes of climate change", the Green Paper observes ominously. "South Africa is a carbon intensive destination, and relies extensively on long haul flights from key international tourism markets."

New air taxes to slow climate change thus create "significant risk" to South African tourism. Yet even though they were warned of this a decade ago, transport ministers Jeff Radebe and Sbu Ndebele pushed through an unnecessary new \$1 billion airport 40 kilometres north of Durban, entirely lacking public transport access, even while all relevant authorities confirmed that South Durban's airport could easily have managed the incremental expansion.

Durban's maniacal pro-growth planners still exuberantly promote massively subsidised "economic development" strategies based on revived beach tourism (notwithstanding loss of coveted "Blue Flag" status); mega-sports events to fill the 2010 World Cup's Moses Mabhida white elephant stadium; a dramatic port widening/deepening and a potential new dug-out harbour at the old airport site (or maybe instead more car manufacturing); a competing new Dube trade port next to the King Shaka Airport; new long-distance air routes; expansion of South Durban's hated petrochemical complex; and a massive new Durban to Johannesburg oil pipeline and hence doubled refinery capacity. The shortsighted climate denialism of Durban city manager Mike Sutcliffe is breathtaking.

This is yet more serious because the Green Paper passes the buck: "Most of our climate adaptation and much of the mitigation efforts will take place at provincial and municipal levels." Yet even Durban's oft-admired climate specialist Debra Roberts cannot prevent dubious carbon market deals – such as at the controversial Bisasar Road landfill in Clare Estate – from dominating municipal policy.

False solutions

The Green Paper repeatedly endorses "market-based policy measures" including carbon trading and offsets, at a time that Europe's emissions trading scheme has completely collapsed due to internal fraud, external hacking and an extremely volatile carbon price; and the main US carbon market in Chicago has all but died. At the Cancun

climate summit in December 2010, Indigenous people and environmentalists protested at the idea of including forests and timber in carbon markets. Only the US state of California is moving the carbon trade forward at present, and the new governor Jerry Brown will run into sharp opposition if tries following through his predecessor's forest-privatisation offset deals in Chiapas, Mexico.

South Africa's Green Paper authors obviously weren't paying attention to the markets, in arguing, "Limited availability of international finance for large scale fossil fuel infrastructure in developing countries is emerging as a potential risk for South Africa's future plans for development of new coal fired power stations." If so then why did Pretoria just borrow \$3.75 billion from the World Bank, with around \$1 billion more expected from the US Ex-Im Bank and \$1.75 billion just raised from the international bond markets? The global North's financiers are as shortsighted about coal investments as they were about credit derivatives, real estate, dotcoms, emerging markets and the carbon markets.

The Green Paper is also laced with false solutions. For example, attempting to "kick start and stimulate the renewable energy industry" requires "Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects". Yet the miniscule €14/tonne currently being paid to the Durban methane-electricity conversion at three local landfills shows the futility of the CDM, not to mention the historic injustice of keeping the Bisasar Road dump (Africa's largest) open in spite of resident objections to environmental racism.

Similarly dubious policy ideas include "a nuclear power station fleet with a potential of up to 10 GWh by 2035 with the first reactors being commissioned from 2022" and, just as dangerously, a convoluted waste incineration strategy that aims to "facilitate energy recovery" through "negotiation of appropriate carbon-offset funding".

Talking left (with high-minded intent) to walk right (for the sake of unsustainable crony-capitalist profiteering) is a longstanding characteristic of African nationalism, as Frantz Fanon first warned of in *The Wretched of the Earth* in 1961. But the Green Paper fibs way too far, claiming that South Africa will achieve an "emissions peak in 2020 to 2025 at 34% and 42% respectively below a business as usual baseline".

Earthlife Africa's Tristen Taylor already reminded Yawitch in 2009 that the "baseline" was actually called "Growth Without Constraints" (GWC) in an earlier climate policy paper: "GWC is fantasy, essentially an academic exercise to see how much carbon South Africa would produce given unlimited resources and cheap energy prices." Officials had already conceded GWC was "neither robust nor plausible" in 2007, leading Taylor to conclude, "The SA government has pulled a public relations stunt."

And if, realistically, we consider South Africa's entire climate policy as a stunt, required so as to

not lose face at the Conference of Polluters' global meeting, then the antidote (short of Tunisia/Egypt-style bottom-up democracy) is louder civil society demands for genuine solutions not found in the Green Paper:

- * turning off the aluminium smelters so as to forego more coal-fired plants, while ensuring green jobs for all affected workers (such as solar hot-water heater manufacture);
- * direct regulation of the biggest point emitters starting with Sasol and Eskom, compelling annual declines until we cut 50 per cent by 2020;
- * strengthening the Air Quality Act to name greenhouse gases as dangerous pollutants (as does even the US Environmental Protection Agency now); and
- * dramatic, urgent increases in investments for public transport, renewable energy technology and retrofitting of buildings to lower emissions.

Those are the genuine solutions whose name cannot be spoken in South Africa's climate policy, given the adverse balance of forces here, and everywhere. Changing that power balance is the task ahead for climate justice activism.

This article first appeared in *Links, International Journal of Socialist Renewal*

↳ Patrick Bond co-authored the new book *Zimbabwe's Plunge: Exhausted Nationalism, Neoliberalism and the Search for Social Justice*.

Cuba - Neoliberal strategy failing in Cuba

In what appears to be a wise decision, at the end of February President Raul Castro announced in an expanded meeting of the Council of Ministers that the timetable will be readjusted on the economic measures that his administration had already approved and had begun applying with the aim of "updating" the state economic model. He pointed out that these would advance as the conditions are created for their implementation, stressing that nobody would be abandoned.

According to the newspaper *Granma*, the president alerted: "A task of this magnitude, a task that in one way or another affects so many citizens, cannot be framed in inflexible terms. The pace of its progress will depend on our capacity to create the organizational and legal conditions that guarantee its successful unfolding, systematically controlling its development so that the appropriate corrections are introduced...".

On September 27, when the "Guidelines" were not yet known and only fragmented information had appeared about what the government-party intended, we issued a statement to those supporting a more participative and democratic form of socialism; in it we asserted that the government was putting the cart before horse.

Heeding left demands: A positive pause

Of singular importance was the reference by Raul to the results of research by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (CITMA). According to Granma, he indicated "the relevance of regulating construction in places near the coast, rehabilitating and maintaining sand-covered beaches, reclaiming swamps, halting the deterioration of coral reefs and deepening research with respect to all of this." What remained clear was "the need to strengthen the role of the Institute of Physical Planning and its provincial and municipal bodies as the guiding vehicles of territorial and urban policies, as well as those of municipal governments, with the purpose of reinstating discipline around this important activity."

They did not mention the 18 famous golf courses and their respective residential communities for the enjoyment of upmarket tourists, but it is very clear that this plan, of incalculable ecological consequences related precisely to those forms of environmental deterioration, will now have to be assessed and approved by environmental scientists and not only by parties interested in their commercial exploitation. This heeded a demand by the left and the environmentalists, who were and are clearly opposed to such incursions.

The president also indicated that our main enemy is presented by our own errors, as he dragged through the mud those who constantly blame external factors as the cause of all our difficulties.

This does not imply the routing of anyone in particular, but it is evident that we are witnessing the tactical failure of the attempt at imposing strategies alien to socialism. These strategies are counterproductive, inappropriate, inopportune, unconsulted, anti-popular and rushed.

The aim was to strengthen the government's financial position but at the cost of sending a million and a half workers into the street, impacting the environment even more, reducing social expenditures and government subsidies significantly, developing forms of private wage-labor exploitation and increasing the revenue of the state budget through excessive taxes on free forms socialist labor: self-employment and cooperatives.

Such forms should be developed as priorities, freely and with active and direct promotion by the government. Those that haven't had the conditions created for the proper access of credit or legal and maintenance resources are instead subject to the bureaucratic brakes of the state monopoly on production, distribution and consumption.

Although not definitive, the push back has been an advance for the critical positions to the neoliberal mercantilist bent that tends toward full capitalist restoration; this was latent in the strategy previously approved by the government and that sought to be endorsed by the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC).

Moreover, it's necessary to say that this was made possible by the willingness exhibited by Raul and other comrades in the party-government leadership to listen to the grassroots/rank-and-file and at least read what other revolutionary actors on the Cuban political stage were writing. The situation is such that it can be affirmed, at this time, that the line for listening prevailed over the line for imposing.

In the decision taken — in addition to the avalanche of criticisms concerning the most negative aspects of the "Guidelines" (according to Granma, "619,387 suggestions were received for deletions, additions and modifications, in addition to doubts and concerns") — what could have had an influence were worries derived from the complicated events taking place in the Middle East. On several occasions we have warned that the increase in socio-economic differences and in the already existing gap between the bureaucratic government and the people could result in catastrophic consequences.

The argument of the broad Cuban left was presented in all the possible settings and we proposed the same thing in meetings on the "Guidelines" that were held with party chapters, in neighborhoods, in official institutions (where possible), in letters that we wrote to Granma (that at least published some of the more moderate critiques), and over the domestic intra-net. However, it was in the international left press that the principal shockwaves were felt.

It's necessary to express thanks for the solidarity of those comrades in the heterogeneous international left who accompanied us in this battle. It is an encouraging sign of the new times and a sample of the cohesion that can be achieved between varying positions.

Naysayers and allies

Poor assessments came from international analysts who — without knowing Cuban society in-depth — shot from the hip and put their unconditional support behind the rapid implementation of those measures that will now be readjusted and reconditioned. Also in a difficult position were those people who wanted to make others believe that the discussion could only take place where and when decided by those "from up high." (These were the same people who said the Cuban left was only dedicated to self-indulgent functions or in search of rivalries in the international network.)

The diversionists who said we were writing nonsense or accused us of "attacking the revolution" will now be able to verify who was mistaken in their analyses about the situation in Cuba. They will see that the ideas of revolutionary socialism are more extended than what they supposed and that we were able to take these positions to the core of the Party and of neighborhoods, despite limitations imposed by bureaucratic sectarian elements.

We have always upheld the cohesion of all revolutionary forces inside and outside the party – not unity based on blind unanimity. This cohesion is possible and necessary to ensure the advance toward socialism. Without coming to a full agreement, there was in fact an accord that helped to momentarily stop the madness that seemed to have already swept over the Cuban people prior to the congress itself.

We are also grateful for the help that several defenders of capitalism offered when demonstrating their solidarity with and their understanding of the macroeconomic measures to readjust the budget deficit in the purest style of neo-liberalism. This should have also served to make some people note the “watermark” on the plan in question. The forces within the party-government that made the decision announced by Raul should not be underestimated. This action confirms our assessment that revolutionary reserves do in fact exist there and that they are capable of positively contributing to the necessary changes in the democratization and socialization that the Cuban revolutionary process needs today.

These experiences should be kept in mind by all those who sincerely want the best for the people of Cuba.

The road ahead

Another lesson that has been reiterated at this stage is that just ideas are unstoppable when, despite adverse conditions, they are defended with dignity, courage, intelligence and constructive spirit.

This doesn't mean that the positions of bureaucratic centralism promoted by the Stalinist circle have been conclusively defeated, nor have those that are held by elements who seek the full restoration of private capitalism from within the bowels of the party-government-state.

Clearly, the president speaks of the readjustment of the timetable and not of the elimination of the measures. But as we have already expressed in the statement cited: while in simple arithmetic the order of the factors doesn't alter the product, it does in economic, political and social matters.

It is not pointless to note that some of the measures that they have been taking are creating a great deal of uncertainty and insecurity among the Cuban people. This is not only due to the contradictory content of these steps, but also because they are accompanied by ambiguity in speech and in actions, by inconsistencies in decisions, by the persistence of all types of absurd regulations, by obstructionist actions of the bureaucracy and by the prevalence of the retarding-sectarian line in the national written press and broadcasting media.

Something else remains clear: sectarianism. This is the notion of there being one sole and sacred line of thought. It is the partial vision of a few who believe they possess absolute knowledge of the

truth. This is quite distant from what contemporary Cuban society needs, which is to now build upon the dialogue entered into between the government and the Catholic Church around the release of prisoners and to expand this to a direct democratic exchange, without exclusions, with the broad social and political spectrum that exists in the country. This goes beyond the PCC and is outside the traditionally existing structures.

It should also be kept in mind that any eventual increase in social tension could serve those who are interested in creating situations in which the only beneficiary would wind up being the historic enemy of the Cuban people: US imperialism.

In a country of 12 million inhabitants, it is not fair, or democratic, or in line with the thought of national hero Jose Marti, or is it socialist-minded that the representatives of a party with less than half a million members be the ones who decide the future course of the nation. Nevertheless, we are not losing hope of seeing the opening of that broad necessary dialogue with everyone. We continue to hope that what is discussed and approved in the Sixth Congress will no longer be the same thing that we saw in those “Guidelines.” We yearn to see a greater presence of measures to stimulate positive change that are based on greater participation of all workers and other Cubans in all aspects related to the production and reproduction of their economic, political and social lives.

What is required now is to continue working to take advantage of this opportunity to see that the now-deferred but still unfounded neoliberal measures are replaced by others of a democratizing and socializing nature.

From the contradictory breast of the revolutionary process, the struggle continues for a more participative and democratic form of socialism.

This article initially appeared in the Havana Times on March 10, 2011

Cuba - What Cuba's reforms may bring

People have been encouraged to speak freely about the economic guidelines of the Sixth Party Congress set for April, so with all due respect I am expressing my point of view.

I didn't want to be among the first to comment, nor did I want to speak out before the discussion began; I wanted to analyze the content of the guidelines, while learning the outcome of the December session of the National Assembly. I also didn't want in any way to influence the opinions of other comrades at the beginning of the debate.

Two months ago the discussion began. In meetings, through the print media and in personal commentaries, a broad section of the international left, as well as many Cuban revolutionaries, communists and ordinary citizens expressed disagreement with aspects of the form and content of the call and the guidelines.

After the debates of the last few years and during the time spent on its preparation, it was expected that the leadership of the party would call for a comprehensive congress with an expansive and truly democratic agenda, without sectarian scaling down, but allowing for a deep and constructive examination of what was previously realized. It was supposed that the line that leads to socialism would be traced, as well as new cadre chosen who could face the task of restructuring Cuban society. People were also waiting on a publicized and far-reaching discussion about what type of socialism we want. This was not in the call made by the leadership, though it was their historic responsibility.

The convening of the Sixth Congress of the PCC, the formulation of an economic plan, the strengthening of municipal autonomy and the opening of other extra-governmental productive relations, especially the expansion of self-employment and the extension of cooperatives to all spheres of the economy, are demands with wide popular backing that many people have been requesting for years. Somehow these are finding partial expression in the call for the Sixth Congress as well as in the guidelines and subsequently in speeches by senior government officials.

Ignoring fundamental problems within the party

I have no doubt that this call and the guidelines seek to address the serious situation posed by the government's financial situation, but by making this the central objective they are ignoring the discussion around fundamental problems in the operation of the party itself, the relationship between revolutionary theory — upon which action is based — and its practice, and that which is related to our concrete situation.

Generally, these can be considered insufficient to guide our society toward true socialism since:

1 – After eight years of waiting, and after having been postponed to better prepare for this congress, the call and the guidelines do not include an integral critical analysis of what has occurred over these past 13 years since the previous congress or the results of the policies pursued to avoid incongruities and omissions and allow for the appropriate corrections.

2 – The selected methodology and the content hamper the broad and needed democratic discussion about the direction and paths to socialism, and thereby repeat the basic errors of the past.

3 – They do not call for the needed replacement of officials or the promotion of cadre with a new mentality capable of guaranteeing the necessary changes.

4 – The call and the guidelines are not accompanied by the election of delegates who would have to defend the positions of their respective constituencies.

5 – They do not assess the outcome of foreign policy or national security policy.

6 – They do not deal with the current international political, economic and social situation in all its complexity, nor our country's system and its position in the contemporary world.

7 – They don't include an analysis of the party's own activity or the internal life of that organization, which needs to breathe new life into its methods.

8 – Some points within the guidelines violate the letter and spirit of the socialist constitution when approving wage-labor for private capitalists and the sale of properties to foreigners for 99 years

9 – They only call for discussion on some specific, limited, prefabricated economic guidelines.

The absence of real debate

Although the official line speaks of a "democratic process" and calls for "consultations," any real democratic debate has been lost because:

1 – They have presented the discussion on some guidelines whose key points had been already approved by the Council of Ministers, put into legislation and are now being executed as part of a five-year plan that ignores the people and the party.

2 – Horizontal exchange between and among rank-and-file and grassroots forces is absent.

3 – Sectarian control exercised by the leadership over the national press hampers the spreading of other contributions and ideas different from theirs.

4 – The "participation" given to workers and grassroots party members is one of consulting and expanding them with a methodology that promotes support prior to discussion and that guarantees the approval of the guidelines almost unanimously (though this is officially criticized). What should be done is only record opinions, because all positions should be respected as valid and debatable to the point of voting on them in the congress' plenary session.

5 – They demonstrate that the traditional intolerance of differences remains, despite official discourse that promotes them.

6 – The historical prevalence of verticalista (top-down) methods of order and command in the party continue to be applied as their methodology, accentuated since the Special Period (economic crisis that began in the early '90s).

7 – The culture of non-debate continues to dominate the process that has generated bureaucratic centralism. Many instructors and intermediate cadre have "assumed" the approval of the guidelines — instead of their discussion — as being the role of the party.

On the other hand, the promoters of the guidelines continue to consider socialism to be a system of distribution of the means of consumption in the neo-social-democratic style and not as a new form

of the organization of production, without their allowing an opportunity for questioning.

Moreover, in a dogmatic, sectarian and uncompromising manner, they assure that there is no other alternative except the one expressed by them, ignoring their own failures, the disasters of imitated "real" socialism and the positive socialist practices of other experiences. They disregard the entire theoretical activity of socialism of the past and what has been realized by many Cuban and international communists and revolutionaries since the fall of the former socialist camp; these latter uphold the idea from Marxist philosophy that points to changes in production relations as the solution to the contradictions generated by the wage-labor system of exploitation, whether this is applied by private owners or by the government.

Instead of looking for the cohesion of revolutionary forces, a congress with all these exclusionary limitations distances them amid a crisis in the credibility of socialism, which we are experiencing.

With so much confusion and people of all strata wanting to live the "American way of life," without successes that demonstrate the future viability of statist projects, does not permit the necessary in-depth treatment by the party or all of society of the current situation and perspectives for Cuba.

Nor does it make the appropriate democratic decisions, and therefore it does not guarantee the objectives that would be expected from such an event in the current circumstances.

No guarantee of the advance of socialism

In this way, the essence of the political economy already approved and being executed, expressed in the guidelines and that seeks to be endorsed by the Sixth Congress, although it implies important changes regarding the traditional paternalistic conduct of the government, does not guarantee the advance of socialism because:

1 – It does not entail a correction that moves from statism to socialization, nor from centralization to democratization that puts control of political, social and economic life in the hands of the workers and the people.

2 – It remains well established that the important strategic decisions will be left with the bureaucratic apparatus of the state/party/government, and that the concrete operatives will be imposed bureaucratically by the traditional administrators.

3 – The fundamental levers of power will remain in the hands of groups strongly influenced by the concepts of archaic bureaucratic centralism blended with ingredients typical of contemporary neo-liberalism.

4 – It doesn't make clear what are the different functions of the party, the state, the government and the economy.

The principal macroeconomic goal that the government is to balance its budget — something very much the fashion in capitalist economies seeking to guarantee the high costs

of governments and their bureaucracies — which will be accomplished by the layoff of a million and half public-sector workers, the reduction of social programs and subsidies, the increase in retail prices of the market monopolized by the government, the freezing of nominal wages and a decrease in real wages, the maintenance of the serious problem of the double currency, and the employment of "available" workers in extra-governmental forms of production with the aim of collecting enough taxes from these individuals to cover their costs.

I don't doubt that these policies could somewhat alleviate the problem of government finances, redirect some workers into state sectors lacking manpower and improve the standard of living of some now-favored strata; but it will negatively impact the low-income majority, particularly the poorest and least protected.

But more than anything, it will be difficult to achieve a significant increase in production and productivity because the guidelines do not contain concrete positive incentives for those who work for the government or for those who are the most responsible for making the large factories and companies productive. Incentives to production remain as negative values that take advantage of the natural pressure of people's needs, just like under capitalism (work as a necessity, not as a source of enjoyment) and they rely on traditional — but inefficient — calls for discipline and sacrifice.

In addition, to achieve a substantial increase in tax revenue to satisfy the aspirations of the government at the cost of new extra-state forms of work would demand the granting of widespread opportunities for the development of private capitalism, self-employment and cooperativism. This would be possible with a tax policy different from the current one, a stimulating one, and if they eliminated the monopolies and centralizing mechanisms that hamper the development of economic activity outside the government, which a good part of the established bureaucracy doesn't appear willing to change. In fact the situation appears to be just the opposite; they seem intent on reinforcing this despite the official line about decentralization and decreasing government intervention in social and economic life.

This is demonstrated in actions to improve centralized economic controls by the bureaucracy, to dictate all economic activity from above; to reinforce the police and other agencies of inspection, repression and coercion that are responsible for maintaining government control; to levy taxes on all extra-economic governmental activities no matter how small, to maintain and even increase the high taxes on self-employed workers, to hamper self-employment in many professional activities (for e.g. architects, doctors, dentists, nurses and others), to continue blaming the workers for the poor performance of the economy, not to expand any of the needed mechanisms of democratic and civil participation,

and keeping out of the congress the important discussion on specific forms in which workers and citizens should participate in the country's economic life.

Nothing to do with socialism

On the other hand, the measures and guidelines enunciated up to now tend to primarily facilitate foreign investment and medium-sized private capitalism. Meanwhile the discussion relating to self-employment is not sufficiently stimulating, and cooperativism is hardly recognized as a possibility just as its concrete measures are not clearly expressed. In this same vein, not a single word has been said in the laws now passed, in the party guidelines or in official speeches concerning workers control of government enterprises, which are those that determine most of the activity in the economy. Nor is there any mention of worker/government co-management or, if you like, the turning over to these producers of factories shut down by the state.

In this manner, the guidelines do not establish the priority required; on the contrary, they underrate the socialization of appropriation, which is the path to the solution of the basic contradiction of the wage-labor system: the increasing concentration of the appropriation of property/surpluses and the socialization of production.

The aims of the guidelines to reach their macroeconomic objectives and the objectives themselves have nothing to do with socialism. The final objectives of any economic plan of a state that claims to be socialist would be to guarantee the well-being and the free and multifaceted development of people and the workers through access of everyone to ownership or usufruct of the means of production. Outside the distribution of idle lands — a process lacking in transparency and without any popular control — this is not mentioned either. Nor do they want to make changes in the ownership of the government enterprises, which are decisive, toward their socialization; rather, they are inclined to share them with foreign companies (privatization).

Proposals to balance the government's budget based on taxes that are collected from private labor and the exploitation of wage-labor is counterproductive from any socialist point of view, just as it doesn't make socialist sense to announce the elimination of 1.5 million jobs and to leave the workers without defined and concrete forms of public assistance and not even guarantees that sustenance can be attained through other means.

This can only be explained because this position continues to be undergirded by the philosophy that has predetermined traditional decisions, which under the slogan of "updating the model" they plan to maintain the old unsuccessful statist scheme in force, sustained by the centralized control of the bureaucracy over the means of production, surpluses, investments and important decisions

— factors that should all be in the hands of labor and social communities and individuals. They also envision the prevailing capitalist wage-labor production relations not only in the bureaucratized government, but extending them to activities of campesinos and self-employed workers, encouraging them to become small capitalists.

A capitalist approach to building socialism?

I reiterate: I do not reject the need for a certain dose of very controlled small private capitalism and perhaps even medium sized (such as the so-called "pymes" [small and mid-sized businesses] that use foreign investment and joint-venture companies that contribute capital, technology and markets where it is indispensably necessary and preferably indirect. However to prioritize those forms of production to achieve the "development of a socialist country" when what is sought is to guarantee the budget of a financier state bureaucracy is an absurdity and definitively opens the road to gradual pro-capitalists reforms.

Although it is true that paternalistic "socialism"— which tried to "solve" the problem of full employment by turning to hidden state underemployment, inflated payrolls and subsidies — could only lead us to the current disaster, it is also true that to attempt neoliberal macroeconomic and monetarists recipes can only lead our economy to accelerated privatization. We have been verifying this since the so-called Special Period, basically with mixed or joint-venture companies that participate with the government in the wage-labor exploitation of our professionals and workers, whose specific weight in the economy is not spelled out in any official document.

The socialist solution to the matter of employment would be to enable the full participation of workers in all decisions that concern them in production and services centers, especially in the management, administration and the distribution of profits. This would allow them to decide if there were excessive numbers of workers, then to evaluate if they could be placed in some other jobs and in undoing all the barriers that hinder self-employment and cooperativism.

With the failures of their centralist, statist and voluntarist attempts at building socialism, those disenchanting souls who are unworthy of Marx reduce Marxism to a few dogmas established by Stalinism and they don't believe or don't accept that there is some other concrete way to reach the new society. Nonetheless, as they aspire to "build it" starting from those "damaged arms of capitalism," they are pursuing the shortest path to its restoration since the prevalence of capitalist means and methods can only lead to the same.

What characterizes a mode of production is "the way in which the labor force is exploited," something the guidelines and official speeches forget when seeking to identify socialism with the centralized planning of resources, government ownership and the "control" of the market.

With that they preserve the basic old economic errors of the dogmatic style of concentrating and centrally deciding on the results of labor (surplus) and maintaining state monopolies on property, purchases, sales and the prices of goods, which only serve to dampen all the initiative of labor and social collectives and of individuals. As long as such vices persist, economic decentralization will not go beyond talk.

Who decides the distribution of profit, the few or the many?

In modern economies, the most efficient production and service companies work more or less on the basis of dividing their profits/surpluses in three main parts: a third for extended reproduction of the entity itself, another third for the enjoyment of the owners (whether private or collective, while the form in which this part of the surplus is distributed — equal or not — is what identifies a company as sharing its profits on a capitalist or socialist basis), and the third part is paid out as a tax to cover social expenses and the government, the municipality, etc. Only this last third should be available to the government for its planning and it now involves relatively large sums. In Fidel's "History Will Absolve Me" he stated that 30 percent of the profits from companies would be distributed among the workers.

The practices of attempts at socialism have demonstrated that planning would have to be democratic, in accordance with participative budgets approved at each level and in each production or service entity and not through the centralization of all surpluses distributed and the whole investment process, a phenomenon that feeds corruption and bureaucracy and is approached without arriving at its essence or finding solutions.

The market — as has already been said, written and repeated — has existed in all social systems.

It is not exclusive to capitalism but is a fundamental tool for economic development that will exist while the capitalist system prevails internationally. Naturally, with the relative prevalence of socialist production relations, it will tend toward the exchange of equivalent values as a channel of social justice until it proceeds to progressively disappear along with the state, classes, the social division of labor, the law of supply and demand, money and other categories of the mercantile economy.

Socialists of different ideological tendencies agree in pointing out that by only putting the means of production under the direct control of workers, with previously contracted production, will it be possible to advance toward the new socialist society. When the workers themselves in each production or service center are the ones who decide on the company's management, its economic administration and the destiny of the surpluses, we will be before real changes in

production relations. Anything else is more of the same thing with a different name.

As has been evidenced, if simple state ownership is not socialized, if it doesn't include those concrete changes in the relations that people contract in the production process and, on the contrary, if it maintains the wage-labor relations and the centralization of the important, natural, inevitable decisions and it demonstrably regenerates the cycle of workers' exploitation (only by the state instead of private owners), it will reproduce exploiting and exploited classes in the form of bureaucrats and producers. Finally, as happened with all forms of "state socialism" in the 20th century, it will end up regenerating the capitalist system. This lesson has not been learned by the current leadership.

With what they intend, they would transition from being a bureaucratized, poor, paternalistic and generous state to another one that is also bureaucratized but additionally a greedy financier that will continue to be poor but with pretenses of opulence.

I am not in the least advocating the immediate disappearance of the state apparatus as some try to accuse those who defend the Marxist path to the withering away of the state. The state is temporarily necessary to guarantee the general aspects of the country's development and its defense. However, socialist construction, socialization, is not possible by concentrating all economic and political power in a few hands or with important decisions being made by a small sectarian group of people without true discussion with full democratic guarantees, rights to free speech, publication and association and where everyone has the same opportunities for participation and the popularization of their ideas.

Cuba again at the crossroads

Each country will advance toward socialism in accordance with its characteristics, its level of development, the degree of socialization and democratization reached, and without having to hope for others to begin that road; but the victory of socialism as the predominant social system with a stable character in any one country will depend on the same situation prevailing in several countries and that these achieve economic and political overlap from their own bases. The projection of ALBA (Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas) in that direction, comprehensively, beyond government ties and based on new socialist relations of production is more than necessary, it is vital.

In Cuba, we are heading then to the critical point of the dissolution of monopoly capitalism under the guise of "state socialism," therefore:

1 – Either we are clearly advancing toward a change in production relations from wage-labor to the prevalence of cooperative-type freely associative and self-managerial relations — this does not involve excluding others — and we are

democratizing the political life that makes this possible, or...

2 – We are regenerating classical private capitalism for the survival of the centralist-bureaucratic-wage labor system that, seeking to exist forever, will soon be absorbed and transmuted by capitalism and self-generated privatization.

Without the widest democratic participation of the workers and the general population in all decisions that concern them, socialism is not possible. What the government/state/party is doing and seeking to endorse through the Sixth Congress does not assure the advance toward socialism.

The path shown by the call to the Sixth Congress and its economic guidelines seem to favor the reinforcement of wage-labor relations of production more than freely associated socialist relations of the cooperative/self-management type. What does not go forward dialectically goes backwards.

The gradual progress of capitalist restoration in the jaws of the most voracious and atrocious empire in history, the traditional enemy of the Cuban nation that has firmly maintained the principal laws of the blockade up until today, is an assault that is threatening to return us to dependence under the empire. As comrade Celia Hart once said, "Cuba is socialist or it's not."

USA - Detroit: Disappearing city

Forty per cent of Detroit today is considered virtually "unoccupied." The administration of Mayor Dave Bing is trying to figure out how to move the remaining residents of these areas out, in the name of "rightsizing" the city. Of course he hasn't revealed any specifics — and the devil is in the details! Residents are wary: without the money to relocate people and the services needed, it's just another round of displacing the urban poor.

Detroit is often compared to New Orleans after Katrina or Haiti, although Chris Hedges' description of Camden, New Jersey as a "City of Ruins" also comes to mind, "the poster child of post-industrial decay (and) a warning of what huge pockets of the United State could turn into" [The Nation, November 22, 2010](#).

The state of Detroit is not really surprising given the reorganization of the U.S. auto industry, which was the "meat and potatoes" of the city's work force in the first three quarters of the 20th century. Although still among the dozen largest U.S. cities, Detroit has seen its population decline from 2.2 million in the "prosperous" 1950s to 850,000-870,000 pending 2010 statistics.

While it's not true that auto manufacturing has left the city, it has certainly downsized. More than 50 years ago it started moving out to the nearby suburbs and to the more rural areas of the Midwest and South. Since the passage of NAFTA in 1993, whipsawing one plant's workforce against another has deepened. The Big Three are also big players in such far-flung countries as China and India,

where workers earn 10% of what the average U.S. autoworker used to earn.

Wherever today's plants are located, management employs robotics, just-in-time production, lean manufacturing and "team concept" as methods to increase productivity and profitability while reducing the number of workers. The Big Three sold off most of their parts plants, further reducing their work force, and increasing their ability to impose conditions on those captive manufacturers to drive costs down.

When negotiating for its bailout with the U.S. government, General Motors predicted a U.S. work force of fewer than 45,000 wage earners. One might suspect that high labor costs were the reason — but they represent only 8-10% of the total cost of producing a vehicle.

Within the Big Three, management has made the decision to outsource jobs that don't result in immediate "value." Thus jobs that keep the plant clean, bring parts to the line, sort and organize components are increasingly performed by low-wage workers from another company.

The UAW has gone along with these changes — with the companies' chopping up the work force into tiered wages and benefits and with the introduction of more and more "temporary" workers — all in the name of keeping the corporations "competitive" in order to save jobs. (When I got a job as an assembly worker at Ford at the end of the 1970s there were 1.5 million UAW members, almost all in manufacturing. Today the UAW has 355,000 workers including nurses, casino employees, state workers and graduate students.)

It used to be that autoworkers could eventually get off the assembly line and find better jobs, or even advance to learning a skilled trade. But with those avenues cut off, newer workers will find the intensity and pace of the work wears them out within a decade.

Detroit has been an industrial city for more than 150 years — beginning with shipbuilding and metal work, stove, bicycle and railroad manufacturing and a pharmaceutical industry, but "good" jobs have always been the result of successful unionization.

Once 90% of the auto parts industry was unionized, and workers made within a few cents of the wages in assembly plants. Today 90% of the parts industry is nonunion, with the wages ranging from little more than the minimum wage to \$19 an hour.

African Americans — except at the Ford Motor Company — were unable to find work in the auto plants until 1943, and faced murderous white "hate strikes" when they finally did. Hired in later, they were concentrated in the more dangerous or more intense jobs that were also affected by automation.

From Detroit's 338,400 manufacturing jobs in 1947, 138,000 disappeared by 1963, a deindustrialization which as historian Thomas

Sugrue observes was underway well before the 1967 rebellion and subsequent "white flight." By 1977 Detroit lost an additional 50,000, more than halving the city's manufacturing base in 20 years.

When Murray Body (1954) and Packard (1956) closed, Black workers were twice as likely to run out of unemployment benefits and forced to take lower-wage jobs than their coworkers. The decline also disproportionately affected Black youth. (See Chapter 4 in Thomas Sugrue's *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, Princeton University Press, 1996.)

Reuther's Fatal Choice

The most articulate challenge to the Big Three strategy of decentralization, speedup and downsizing came from UAW Local 600. Ford Rouge workers went out on wildcat strikes. Their radical leadership set up a committee in 1950 to investigate the potential impact of Ford's "runaway" plants and to develop a campaign to counter it. They opposed the use of overtime as a way of reducing jobs and petitioned the UAW International to fight for a 30-hour week.

But UAW President Walter Reuther had already given up challenging the corporate elite. He called for union cooperation with government and corporations in order to manage the problem. On the UAW side this included demanding the extension of unemployment benefits, retraining programs, early retirement, a guaranteed annual wage and a national health care system.

Over the years the UAW International was able to secure pension and health care benefits after 30 years of work, supplemental benefits to one's unemployment compensation, a jobs bank for laid-off workers, even paid personal days that were to go toward reducing the work week. But these benefits were for UAW members only — not for the U.S. working class as a whole — and most of them have been swept away in the aftermath of the corporate bailouts of 1979-81 and 2009.

As the city's oldest plants closed, production moved outward. General Motors, Chrysler and some parts suppliers built new plants in the city — particularly GM's Hamtramck plant (3,000) and Chrysler's Jefferson North facility (6,000) — when extensive tax abatements and the use of eminent domain to clear land sweetened the deal. But relatively few manufacturing jobs remained — in 2005 the total was estimated at 35,289, but it's less than that today.

Along with the decentralization of the auto industry, urban renewal and the freeway construction reshaped Detroit. This displaced several working-class neighborhoods, from Black Bottom with its array of Black-owned businesses to Poletown, and opened up corridors that turned farmland into suburbia. Of course this dynamic occurred in other major industrial cities including Buffalo, Cleveland and Pittsburgh, but the depth of racial segregation of Detroit dramatically sharpened the dynamic.

Detroit had been a stronghold of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s and almost elected a Klan supporter mayor in 1924. By the beginning of World War II Blacks at the national level successfully pressured the federal government to end discrimination in the defense industry, and, combined with a tight labor market, secured a foothold in the auto industry. But 1943 saw "hate" strikes within Detroit plants over hiring and promotion of Blacks, as well as by a full-blown race riot.

Of the 34 killed in the course of the three-day riot, 25 were Black, of whom 17 were shot to death by the police.

From the 1920s housing had been a particularly contested terrain: restricted covenants were backed by homeowners' associations that mobilized their memberships against any Blacks moving in. During World War II the riots that broke out when African Americans moved into the Sojourner Truth housing project let officials know threats would become a reality if housing was set aside for the needs of the Black community. As a consequence, less public housing was constructed in the Detroit area than in other major cities.

By the time the civil rights and Black Power movements of the 1950s and '60s successfully challenged Detroit's racial discrimination in housing, jobs and political life, the economic dynamics of the city had shifted. Whites, particularly as more Blacks moved into their areas, made the decision to leave. Their individual decision — based on race, jobs and class — opened the door to the white flight of 1967-'74. As chronicled extensively in Heather Ann Thompson's study, *Whose Detroit?*, the flight took off following the riot/rebellion of 1967 and was completed in the aftermath of Coleman Young's inauguration as the city's first Black mayor. (*Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City*, Cornell University Press, 2001).

Every mayor, from Coleman Young to former Detroit Pistons hero Dave Bing, has focused on rebuilding downtown, and neighborhoods have been starved of funding. Detroit now has three casinos and two downtown stadiums. It boasts having the headquarters of General Motors, Compuware and Quicken Loans.

But Detroit, with a population at least the size of San Francisco, has no department store or national chain grocery store within its city limits. Yet the population density is about 6,000 per square mile, twice the density of sprawling cities such as Jacksonville, Florida.

Detroit's population is about 83% African American, 10% white and 7% Mexican American. Before the current economic crisis 55% owned their own homes, although many were too financially strapped to repair them; by 2008 over 100,000 homes were vacant.

The city's population is 10% less likely to be in the work force than other big cities and one third lives in poverty. According to the Bureau of Labor

Statistics, Detroit's rate of unemployment since 2000 is the highest of the 50 largest U.S. cities. That is, the economic crisis that hit the United States in 2008 hit Detroit well before.

Today Michigan's official unemployment rate stands at 15%. Detroit's is officially double, but newspapers write about a 50% unemployment rate.

The Role of the Police

Part of the legacy of Detroit's racism and segregation is rooted in the role of the police. In 1925 one of the reasons Dr. Ossian Sweet dared purchase a home outside the Black Bottom neighborhood where he had his practice was the number of killings by the police that occurred there. Black professionals like Sweet faced harassment and intimidation when they purchased homes outside of Black neighborhoods, often while police looked on.

Police brutality has been a constant over the years. In his mayoral campaign in 1974, Coleman Young promised to disband STRESS, the police squad most responsible for harassing and killing Black youth. He kept his campaign promise but police killings, by both Black and white officers, continue.

One of the most recent and well-publicized cases occurred in June 2010, when seven-year-old Aiyana Stanley-Jones was shot to death by Officer Joseph Weekly as she slept on a couch next to her grandmother. The police were looking for a murder suspect who was in the upstairs apartment.

Detroit's police department has been under federal consent decrees since 2003 over its use of lethal force and deplorable incarceration conditions in the precincts. Its error-ridden crime lab was shut down in September 2008 and the state police assumed responsibility for testing. Police error and misconduct continue although the Detroit Committee Against Police Brutality and the Detroit Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild defend victims of police brutality, campaign to end police patrol chases that result in killing bystanders and advocate for police accountability.

Resources and Schools Under Attack

It's a reasonable conclusion to say that Detroit is still being "redlined," i.e. starved of credit and capital through race and class discrimination. With the erosion of the city's tax base and the racism from those who see Detroiters as having caused our own poverty, Detroit's remaining resources are under attack. Public officials, including a previous mayor, have been indicted on charges of extortion, bribery, fraud and conspiracy. While politicians of all ethnicities have been caught with their hands in the till, the misdeeds of Black officials provide a pretext for suburban politicians to proclaim Detroit incapable of governing itself.

Previous mayors have outsourced portions of a water and sewerage system developed over 150 years, serving four million people in 126 communities. But the rates are high and thousands

of Detroiters have their water turned off for non-payment.

Despite the city's already inadequate bus service, Mayor Bing threatened to completely shut down the buses on Sundays. He backed off when hundreds showed up at public meetings across the city. However he downgraded a system that many depend on by increasing the time between buses and laying off 25% of the drivers.

Bing also threatened to end service to half of the city's parks but dropped that proposal when it became too controversial.

Speaking of the 3,500 city workers represented by AFSCME, Mayor Bing told the press, "They've crippled our ability to do the things we need to do." He then mandated a 10% pay cut through imposing further furlough days. ("Mayor: AFSCME Obstructing Bargaining," *Detroit News*, 2/25/10)

Recently the Detroit City Council awarded DTE Energy a \$150 million, four-year contract for servicing what had previously been powered by the city-owned utility, Mistersky Power Plant. It gave the contract to the company rather than spend \$80 million to upgrade the system — which provided lights for municipal buildings, for Wayne State University and the Detroit Medical Center — and preserve jobs. Yet last fall the combination of a wind storm, DTE wires not properly trimmed and maintained, and a fire department that doesn't have enough trucks or firefighters resulted in 81 houses in northeast Detroit burning down in one afternoon.

At the end of 2010 Detroit Medical Center — a non-profit complex built after World War II through clearing the delapidated housing where African Americans lived — will be sold to Vanguard Health Systems for \$1.5 billion. Vanguard will receive 15 years of tax breaks and promises to honor all commitments to provide care for low-income patients over a 10-year period. It pledges to refrain from selling any DMC acute-care hospitals during that time.

As a non-profit, DMC was unable to obtain the financing it needed for further construction, but financing is not a problem for Vanguard, which earned \$2.1 million in the third quarter of 2010. It operates 18 hospitals, surgery centers and health plans in half a dozen states. An equity company, The Blackstone Group, owns 66% of its stock.

Shortly after my retirement from a parts plant, I decided to leaflet the complex in support of an independent running for city council. I assumed most white workers no longer lived in the city, but that most Black workers did. During that week of leafleting, however, I learned that a surprising number of older white workers remained in the city while a hefty proportion of younger Black workers lived in working-class suburbs.

When I thought it over, I realized that most of the Black workers had children and left the city because Detroit schools do not have the same resources as the suburbs. When I was a

substitute teacher in the early 1990s, I found the school I'd been assigned to teach in had no art or physical education classes and a very limited music program.

Given that Detroit is a vital center for music and art, this was particularly distressing. But when I taught in nearby Southfield the schools had computers in the classrooms, a full curriculum, well-maintained schools and an efficient administration.

Just as Detroiters are urged to pick themselves up by their own bootstraps when their boots have been stolen, teachers are blamed for the state of the Detroit Public Schools (DPS). Both current and past mayors wanted to take control over them, but so far residents have successfully resisted.

Twice the state of Michigan has intervened to take the system over. In 1999 former governor John Engler (Republican), in cahoots with then mayor Dennis Archer (Democrat), dismissed the elected School Board and appointed another board and superintendent. Before returning the school system back in 2005, the state managed to turn a hundred million dollar surplus into a \$219 million deficit. A major boondoggle was the decision to move DPS's office out of its building and into rented space.

In March 2009, Governor Jennifer Granholm (Democrat) seized control of the district's finances and appointed Robert Bobb its Emergency Financial Manager to a one-year term. Reappointed for a second year, Bobb drove the deficit up to \$327 million. His term was to be up in March 2011, shortly after the new governor, Rick Snyder (Republican) had been installed, but Snyder has indicated he will extend his term to the end of the school year.

Bobb has no experience as an educator, but was a 2005 graduate of The Broad Foundation's Superintendent's Academy. The foundation's aim, according to its website, is to "dramatically transform American urban public education." (<http://broadeducation.org/about/overview.html>) Bobb supposedly "earned" his reputation from his work in restructuring school finances in Oakland, California and Washington, D.C.

From the beginning, Bobb insisted that his mandate gave him the right to take charge of the district's academic policy, maintaining that finances and academics can't be separated. His yearly salary from the Detroit Public Schools is \$280,000. but his 2010 contract with the state of Michigan allows him to receive additional compensation: \$56,000 from The Broad Foundation and \$89,000 from unidentified "philanthropic" organizations for a total package of \$425,000. (The \$89,000 was later identified as being paid by the Kresge and Kellogg foundations.) There is no accountability to anyone other than the governor.

Certainly the DPS system is troubled. Superintendents of education have come and gone over the last decade, and only 58% of the

students who start high school graduate within four years; the dropout rate in 2008-09 was 27%. The "average" student misses 46 days of school every year — one-fourth of the school year.

Since school closings were instituted in 2003, enrollment has dropped 10,000 a year. For 2010-11 enrollment stands at 77,669, less than half that of 2002-03. Thousands of Detroit students now attend suburban public school while charter schools have siphoned off an additional 44,375. The loss of each student decreases the state's allotment to DPS by \$8,200.

Eighty-eight percent of Detroit students are African American, 9.5% are Latino/a and 2.5% are white. Seventy-seven percent are entitled to a free or reduced-price lunch. With nearly 40% of the city's children living in poverty, family access to resources is limited. Many have special needs, starting with the problem of developing healthy eating habits in a city with few grocery stores and where more than a third of all families rely on bus transportation. While urban gardens have grown like wildfire over the last few years — and some schools have gardens — cheap, fast food is readily available.

Additionally, a recent study revealed that of the 169,000 Detroit children tested for lead poisoning between 1992 and 2008, 74,171 had unsafe levels. Given the reality of segregated housing, such exposure goes far to explain the achievement gap in reading between African-American and white students. As Randall Raymond, a geographic information specialist for DPS, commented to the Detroit Free Press, "This is an educational crisis, and we should be doing something about it." (5/16/10)

Lead poisoning is only one of the many pollutants that can harm children living in Detroit. Others include metal dust from the cement, gypsum, steel, asphalt and oil recycling plants and diesel fumes from the 13,000 trucks that drive daily through my neighborhood in southwest Detroit. My zip code is one of the top 10 most polluted areas in the state, with two neighboring zip codes right up there as well (48209, 48210, 48217).

Last September Bobb received a letter from the Michigan Department of Education, informing him that the state would block nearly \$5 million in funding because of noncompliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. While Bobb's spokesperson laid blame on a previous administrator's tenure, the state increased its supervision for 7,000 disabled students' progress four months after Bobb was appointed. At the beginning of this school term, local newspapers recounted the problems disabled students had in not being picked up for school, or being picked up one day but not the next.

When questioned, Bobb's office issued a press release claiming more special education students are working toward diplomas this year. An accompanying attachment suggested that parents

of special education students have a reason not to want their children to finish school: "Parents make \$433 in SSI (Supplemental Security Income) per kid each month for special ed.... Don't want to graduate kids." ("State hits DPS for \$4M over disabled," Detroit News, 10/21/10)

Bobb's "Irreparable Harm"

During the first five months of his tenure Bobb made two presentations to the School Board, but by the summer of 2009 consultation was out the window. Bobb accelerated school closings and by August, disregarding the procedure in place for text adoptions, signed a \$40 million contract with Houghton Mifflin Harcourt for the purchase of new books.

In a recent NPR interview Bobb stated that the Detroit school deficit stood at \$330 million. On his watch he has closed 57 buildings (mostly schools) and plans to shut 20 more. ("Change of Guard Likely for Troubled Public Schools," NPR interview, 11/3/10).

Last summer he laid off 226 unionized school security guards and outsourced their jobs, claiming they cost at least \$11 million a year and replaced them for a mere \$6.5 million. But they successfully sued and are back at work.

After being reappointed by the governor for a second year, Bobb released his detailed objectives for Detroit Schools, "Excellent Schools for Every Child: Detroit Public Schools Academic Plan" in March 2010. Bobb and his co-author acknowledge that the plan "coincides" with "Taking Ownership: Our Pledge to Educate All of Detroit's Children" released by the Excellent Schools Detroit Coalition.* Since the coalition plan is the more general statement, I'm outlining its main objectives:

- Disbanding the Detroit School Board, which currently manages 172 schools, in favor of mayoral control. The mayor would appoint the superintendent/CEO, who would be responsible for day-to-day operations.
- Creating an independent citywide commission for standards and accountability. It would establish standards and measurable goals, collect "timely performance information" and publish an easy-to-read report card to help parents choose the best schools.
- Helping parents become "smarter shoppers" and therefore able to make more informed choices.
- Building public support for closing Detroit's "worst schools." According to their chart, this would mean shutting down 74 schools (including some private and charter schools), involving 39,000 students.
- Coordinating the opening of 40 new schools by 2015 and 70 by 2020. This includes 35 college preparatory high schools in the Detroit area — some may be small academies within one campus rather than separate buildings.

- Establishing a leadership academy to provide a training program for teachers and attracting alternative teacher programs such as Teach for America.

Aside from mentioning that hundreds of millions of dollars are spent each year by city agencies, community organizations and foundations on programs benefitting children and calling for more effective management of "these investments for student success," there is little in either plan about addressing the particular needs of Detroit children.

Bobb's Map for Going Backward

Bobb's current plan is to close Burton International, a successful K-8 magnet school, and combine it with students from two other schools, to bring the total population to 1,150. Mayberry, a successful K-5 in my neighborhood, would be combined with a middle school, bringing the student population at the new school to 1,161.

The assumption that good schools can be moved into other facilities, combined with other students and remain successful seems wildly optimistic. Many parents in my neighborhood question the rationale of combining K-5 with middle school students. It does make sense if one realizes that the 3rd grade test results are better than those in the middle school. The school's scores would magically increase.

In July 2010 the Detroit School Board sued Robert Bobb for breach of duty. Not only did he fail to meet with the School Board at their monthly meeting, but he attempted to control its academic policy. On December 6 Judge Wendy Baxter issued a 34-page opinion that granted the Board injunctive relief, ruling that Bobb's actions caused "irreparable harm." Politicians have encouraged Bobb not to appeal.

Meanwhile Bobb has asked the state to apply a \$400 million tobacco settlement to \$219 million of Detroit's school debt. To make the deal more attractive to legislators he has urged that the debts of 40 other school districts also be forgiven. However no other school system was put into receivership. (Funds are currently allocated for Medicaid and the Michigan Merit Program.)

While this proposal publicizes the fact that the debt occurred under the state takeover, since the debt has dramatically risen under Bobb's watch it would seem reasonable that the state should be held responsible for the total amount.

In offering his deficit reduction plan, Bobb outlined two possible outcomes:

- Plan A is to "forgive" a portion of Detroit's school deficit and develop a two-tiered educational system, one being a traditional public school with a second, larger, system composed of charter schools. He describes the charters as being able to provide "autonomous learning and financial environments in which academic achievement will be the centerpiece of decision making and in which flexibility to make decisions will be protected."

- Plan B assumes Detroit is saddled with the debt and would, in Bobb's own words, be an "extremely draconian" measure. Seventy schools will be closed and school real estate sold. Class size will be doubled, along with longer school days, a longer school year, and additional outsourcing.

Neither plan has attracted support from politicians, educators or school board members. Plan A reveals Bobb's drive to charterize Detroit's educational system by any means. What he envisions is a small public system left with special needs children who require extensive services and students whose lack of resources mark them as undesirable for charters.

Another aspect of Bobb's charterized vision is to destroy the teachers union. Clearly the charter schools Bobb outlines do not have unionized teachers who might challenge the "flexibility to make decisions."

As for Plan B, it is just a threat — after all, there aren't even classrooms built for 70 students. But it stands as a dramatic image of the urban school as a prison.

This year Bobb did unilaterally raise class size for students in grades 4-12 to 38, in violation of the contract with the teachers, and the Detroit Federation of Teachers has an unfair labor practices suit pending against the district.

Even if Bobb left next week, the two state takeovers have severely damaged a resource-deprived system. The weakening of Detroit's public schools, symptomatic of the increased inequality in America as a whole, is the result of a conscious decision to loot and scapegoat.

ATC 150, January-February 2011

• Dianne Feeley is a socialist feminist and an editor of "Against the Current". Feeley is a retired autoworker from the parts industry. She is a member of USW Local 235.

Indian sub-continent - Baght Singh day in Pakistan

On March 23, at Shadman Chouck in Lahore, the place where Bhagat Singh was hanged on 23 March 1931, several groups including Labour Party Pakistan organized a vigil. There were a good number of political activists present on the occasion. Lok RaHS organized a street theater on the spot. Later on in the night, we were joined by our Indian friends who drove straight from Islamabad to Shadman Chouck.

They included Ramesh Yadev, based in Amritsar and actively involved with folklore society, Shahid Siddiqui, a former member of parliament and editor of Nai Duniya, a leading Urdu daily, Jatin Desai, an activist-journalist, a national joint secretary of Pakistan-Indian Peoples Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPFPD) and a bureau member of South Asia Human Rights (SAHR), Mazher Hussain, from Hyderabad and executive

director of COVA, Haris Kidwai, General Secretary of PIPFPD, Delhi chapter, Bharat Modi, from a fishing community, based in Porbandar (Gujarat), Kangkal Shanth Kumar Nikhil Kumar, a journalist based in Delhi, Mahesh Bhatt, a prominent Indian film director, producer and screenwriter and renowned South Asian intellectual Kuldip Nair.

We demanded that the place should be named as Bhagat Singh Chouck. On the occasion, Asid Hashmi, a leader of the Pakistan People's Party and chairman of Auqaf Department announced that one of the main buildings in Lahore will be named as Bhaght Singh building. I spoke to Kiran Singh, son of the nephew of Bhagat Singh on the telephone and we exchanged greetings and a commitment to continue the struggle of Bhagat Singh for a socialist Indian sub-continent.

Some history of Bhagat Singh

Bhagat Singh was one of the most prominent faces of Indian freedom struggle. He was a revolutionary ahead of his times. By Revolution he meant that the present order of things, which is based on manifest injustice, must change.

Bhagat Singh studied the European revolutionary movement and was greatly attracted towards socialism. He realized that the overthrow of British rule should be accompanied by the socialist reconstruction of Indian society and for this political power must be seized by the workers. Though portrayed as a terrorist by the British Imperialism, Bhagat Singh was critical of the individual terrorism which was prevalent among the revolutionary youth of his time and called for mass mobilization.

In February 1928, a committee from England, called the Simon Commission visited India. The purpose of its visit was to decide how much freedom and responsibility they felt could be given to the people of India. But there was no Indian on the committee. This angered Indians and they decided to boycott Simon Commission.

While protesting against Simon Commission in Lahore, Lala Lajpat Rai, an Indian author, freedom fighter and politician who is chiefly remembered as a leader in the Indian fight for freedom from British Imperialism, was brutally Lathicharged and later died as a result of these injuries. Bhagat Singh was determined to avenge Lajpat Rai's death by shooting the British official responsible for the killing, Deputy Inspector General Scott. He shot down Assistant Superintendent Saunders instead, mistaking him for Scott. Bhagat Singh had to flee from Lahore to escape death punishment.

Lala Lajpat Rai had established a TB hospital in Lahore in memory of his mother Ghulab Devi. The hospital is still one of the largest in Pakistan fighting TB.

On 8 April 1929, Singh and Dutt threw a bomb onto the corridors of the assembly and shouted "Inquilab Zindabad!" ("Long Live the Revolution!").

This was followed by a shower of leaflets stating that it takes a loud voice to make the deaf hear.

The bomb neither killed nor injured anyone; Singh and Dutt claimed that this was deliberate on their part, a claim substantiated both by British forensic investigators who found that the bomb was not powerful enough to cause injury, and by the fact that the bomb was throwaway from people. Singh and Dutt gave themselves up for arrest after the bomb.

He and Dutt were sentenced to death by a court in Lahore. Bhatgt and his comrades went on hunger strike which last for several weeks against the conditions of the prison for prisoner rights.

Even Muhammad Ali Jinnah, one of the politicians present when the Central Legislative Assembly was bombed, made no secret of his sympathies for the Lahore prisoners - commenting on the hunger strike he said "the man who goes on hunger strike has a soul. He is moved by that soul, and he believes in the justice of his cause." And talking of Singh's actions said "however much you deplore them and however much you say they are misguided, it is the system, this damnable system of governance, which is resented by the people

On October 7, 1930 Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Raj Guru were awarded death sentence by a special tribunal in Lahore. Despite great popular pressure and numerous appeals by political leaders of India, Bhagat Singh and his associates were hanged in the early hours of March 23, 1931.

Several popular Bollywood films have been made capturing the life and times of Bhagat Singh: Shaheed-e-Azad Bhagat Singh (1954), Shaheed Bhagat Singh (1963), Shaheed (1965), The Legend of Bhagat Singh (2002), 23 March 1931 Shaheed (2002), Shaheed-E-Azam (2003), Rang De Basanti (2006)

• *Farooq Tariq is the national spokesperson of Labour Party Pakistan, <http://www.laborpakistan.org/>.*

Ivory Coast - Two oligarchic factions tear the country apart

Two "presidents of the Republic", the outgoing Laurent Koudou Gbagbo and his rival Alassane Dramane Ouattara, are tearing Ivory Coast apart. Each of the "presidents" relies on real support at the national level. This internal virtually balanced "legitimacy", is combined with an external legitimation — characteristic of the limited sovereignty of the African post-colonial states — by the "international community", which is unbalanced.

Alassane Ouattara benefits from the quasi unanimous support of the "international community", that is the USA, France, the European Union, the UN Security Council, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and so on. If initially Laurent Gbagbo benefited from

the support of Russia or Mexico, for example, this was quickly lost. Some African head of states like Jacob Zuma (South Africa) or the acting president of the African Union, the Malawian Bingu wa Mutharika, indeed one of the mediators, Yayi Boni (Benin) have distanced themselves from the intransigence of their peers in the African Union, without however sharing the unconditional support for Gbagbo manifested by the Angolan Eduardo Dos Santos. Inside the political establishment of the former colonial metropolis, Gbagbo benefits only from the support of some dignitaries of the French Socialist Party, opposed to the official position of the latter, a member of the Socialist International like the Front Patriotique Ivoirien (FPI) of Gbagbo. African political parties and intellectuals — inside and outside the continent — are seriously divided.

The post-electoral crisis has seen hundreds of deaths added to the victims of the Ivorian crisis which has been ongoing since the attempted putsch of September 2002. The elections of 2010, supposed to put an end to this crisis, have instead led to this tragic imbroglio, where the interpretations and positions taken reflect unilateralism and confusion: "anti-imperialism", "democracy", "pan-Africanism", indeed "socialism"... these are the standards deployed and counterposed by the different participants in the debate.

Origins of the Ivorian crisis

Since the death in 1994 of the autocrat Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the Ivory Coast has experienced a war of succession inside the single party, the Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI). This has mainly opposed Alassane Ouattara, the neoliberal prime minister of the dead president, and Henri Konan Bédié, president of the National Assembly. Bédié came out winner, relying, amongst other factors, on "ivoirité" ["Ivoryness" – the state of being a true Ivorian] — evoking the supposedly doubtful nationality of his rival, stressing his Dioula ethnic origin (an ethnic group from the north of the country, classified as "Voltaïque") and the fact that he also had an Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) passport. The concept of "ivoirité" as ethnic-confessional sectarianism with respect to the Dioula Muslims would become a major discriminator in the struggle for power.

Bédié was overthrown at Christmas 1999 by a military mutiny. The mutineers sought to justify themselves by speaking of the instrumentalisation of "ivoirité" and "baoulisation" [the privileging of the Baoulé ethnic grouping] at the summits of the state. They promoted as head of state a general, Robert Guéi, the former chief of staff of the Ivorian army and manager of the support for Houphouët-Boigny in the rebellion of the 1980s and 1990s, a victim of the "baoulisation" encouraged by Bédié. This so called transitional government had among its main tasks the eradication of "ivoirité" and the organisation of democratic elections.

But Alassane Ouattara, leader of the Rassemblement des Démocrates Républicains (RDR), like several other potential candidates, including the overthrown president Bédié, was not allowed to be a candidate at the presidential election of 2000, organised so as to allow the confiscation of power by Guéi. And it was Laurent Gbagbo, a former trades union activist in the teaching sector, exiled in France from 1985 to 1988 and founder of the Front Populaire Ivoirien, imprisoned by Ouattara during the student demonstrations in 1992, who won with a low rate of participation.

In September 2002, an armed putsch against Gbagbo, then visiting Italy, was defeated. Aborted, this putsch was transformed into a military political rebellion in the north of the country. In his turn, Gbagbo was accused of having amplified the phenomenon of "Ivoirité". Ivory Coast has been cut in two. On the one hand, the northern part and a part of the centre are under the control of the political military rebellion (currently the Forces Armées des Forces Nouvelles – FAFN) led by Guillaume Soro, originally from the north and a former leader of the student movement (Fédération des étudiants et scolaires de Côte d'Ivoire, FESCI, then seen as on the left), who went from struggling alongside Gbagbo and the FPI, against the regime of the PDCI, to support – during the Gbagbo phase of "ivoirité" – for Alassane Ouattara, a neoliberal. The FAFN have made Bouaké, the third biggest town in the country, the capital of their zone. On the other hand the coastal area— which includes the economic capital Abidjan and the port town of San Pedro — and a part of the centre, remain under the governmental control of Gbagbo. Between the two there is a French interposition force, subsequently strengthened by a UN mission.

For five years we have seen agreements signed under the aegis of the "international community", only partially respected, racketeering by traders and shippers on the roads, popular demonstrations violently and bloodily repressed, including by the political private militias, armed confrontations between loyalist and rebel armies, and bombardments between the loyalist army and the French army (November 2004 in Bouaké and Abidjan). A peace agreement was finally signed in March 2007, at Ouagadougou, between the government of Gbagbo and the Forces Nouvelles (FN) and Guillaume Soro, facilitated by the Burkina Faso president Blaise Compaoré, until then presumed complicit in, indeed the inspirer of, the rebellion.

With the Accord Politique de Ouagadougou (APO – Ouagadougou Political Agreement), the road was considered opened to presidential elections which would put an end to the crisis. After several delays the election finally took place in October and November 2010. Instead of bringing the hoped for end to the crisis, it plunged the Ivory Coast into a highly embroiled situation seen as the most threatening since September 2002.

With regard to the promise of fair play made by the two candidates during the debate broadcast on the eve of the second round, presented as a lesson in democracy for other African presidential elections, this crisis seems surprising. The results of the first round were not subject to any dispute, despite some irregularities. But after the second round the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), responsible for the proclamation of the provisional results, announced a victory for Ouattara while the Constitutional Council (CC), responsible for the proclamation of the definitive results to be certified by the UN Mission, attributed victory to Gbagbo – with the UN Mission ultimately supporting the verdict of the CEI!.

In the cleavage produced by the Ivorian electoral crisis, Gbagbo has been presented as having a societal project opposed to that of Ouattara. For Pierre Sané : "There is a struggle for power in Africa today (...) above all between two projects of society which, to put it simply, involve leaders who are supporters of globalised neoliberalism as against others who adhere to a sovereign and socialising Pan-Africanism" [1]. Thus, given the unrestrained neoliberalism of the former deputy director of the IMF, the camp of "sovereign and socialising Pan-Africanism" would apparently be represented in the Ivorian crisis by Gbagbo.

A socialist Pan-Africanist Gbagbo undoubtedly was in his opposition to the neo-colonial capitalist regime of F. Houphouët-Boigny. But should we project this past on the present? Can we adduce anything from his membership of the Socialist International, like Abdou Diouf, Thabo Mbeki, Ben Ali, whose adherence to neoliberalism has been undeniable? Would it not be necessary rather to characterise him according to the policies he has followed for the past decade?

Certainly the Gbagbo regime was confronted with the neocolonial state culture of French capital, led by Jacques Chirac, whose involvement in the attempted putsch of September 2002 seems fairly obvious. He had to lead a battle against the attempts at destabilisation orchestrated by certain French imperialist interests and their allies in the Ivory Coast and Francophone Africa, in a situation of quasi-marginalisation by his peers, conservatives in the "Françafrique" tradition. Ivorian national sovereignty, ridiculed during the four first neo-colonial decades, was undeniably at stake and he tried to defend it. Should it be forgotten all the same that this "Pan-Africanist" in turn used "ivoirité" even if we should recognise his decision much later (in 2007) to suppress the residency card for residents from neighbouring countries? The Gbagbo regime also established a lobby – the Cercle d'amitié et de soutien au Renouveau franco-ivoirien, (CARFI) – in France, through which crony contracts were attributed? Some of the beneficiaries of these contracts had already profited under the regime of Houphouët-Boigny.

The Gbagbo regime strengthened the grip of US transnationals on Ivorian cocoa and won approval from the World Bank and IMF for application of their principles. Certainly Gbagbo initiated, for example, a policy of free supplies for primary schools and the elimination of school fees, but his regime was also active in the area of oligarchic accumulation of capital, in a climate of growing poverty. Should we close our eyes to this indecent enrichment, at the expense of the public treasury and the people, or the scandals of underhand dealings in the coffee-cocoa sector? Acts which even exasperated the regime's number two, the president of the National Assembly, Mamadou Koulibaly — an unconditional supporter of economic neoliberalism who had been Gbagbo's economic advisor and represented his Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI) in the transitional government led by Robert Guéi.

Africa had, in the first phase of neo-colonialism, its batch of "socialist" imposters — as was also the case elsewhere. It is pointless to add to them at a time when the socialist ideal could gain a new beauty and youth given capitalism's proven objective incapacity, whether in its neoliberal version or any other, to produce anything other than the development of social injustice or democracies in which some are more equal than others.

Ouattara the democrat?

The support for Ouattara is justified by the necessity of respecting the democratic game or alternation in Africa. Which is perfectly legitimate. In other words if it was established that Ouattara was undeniably the victor of an unproblematic election, it would be legitimate that he fulfil the mandate given to him by the majority of the Ivorian electorate. However, contrary to what some claim, it would be wrong to attribute to Ouattara the status of eternal victim of chauvinism from the tenants of "ivoirité" or the adversaries of democracy. He is not a knight of democracy in the Ivory Coast.

Should we forget the years in which he was prime minister in charge of the application of structural adjustment measures and the management of the early years of multipartyism? Did he not lead the government which repressed with especial brutality social and political opposition to the anti-social measures of the structural adjustment programme? Didn't Gbagbo introduce the project of installation of the residency card to distinguish foreign residents from Ivorians, well before his competitors? We stress that this was not out of personal xenophobia, but through economic motivation: with at least 20% of the Ivorian population being foreign residents, this represented a significant source of public income in a period of structural adjustment. This was not an Ivorian invention, but a suggestion of the IMF to the over indebted states. It is a stroke of luck for the neoliberal international to see its dear candidate supported thus, beyond the right and in

the name of democracy, including in circles which claim to be anti-imperialist.

False choice

In the Ivory Coast, as elsewhere, the false choices imposed on us by hegemonic capitalism, above all at the ideological level, should be rejected. Who can distinguish in the Ivory Coast between the basics of the economic and social programmes of Gbagbo (a good pupil of the IMF and World Bank) and Ouattara (an IMF technocrat)? Have the capitalists changed their nature through being African relative sovereignists? Will the Ouattara regime invent social neoliberalism? Has the Ouattara faction less oligarchic intentions than the Gbagbo faction?

What matters is to work for the emergence or development of alternative popular forces which do not understand democracy as the combination of multipartyism with the so-called market economy, forces which do not reduce democracy to the fact of putting ballot papers in a box regularly, in an atmosphere of demagoguery and disinformation, which deprive peoples of their permanent sovereignty. It is up to the people of the Ivory Coast to free themselves from the fascination with these two factions currently competing and to bid them as well as the pyromaniac "international community" of Sarkozy, Obama. Goodluck, wave a fond farewell as has already been done, in a different context, by the Tunisian people who resist the diversion of their dearly won victory by factions who wish to limit their sovereignty to the democracy of the model promised by the "international community".

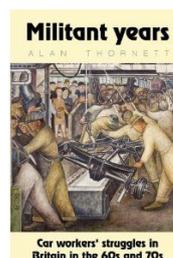
• *Jean Nanga is a Congolese revolutionary Marxist.*

NOTES

[1] Pierre Sané, "Les élections en Côte d'Ivoire": chronique d'un échec annoncé", Pambazuka News, 173, 09.01.2011, <http://www.pambazuka.org/fr/category/features/69916>

Britain - Renewed interest in class struggle?

Successful book launch in Oxford
Alan Thornett



There had been a remarkably strong response in the BMW car plant in Oxford to my new book *Militant Years*. A book launch held in Oxford on Wednesday was chaired by the convenor of shop stewards from the BMW plant (who is also an

executive member of the BMW European Works Council), who had already read the book and who spoke enthusiastically about it.

There were 60 people at the meeting and the delegation from the plant included not just the convenor but his deputy and 10 shop stewards. Also present were workers from the plant, past and present, and other activists from the Oxford labour movement. 30 copies of *Militant Years* were sold at the meeting despite the fact that quite a few people present had bought them in advance.

In fact the BMW Unite branch (the plant is organised by Unite Britain which is biggest union) had already bought copies of the book and are making them available from the union office in the plant. The book has been promoted at meetings of shop stewards and at Unite branch meetings. What is remarkable about all this is that the book, which is on the struggles of car workers in Britain in the 1960s, 70, and 80's, and centers on the car plants in Oxford, is heavily critical of the leaders of the unions of the day, which were forerunners of Unite, for attacking militant trade unionism and opening the door to the Thatcher onslaught and contributing to the defeats imposed on the unions in Britain in the 1980's and from which we continue to suffer.

I was not just surprised at this response but astounded by it. The only explanation I can offer is that there appears to be a renewed interest in the recent history of the unions in Britain as people grapple with the problem of mobilising the unions against the cuts onslaught which has been launched by today's coalition government.

In fact the comrades in Oxford who organised the book launch deliberately arranged it in the run-up to the TUC demonstration of 26th March and it seems to have worked very well.

The book can be ordered from resistance books at £12.00 (postage free in Britain but 4.00 outside Britain). Either send a cheque to 'Resistance Books', PO box 62732, London SW2 9GQ, or visit paypal.com and send to resistance@sent.com

*Alan Thornett is a member of the Executive Bureau of the Fourth International and a long-time leading member of British Section of the Fourth International, Socialist Resistance. His most recent book, *Militant Years: Car Workers' Struggles in Britain in the 60s and 70s*, was published in 2011*

Car industry - Fiat: Building unity between workers in Poland and Italy

Under the leadership of Sergio Marchionne, the FIAT group has declared war on its workers. They acquired Chrysler in the United States - without spending a penny and benefiting from billions of dollars in subsidies from the Obama government - and obtained the capitulation without a fight of the United Automobile Workers (UAW) union, which undertook not to strike until 2015. The UAW also

accepted a reduction of bank holidays, the non-payment of overtime and a decrease in medical assistance for pensioners.

Through the workers' pension fund, which it controls, the trade union also became a shareholder in Chrysler, with 55 per cent of the shares but without the right to intervene in the management of the company, which Sergio Marchionne manages, although FIAT has only 35 per cent of the shares.]. Now management of FIAT is pursuing its attacks on workers in Italy, Serbia and Poland.

In Italy, after having announced the closure of the Termini-Imerese factory (in Sicily) for 2012, the FIAT management resorted to blackmailing the workers of the of the Pomigliano d' Arco factory (near Naples, Campania) with the threat of losing their jobs, putting them in competition with the workers of FIAT Auto Poland (the factory in Tychy, Silesia, which at present produces the FIAT 500 and the Panda). By dangling before the workers the incentive of repatriating to Italy the production of the Panda model, the management got adopted by referendum an agreement [1] which makes nonsense of the collective agreement of the industry.

The factory was removed from the group in favour of the creation of a "new company" which will no longer comply with the old social regulations. The number of hours of overtime will increase from 40 to 120 annually. The factory will work 24 hours a day, six days a week. The workers will lose ten minutes break a day. The first three days of sickness leave will no longer be paid systematically [2].

In the same vein, the direction of FIAT Auto Poland tried to impose flexible working. Faced with the refusal of the majority union - WZZ "Sierpien 80" ("August 80" Free Trade Union) - and not being able to get it through because of the Polish labour regulation which requires that the representative trade unions accept modifications of collective agreements, the employers started to harass the union members: "Here is a letter of a resignation from the union, if you want your work contract renewed, sign here!" - that is what the workers with a temporary contract heard, when they were called in by their foremen. "We cannot renew your contract... unless you convince your colleagues (those who had permanent contracts) to leave "August 80 ", then we could make an effort... ". The goal was to reduce the membership of the union which, if it had less than 10 per cent of the workers, would cease to be representative and its signature would no longer be essential ... The employers only succeeded in making about a hundred union members cave in [3], not enough to break the union! But the attacks continue; the management reduced last year's Christmas bonus, accusing "August 80" of being responsibility for it. The harassment continues.

In 2008, FIAT acquired 67 per cent of the shares of the Zastava factory in Kragujevac (Serbia), rebuilt

by the workers after the bombardments of 1999, obtaining moreover from the Serb authorities 200 million euros of aid and receiving the site rent-free, while promising to invest.

The "new company", Fijat Automobili Srbje (FAS) was in theory meant to re-hire the Zastava workers. But in December they learned from an article in the weekly magazine *Polityka* that there would be 1566 workers laid off... Faced with a strike Marchionne played the innocent: it was not the FAS, it was the Serb government, owner of Zastava, that was concerned! And the government announced a "social plan" for the 910 workers who had more than five years to wait before retiring and early retirement for the oldest workers. "Take it or leave it, if you don't like it, you won't even have the 20,000 dinars [approximately 200 euros] monthly allowance".

After five days on strike and the occupation of a building in the centre of the city, the strikers became divided and the Samostalni trade union decided to sign the agreement. Rajka Veljovic, the person in charge of the international relations of the union, explained to *Il Manifesto*: "We lost. (...)FIAT workers all over the world should unite and coordinate their strike initiatives. Make a sort of international strike. That's the only way to win the struggle. We've been talking about it since 1999. We need a new trade-union coordination in Italy. " [4]

At the same time Marchionne attacked the historic core of FIAT, the Mirafiori factory in Turin. There again, it was blackmail over jobs that was used by him as lever to finish liquidating what was left of the working-class conquests of Italy's "Creeping May" in 1969. Following the example set at the Pomigliano factory, the FIAT management proposed to the unions an increase in working time, its intensification, no payment of benefit for the first three days of sickness, the limitation of the right to strike, in other words an agreement that was exorbitant compared with the collective agreement of the engineering industry. All of this while transforming FIAT-Mirafiori into a "new" company, "Chrysler-FIAT Joint Venture". Such an agreement, signed on December 23 by the UGL and FISMIC (minority) unions, was refused by the majority union, the FIOM, which explained: "they want a contract in which they would choose the articles they liked in the same way as you choose products on the shelves of a supermarket. They want a contract which is freed from Italian and European social rules, i.e. a kind of free zone".

The FIAT management threatened that the investment that was envisaged at Mirafiori would be delocalized to Illinois in the United States. It was supported by the Berlusconi government, whose Minister of Industry announced that "the investment planned for FIAT Mirafiori is so important for the future of the Italian economy that it requires abandoning all prejudices and rigid formalism". FIAT organized - again - a referendum on 13-14 January, 2011. The workers of Mirafiori

had the choice: vote "yes" or "no" to the December 23 agreement - but, as Marchionne said, "the transfer of production from the Turin factory to the United States is an option if an agreement is not reached... ". The "Yes" won (54.3% per cent of the vote), but only thanks to the votes of management employees and executive staff. The majority of the workers on the assembly lines voted against the agreement.

In an interview with *Repubblica* on January 18, 2011 Marchionne no longer concealed his intentions: "The agreement has already been concluded in Pomigliano and I cannot accept two different systems in the same company and for the same work." He announced that there would be no more negotiations, even though half of the workers did not accept the agreement, referred to the FIOM as a "reality of the past" and explained that "those who are not contractors cannot profit from the contract", in other words that the FIOM, which was not a signatory to the agreement, could not be chosen by the workers of FIAT! On January 28 a one-day general strike, called by the FIOM and the rank-and-file trade unions - the COBAS and the USB [5], had also refused the agreement of December 23, 2010 - blocked the Italian engineering industry. The struggle continues...

Polish-Italian working meeting

Faced with the attacks of the management of FIAT, the Polish trade union "August 80" and the Italian anti-capitalist organization Sinistra Critica took the initiative of starting an exchange of experiences and information between FIAT workers in the two countries. Several dozen workers from FIAT and Italian sub-contracting companies thus took part, on Sunday December 5, in a room at the ARCI people's house in Turin, in a seminar, with the presence of trade unionists from the FIOM-CGIL, the COBAS and the USB, as well as two representatives of "August 80" from FIAT Auto Poland from Tychy and from sub-contracting companies in Poland.

It was first of all a question, as Franco Turigliatto, former senator and leader of Sinistra Critica, stressed in introducing the discussion, of knowing and understanding the diversity of cultures, experiences and situations, as well as establishing links between the biggest trade unions at FIAT in Poland and in Italy.

Franciszek Gierot, president of "August 80" at FIAT in Poland, thus told the history of his union, which has 2400 members today, created in 1991 by eight trade unionists who refused the unprincipled compromises of the "Solidarity" trade union with the government which was restoring capitalism and, in particular, carrying out privatizations. At the end of July 1992, the Polish government sold to FIAT for a mess of pottage - the equivalent at that time of four months of a worker's wage, about 400 euros in today's money - the FSM factory, built at the beginning of the 1970s, which produced the Polski-FIAT 126p. The workers, to whom had

been held out the dazzling prospect of becoming "worker-shareholders" and who did not even have access to a single share, revolted. A strike began, with occupation of the factory.

After a few days the trade unions that were then dominant - "Solidarity" and the old official trade union OPZZ - chose their camp: champagne and fancy biscuits alongside the FIAT managers and the government. A strike committee was elected. The strike and occupation of the assembly line factory of Tychy lasted for 56 days, encircled by the police, facing the mobilization of strike-breakers whom the yellow trade unions had convinced that the strike would lead to the liquidation of the company and to 26,000 workers being laid off...

"We did not succeed in preventing privatization for the benefit of FIAT" - explained Krzysztof Mordasiewicz, vice-president of "August 80" at FIAT in Poland - "but we succeeded in preserving the company's health service, something that the workers of FIAT and the sub-contracting companies coming from the FSM are proud of today, a recreation centre where we can relax, and we obtained pay rises, which put them above the average wages of the engineering industry in Poland". At the end of this strike the "August 80" trade union became the biggest union in the ex-FSM, functioning as an inter-enterprise union, operating both in FIAT and in the enterprises to which work had been outsourced. It also succeeded in exposing all the underhand manoeuvres that had allowed FIAT to seize control of the company, which were confirmed by the report of the Supreme Chamber of State Control, but buried by successive neoliberal governments. "But although we did not prevent the theft of public property in our enterprise, our strike obliged the government to slow down privatizations and to no longer organize them in such a crude fashion..."

Speaking in the name of the FIOM at Mirafiori, Edi Lazzi explained the strategy of FIAT in Italy today. Italian production is falling - 900,000 cars in 2007, less than 600,000 in 2010. Mirafiori is still the biggest FIAT factory in Italy, but whereas in 2006 it produced 217,000 cars, in 2010 it will produce only 119,000. Marchionne uses this drop in production to reduce employment and wages, to call into question workers' rights, to put his workers in competition with each other, playing one enterprise against another, one country against another. Everything that the management succeeds in taking away from workers in one factory, it uses as an example to impose in another. In Pomigliano they said that if the workers do not give in, then the Poles will produce on FIAT's terms. Today it is Pomigliano which serves as a "model" to make Mirafiori yield... In Pomigliano, the FIOM was the only union which refused to sign the agreement.

Now Marchionne wants to impose the same thing at Mirafiori. The contract is still being negotiated, but as it is shaping up, the FIOM will not sign it. "What is at stake here? To intensify work for the same wages, to liquidate the rights

won by the workers, to bury industry-level collective agreements - the agreement that is being proposed is inferior to the national agreement in the engineering industry. The "new" company which would replace FIAT-Mirafiori would not be part of the employers' federation, Confindustria [6], so as not to have to respect the collective agreement signed by it! (...)

The management of FIAT wants to impose the reduction of pauses from 40 to 30 minutes, to impose meals being taken after work and not at the normal meal hours - the canteen would no longer be open at those hours! -, to no longer pay sick pay after the second period of time off for sickness in a year, to make workers sign a "responsibility clause" which would prevent them from striking against the agreement, threatening them with "dismissal for misconduct", to increase to 120 the number of hours of overtime that the management could impose on workers without control by the unions, to make the production lines function six days out of seven, with teams working 10 hours a day, for four consecutive days, in rotation... The FIOM refuses that. Tomorrow Mirafiori starts production again, after five weeks of the workers being laid off, for four days, before a new lay-off until January 11. At 5 o'clock in the morning the FIOM will distribute a leaflet, to invite workers to discuss the contract and to see how they react..."

Alberto Tridentate, former leader of the Metalworkers' Federation (FLM) and former MEP for Democrazia Proletaria, now retired, who is doing his best to help the trade unions of different countries to establish relations and to fight together, then recalled the experience of trade-union internationalism, between FIAT of Turin and SEAT of Barcelona, in the 1970s, when Spain was still living under the dictatorship of Franco. "Today it is much easier to cross borders, to organize meetings. We have to prevent the European Union imposing regulations which put workers of different enterprises in competition with each other; it is possible to prevent the management of FIAT from exploiting trade-union divisions. We must not only defend ourselves, we must take the initiative again. It is possible to fight against competition between FIAT workers in Italy, Poland, Serbia, Turkey... The strategy of the unions can start with a common defence, but we must also be able to move onto the attack against the employers. And he recalled that in the 1950s the income of the company president was fifty times that of a worker - which we considered to be excessive... - and that today it is 500 times greater!"

Luigi Casali, of the national leadership of the Rank-and-file Trade Union (USB), insisted on the importance of getting to know each other, of exchanging experience. He proposed organizing an international meeting with the Polish comrades.

A delegate from the FIOM at Mirafiori announced that the following day the workers of FIAT would mobilize for the reopening of the negotiations

broken off the day before by Marchionne, that the FIOM would propose a walk-out, a march and a meeting. "We hope that the Polish comrades can be present!"

Uniting the workers of Europe

Edi Lazzi: "The strategy of FIAT is to divide us, so we need at least exchanges between us, moving towards coordination, then towards a common struggle". Krzysztof Mordasiewicz ("August 80") continued: "We must have better knowledge of our respective gains and fight together to level upwards working conditions and wages". "To do that", added Franciszek Gierot ("August 80"), "we need meetings of European car workers, not only from FIAT but also from Renault, Peugeot, Opel, Volkswagen, Volvo... It's the only way to seek a common matrix which makes it possible to fight against wildcat capitalism. We are at the eleventh hour. If the employers are able to break us at Mirafiori, they will destroy us in Tychy and elsewhere in Europe. " Alberto Tridente: "Serbia and Turkey are on the waiting list to join the European Union. Either we manage to impose European wages, or social dumping will carry the day. "

Luigi Malabarba, a leader of Sinistra Critica, a former senator and a former union leader at Alfa Romeo in Milan (which has already been closed down): "Today the combative trade unionists of different countries, even if they have the same employer, do not know each other.. It is not a question of distance or of the language barrier - in 1906, when the national union was founded in Italy, we didn't speak the same language and it was much more difficult to travel. It is a subjective problem, a question of will, of imagination. The European Metalworkers' Federation could do it, the FIOM has the means, even the rank-and-file trade unions, which are weaker, could organize meetings and international cooperation between trade unionists. It was possible to organize a European strike against the closure of Renault Vilvoorde (in Belgium) in 1997... The FIOM could take the initiative of a European meeting of FIAT unions to start to work out a common platform..."

After having underlined the need for the unity of the combative trade unions - not only between the FIOM and "August 80", but also between the FIOM and the Italian rank-and-file unions, Franco Turigliatto stressed that following the example of the meeting in progress, it was also necessary to establish working relations between the trade unionists and the political activists who are on the side of the workers ("even though the majority of the political representatives, in the governments, the regional institutions and the municipalities are on the side of Marchionne and not on the side of the workers, there are nevertheless some who are on the side of the workers! "). Taking up the idea launched by Franciszek Gierot, he proposed a European car workers' meeting, together with anti-capitalist parties and combative trade unions, as quickly as possible, and announced that the

International Institute for Research and Education in Amsterdam was ready to accommodate it.

Exchanges of information

The discussion continued about exchanging information, wages at FIAT (on average around 850 euros net, including overtime and bonuses, in Poland; around 1250 euros net on average at Mirafiori); overtime (150 hours in Poland, as against still 40 hours in Italy, but if the trade unions give their agreement in Poland, the number of hours of overtime can increase, up to 416 hours in a year..); work contracts (in Italy the workers on short-term contracts have been laid off - at FIAT Auto, out of 6401 workers, 1200 are employed on contracts that are renewable every month..); intensification of work (Krzysztof Mordasiewicz: "We went from 20 cars produced per worker per annum to nearly 100... But be careful, that testifies not only to the intensification of the rhythm, but also to the outsourcing of everything that is not assembly work... "); industry-wide collective agreements (Nina Leone, delegate of the body shop at Mirafiori: "In Italy it is the very idea of industry-wide collective agreements that make it possible to impose, thanks to the relationship of forces in big companies, a minimum of conditions in the smaller ones, which is being attacked today, with Marchionne in the front line... And in Poland? " Krzysztof Mordasiewicz: "In Poland we had negotiated for nearly six years, then when the agreement was ready, the bosses who were opposed to it left the employers' organization and established another one... and it was not signed by the employers... Is that what inspired Marchionne to consider leaving Confindustria?").

There were also exchanges about the strategy of FIAT. In Poland, the management is trying to break the "August 80" union. But the union is defending itself, not yielding, going over to the attack. Thus, "August 80" has collected recordings of the pressures exerted on workers - to force them to leave the union, to oblige them to take unpaid holidays when production stopped to prepare the introduction of the new model which will be produced next year... - and provided this documentation to the factory inspectorate. FIAT workers went and took part in their own way when the director Arlet was decorated with the medal of "excellent manager", carrying banners which proclaim "excellent manager = harassment", "a prize for the kapo", "FIAT is good in the media, inside it's a labour camp"... And the union invited the Minister for Labour so that he could see what conditions were like at FIAT - the management refused him access, on the pretext that the union only had the right to invite trade unionists (!). So the meeting took place at the head offices of "August 80" in Katowice - but for the workers of FIAT Auto Poland it was the proof that their union is strong, that it can even have relations with a minister, whereas the management of FIAT is afraid.

"What is at stake for Marchionne is to break the workers' resistance, and thus to take advantage of the crisis to break the combative trade unions. We are able to defend ourselves, but to take back the initiative, we have to do it on an international level, because Marchionne can play on this level", explained Krzysztof Mordasiewicz. In Italy also the goal is to break the FIOM: "The management plays on division between unions, with the aim of isolating the FIOM", explained Edi Lazzi.

The "responsibility clause" is also an anti-union weapon: Marchionne wants the unions that refuse to sign it to lose their rights in the company...

Concluding the meeting, one of the organizers said: "The strength of Marchionne is his ability to divide the workers, union against union, factory against factory, country against country... But he is afraid of our co-operation. So the management of FIAT Auto Poland was furious when it learnt that the comrades of "August 80" were going to meet the workers of Mirafiori. Marchionne clearly asked them right away how they controlled "their" workers... So this meeting has a symbolic dimension. But imagine Marchionne faced with a strike starting at the same time in Tychy and Mirafiori... Our meeting is a step in that direction..."

A very useful exchange. "In one day I learned more about work in Italy than I had done by searching for information for eighteen years", Franciszek Gierot said to me at the end of the day.

Walk-out at Mirafiori

On Monday December 6, it was cold, snowflakes were falling. Since five o'clock in the morning the discussions on the assembly lines had not stopped, the tension was rising. "Marchionne wants to make us slaves, ready to do his every bidding", explained a delegate of the FIOM. At ten o'clock the walk-out began. Several hundred workers, trade unionists of the FIOM, activists of the COBAS and non-unionists took to the street. Prepared by the Italian comrades, a Polish and Italian banner welcomed them: "We are fighting for the same thing! Workers of all lands, unite!". Edi Lazzi of FIOM-Mirafiori and Federico Bellono, general secretary of the FIOM in the province of Turin, gave an account of the negotiations, explained why the FIOM refused such an agreement and called on the workers to continue the fight.

Franciszek Gierot of "August 80" was invited onto the platform. He called for a united trade-union front across borders and saluted the determination of the Italian workers, ready to strike although they had already lost a fifth of their incomes because of the lay-off. For the first time in eighteen years proof had been given that the management cannot play on the competition between the workers in Poland and those in Italy. "Polacchi? Italiani? Metalmeccanici!" [7] a striker said to me.

The relations between unions that started in December 2010 have continued. On January 13, 2011, just before the referendum at Mirafiori, "August 80" sent a declaration of support to the

FIOM: "We call on the workers of FIAT: reject this shameful agreement!" On January 17, 2011 Giorgio Airaudo, national secretary of the FIOM in charge of the car industry, was in Poland, where he met the trade unionists of "August 80" in Katowice. Interviewed by the Polish press agency, he explained that "FIAT would like the workers to elect only representatives of the trade unions which are in agreement with its policy, which is an attack on liberty that at least half of the FIAT workers refuse" and that "the FIOM considers that the negotiations are still open, because it is impossible to manage a divided factory."

"The FIOM will thus continue the fight", he continued, opposing the idea that the workers of Italy should be set against those of Poland, and reciprocally. "For this reason we are opening a dialogue with the representative trade unions at FIAT in Poland. We need joint union actions. We have the impression that FIAT wants to impose the same employment policy in all its factories, and that that was accelerated by the acquisition of Chrysler." For his part, Boguslaw Zietek, president of the "August 80" union stressed that co-operation with the FIOM made it possible for Polish trade unionists to better know the "true intentions" of FIAT in Italy and that "the same events are also taking place in Poland", presenting journalists with the documents and the recordings which testified to the determination of FIAT to force the workers to resign from the union [8].

The day before the January 28 strike of Italian metalworkers, the "August 80" union wrote: "The Free Trade Union 'August 80' of FIAT Auto Poland and the representatives of our union in the car industry, as well as a large number of FIAT workers in Poland, support the action of the FIOM in defence of the collective agreements of Italian FIAT workers. 'August 80' protests firmly against the solutions of the Marchionne plan, whose implementation is in preparation and which consists of systematically limiting the rights of the workers, of liquidating the gains they have obtained over several decades and of obliging the workers to make extra efforts without, however, increasing their wages.

The attempt to eliminate the FIOM from the FIAT factories, because it refuses such a Draconian limitation of the rights of the workers, indicates that FIAT and Marchionne have de facto declared war on their workers. (...) The task and the obligation of a trade union is to defend the rights of the workers. For this reason we send the expression of our total support for the actions of the FIOM. We wish you victory, because it will be the victory of all workers."

On January 28, hundreds of workers of FIAT Auto Poland demonstrated in front of the Italian Embassy in Warsaw (350 km from their factory in Tychy) in solidarity with the strike of the Italian metalworkers, at the call of "August 80". In Turin, addressing the demonstration, Giorgio Airaudo applauded the trade-union delegations that were

present to express their solidarity, from the CGT (France) and IG-Metall (Germany) as well as the "August 80" union, which "not only is in solidarity with us, but supports our demands".

Jan Malewski, editor of Inprecor, is a member of the Executive Bureau of the Fourth International and a member of the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) in France. He took part organizing the Polish-Italian meeting in Turin.

Jan Malewski is a member of the New Anti-Capitalist Party (Nouveau parti anticapitaliste, (NPA), France), editor of Inprecor and a member of the Executive Bureau of the Fourth International.

NOTES

[1] The majority union, the FIOM-CGIL, refused this agreement, approved by the minority trade unions UIL and CISL. In the referendum on June 22, 2010, 63 per cent of the workers on the Pomigliano site voted for the agreement, while 37 per cent of them followed the opinion of the FIOM and the rank-and-file trade unions. This referendum was organized more or less as a plebiscite and the fact that 37 per cent of the workers had the courage to vote "no" almost constituted a political victory for the class-struggle trade unions.

[2] In Italy sickness pay is dealt with by social security as from the fourth day, the first three days being the responsibility of the company. This is what FIAT is calling into question.

[3] *Mikroinformator* n° 302, December 2, 2010 (bulletin of WZZ "Sierpien 80" of the FIAT Auto Poland enterprises, of its subcontractors: Sistema, Delfo, Ceva, Comau, Powertrain, Sirio, Nosag, Cablettra, Formpol, Lear, Fenice, DENSO, Components Plastic, GalwanoTechnika, DP Metal, Serwis Paint, Proma, Flexider, STR, Master and of the Tesco supermarkets.

[4] Tommaso Di Francesco, "Hannon licenziato I lavoratori Zastava", *Il Manifesto*, January 13, 2011.

[5] The FIOM is the Metalworkers' Federation of the biggest Italian trade-union confederation, the CGIL. It is more combative than its confederation. In FIAT the FIOM is the main trade union. The Confederation of rank-and-file committees, COBAS, was formed in 1986-1987 by combative trade-union activists, starting in the education sector after following a strike characterised by self-organization. The Unione sindacale di Base (USB, Rank-and-file Union) is a new organization of the rank-and-file trade unions, founded in May 2010 by several sectoral rank-and-file unions.

[6] Confindustria is the main Italian employers' organization.

[7] "Poles? Italians? We are metalworkers! "

[8] PAP news agency, "Lewicowe związki: FIAT ujednocila politykę pracowniczą" ("Left trade unions: FIAT unifies wages policy"), January 17, 2011.

Review - Arabs and the Holocaust

The Palestinian Tragedy, a late product of 19th-20th century colonialism and imperialism in general, must also be understood as a very specific aftershock of the greatest industrial genocide in history, the Nazi holocaust, which shook the ways in which we view human society and history.

Technological advance may be inevitable in an industrial age, but can be accompanied by and actually facilitate the most horrific social retrogression — in our age, not only genocide but also nuclear war and catastrophic environmental degradation.

"In Auschwitz," writes the Italian Marxist Enzo Traverso, "(w)e also see a pre-eminently modern genocide (which) requires us to rethink the twentieth century and the very foundations of our civilization." The genocide, in which the Jews of Europe were the central (though not the exclusive) target, also poses a challenge to any theory that sees an inevitable tendency toward human progress, including Marxism:

"The incapacity of Marxism — the most powerful and vigorous body of emancipatory thinking of the modern age — first to see, then to understand the Jewish genocide raises a major doubt about the relevance of its answers to the challenges of the twentieth century. Marxists' silence [at the time of the events]...suggests limits to their interpretations of the past, barbarous century."

Is it possible to simultaneously confront the global significance and intensely local consequences of the holocaust? And if its horrors are supposed to provide lasting lessons for our present and future, what then about the never-ending debate about the "uniqueness" of the Nazi holocaust?

Traverso concludes that "(a)cknowledging Auschwitz's historical uniqueness can have a meaning only if it helps to promote a fruitful dialogue between the meaning of the past and the uniqueness of the present. The goal must be to illuminate the many threads that bind our world to the very recent world in which this crime was born." (Enzo Traverso, *Understanding the Nazi Genocide. Marxism After Auschwitz*, Pluto Press and International Institute for Research and Education, 1999: 4, 78, emphasis added)

Among other threads, without the Nazi holocaust in Europe there would certainly be millions more Jews alive today, including in the Middle East — Iraq, Morocco and Egypt especially — but probably fewer Zionists, and almost certainly not a "Jewish state." The intervention of catastrophes in history is far from entirely predictable, and its consequences even less so

The Lebanese Marxist Gilbert Achcar took up the challenge to illuminate, or untangle, some of these threads, in particular "the reception of the Holocaust in the Middle East," when Traverso asked him to contribute a chapter for an Italian anthology on the Shoah (the Jewish catastrophe in Europe).

This exploration would lead to Achcar's full-length book *The Arabs and the Holocaust*.

Multiple Diversities

As Achcar states from the outset, it requires "enormous effort to depict the reception of the Holocaust in the Arab world, where the diversities of countries and conditions is multiplied many times over by the diversity of political tendencies and sensibilities, even as the inhabitants' views of the Jewish tragedy are rendered infinitely more complex by their relationship to the Palestinian tragedy, the Nakba." (2)

How then to untangle the threads? In Part I, "The Time of the Shoah," Achcar dissects the four main strands of Arab political thought from the early 1930s to the eve of the 1948 war: "Liberal Westernizers," "Marxists," "Nationalists" and "Reactionary and/or Fundamentalist Pan-Islamists."

These four chapters make an extraordinary contribution, especially for those of us who can't read Arabic texts. It's essential to cut through the stereotype that politics in the Arab world was monolithic, aligned with Nazism and fanatically hostile to Jews.

The identity "Arab Nationalism = Hatred of Jews" has been burned into mass consciousness by much of the western mass media, but perhaps most of all through Leon Uris's fantastically successful 1958 propaganda novel *Exodus* and the Hollywood blockbuster it spawned.

Gilbert Achcar pulls no punches in his own critique of elements of Arab nationalism, but also guides the reader through the complexities of the picture. Discussing the issues of alleged and real "Arab Nationalism and Anti-Semitism," he cites "the anti-Semitic tendencies of certain Iraqi nationalists (who) simply accused Jews of supporting Zionism or the British [the colonial overlord of interwar Iraq — ed.] — despite the fact that many Iraqi Jews were anti-Zionists." Indeed, "the Jews who were both anti-British and anti-Zionist were usually Communists."

In 1930s Palestine, on the other hand, "Palestinian nationalists' failure to distinguish between Jews and Zionists was generally much more 'natural' than the Iraqis', inasmuch as the Palestinian Arabs were confronted with a Yishuv [Jewish immigration to Palestine] that defined itself as representative of world Jewry and included only a tiny minority of anti-Zionist Jews." But despite this, "the most radical representative of secular Arab nationalism in Palestine, the Istiqlal (Independence) Party, had so enlightened an attitude toward the Jews that Baruch Kimmerling and Joel Migdal, in their book *The Palestinian People*, single it out for praise." (94)

Kimmerling and Migdal explained that Istiqlal "was forthright in proclaiming that the British, not the Jews, should be the primary targets of action — in some cases, Palestinians even organized contingents of guards to protect Jews and their

property during demonstrations." (*The Palestinian People: A History*, Harvard University Press, 2003: 106. Cited by Achcar, 94, 316n)

The fundamental point of these examples and many others is that anti-Jewish attitudes were hardly the driving force or independent variable in Arab nationalism. Rather, strategies for the struggle against colonialism, the conflicted role of religion, and methods of political organization were the dominant questions.

Sectors of Arab nationalism certainly had some affinities with fascist organization — and even more so did the rightist Union of Revisionist Zionists, "some of whose most prominent members would scale the summits of the Israeli state" (Achcar, 65) as leaders of the Herut and later Likud parties — but few had much of anything in common with the genocidal racist ideology of the Nazi cult.

Achcar is nonetheless scathing in his denunciation of the sterile and reactionary concept "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," which drew elements of the Arab leadership toward alliances with fascist regimes that were enemies of Britain in particular.

The Real Amin al-Husseini

In the discussion of "Reactionary and/or Fundamentalist Pan-Islamists," the figure of the Mufti of Jerusalem, Mohammad Amin al-Husseini, inevitably stands out. For those of roughly my generation who were introduced to "Haj Amin" through reading *Exodus*, the Grand Mufti stands out as the ultimate villain, the ally if not agent of the Nazis and the aspiring Arab Hitler. Achcar identifies him as an "architect of the Nakba," the 1947-'49 Palestinian Catastrophe.

Husseini was installed at age 26 in 1921 as Mufti by the British High Commissioner for Palestine Herbert Samuel — a Zionist "who had been one of the architects of the 1917 Balfour Declaration." By the early 1930s the Mufti, "unlike the Istiqlal, strove to channel the anger of Palestinian Arabs toward the Jews rather than the British." (132, 134)

With the rise of Hitler's regime, Husseini and other "reactionary pan-Islamists" became sympathetic to Nazism due to "the hatred for the Jews that obsessed these two distinct worldviews, one religious and the other racial, both of which essentialized the enemy," despite Hitler's open contempt for Arabs as an "inferior race" and the Nazi regime's policy of facilitating German Jews' emigration to Palestine. (139)

Husseini nonetheless played a significant role in sabotaging the 1936 Palestinian general strike that opened the historic revolt of 1936-'39. The rebellion resumed full force following the 1937 Peel Commission recommendation for the partition of Palestine, at which point Husseini turned toward an open alliance with Germany and fled into exile to avoid arrest. After being so conciliatory toward the British authorities while inside Palestine, the exiled

Mufti now “set out on a campaign of nationalist one-upmanship, becoming as intransigent as the Qassamists” who were waging the uprising under conditions of brutal and murderous British repression.

“In the process,” Achcar argues, “he dragged the Palestinian national movement into its most serious historical error — which, contrary to an often expressed opinion, did not consist in rejecting the partition plans (which) would have been a dishonorable surrender.”

“The major historical error of the Palestinian national movement was rather its rejection of the British white paper of May 17, 1939, after a considerable majority of Parliament in London had approved it. This new document rejected the idea of partitioning Palestine and creating a separate Jewish state there; the British government declared itself in favor of limiting Jewish immigration to Palestine to seventy-five thousand annually for the next five years and of creating an independent Palestinian state within a decade, to be governed jointly, on a proportional basis, by Arabs and Jews.” (142-3)

While the Zionist movement naturally reviled the new policy and the majority of the Higher Arab Committee (the leadership of the Palestinian revolt) including the secular nationalists of Istiqlal were favorable to it, the dominance of Amin al-Husseini led the HAC to reject it — essentially throwing away a victory the Palestinian masses had won in struggle at enormous sacrifice.

Subsequently, in World War II the Mufti in radio broadcasts sought to rally Arabs to the losing side, the Axis powers — an appeal that had at most a marginal effect, but would provide fabulous propaganda ammunition to the Zionist movement and the likes of Leon Uris, even to the present.

Indeed, it’s a striking fact pointed out by historian Peter Novick that the massive Encyclopedia of the Holocaust produced by Yad Vashem, Israel’s holocaust museum, contains an entry on the Mufti “more than twice as long as the articles on Goebbels and Goring, longer than the articles on Himmler and Heydrich combined, longer than the article on Eichmann (and) exceeded in length, but only slightly, by the entry for Hitler.” (Quoted by Achcar, 165)

Achcar also notes that by 1943, “Husseini knew about the genocide” from conversations with Heinrich Himmler personally. He continued to offer inane strategic advice to the Nazis, which was ignored (as were, by the way, secret appeals to the Nazis from a fascistic Zionist splinter “National Military Organization” headed by a future Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir).

The Lost Options

Until his death in 1974, Husseini continued to turn out self-serving drivel on the world Jewish conspiracy. His real legacy is summed up by Achcar:

“At the stage that the evolving conflict reached after 1945, with the accumulation of defeats under Husseini’s disastrous leadership, the only path still open to the Palestinians, if they were to avoid the catastrophe, the Nakba, was to shake off the political influence of this disreputable individual once and for all and, as we have already suggested, seek an understanding with the Jewish partisans of a binational state on the basis of the program formulated by the Arab governments in 1946. This was not the path taken: Husseini’s compromising shadow, his execration of the Jews, and his obstinate attachment to a line of conduct that consisted in impotently raining imprecations down on the heads of his adversaries, continued to loom large over the Palestinian movement until its debacle.” (161)

To be sure, the Zionist leadership for its part knew how to take full advantage, as the Israeli historian Simha Flapan points out: Despite Husseini’s declining influence and his rejection by many Palestinian leaders and organizations, “Ben-Gurion’s profound resistance to the creation of a Palestinian state significantly undermined any resistance to the mufti’s blood-and-thunder policies.” (Quoted by Achcar, 161)

It was of course tragic that progressive and revolutionary options had been defeated in the Arab world. In earlier chapters on “The Liberal Westernizers” (including the author’s father, Joseph Achcar) and “The Marxists,” Achcar surveys the views of these once-influential currents.

“All things considered, the attitude of the Palestinian liberals was one of the most remarkable and commendable forms of opposition to Nazism in the world,” inasmuch as they absolutely rejected “the enemy of their two enemies” (Zionist encroachment and British colonial power).

Their struggle upheld “an ethical hierarchy that put liberal values, both secular and religious, above every other consideration, in the hope (or, perhaps, wish) that those values would lead the nations fighting for them to render the Palestinians justice.” (45)

The crushing of that hope by the Western democracies following World War II would rank among the great cynical betrayals that marked the era, and certainly one of the more destructive. It logically accompanied, however, the West’s embrace of Arab family dynasties and presidentialist dictators, from the House of Saud to Saddam Hussein and Hosni Mubarak.

The Marxists in the Arab world often played a proud and honorable role in opposing both anti-Semitism and Zionism, as well as fighting the influence of fascism. Given the many twists and turns of Stalinist policy all too familiar to those who know Communist history, their attachment to Moscow put them more than once in hopelessly contradictory positions.

Ultimately, “Moscow’s 1947 change of heart on the Palestinian question — which took the form of both

political and (with the delivery of Czechoslovakian arms) military support for the creation of an Israeli state and that state's first war against the Arab armies — put a sharp brake on [the Arab Communists'] expansion and left them isolated in Arab public opinion for some time to come." (63)

The vacuum on the Arab left would be filled by nationalist forces — Nasserism in Egypt, the Baath in Syria and Iraq — which had their own contradictions with imperialism but were brutally repressive of left and independent working-class politics, and ultimately failed in their confrontation with Zionism.

In the Nakba's Shadow

In Part II, "The Time of the Nakba," Achcar surveys Arab perspectives on the Jews and the Nazi holocaust during the periods of Nasserism, the PLO, and the recent rise of Islamist resistance. He concludes with a chapter on "Stigmas and Stigmatization," offering amidst a generally frightening picture some grounds for "guarded optimism in the increasingly tragic context of the Arab-Israeli context."

In the recent writing of Avraham Burg "with his irreproachable Zionist credentials" and deep family roots in religious Zionism, Achcar cites Burg's rejection of the twisting of Shoah memory "into an instrument of common and even trite politics" for the Israeli establishment. Achcar juxtaposes Burg's recognition of the Palestinian tragedy with Edward Said's understanding of the necessity, as Said called it, "to submit oneself in horror and awe to the special tragedy besetting the Jewish people." (291, 292, 293)

Such statements stand in powerful contrast to the unbelievably degraded discourse, on the one hand, of the Zionist purveyors of what Norman Finkelstein calls "The Holocaust Industry" and, on the other, what Edward Said called "a creeping, nasty wave of anti-Semitism and hypocritical righteousness insinuating itself into our political thought and rhetoric [among which] the notion that the Jews never suffered and that the Holocaust is an obfuscatory confection created by the Elders of Zion is one that is acquiring too much, far too much, currency." (Quoted by Achcar, 262)

Among other deplorable phenomena is the influence of a French former Communist turned holocaust-denier Roger Garaudy, "a calamity," Achcar suggests, "symptomatic of a problem that went deeper than Holocaust denial: namely, the intellectual regression that has been under way in the Arab countries for several decades now, brought on by the decline of the educational system, the curtailment of intellectual freedoms... and the stultification of whole populations by television." (260) Perhaps that last clause could stand some revision in light of the role of al-Jazeera in broadcasting the upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt.

Similar regression has been noted in Jewish Israeli society by a variety of that country's commentators, driven by multiple factors including the collective moral rot induced by the post-1967 Occupation, the growing strength of the ultra-Orthodox sector as well as the racist anti-democratic politics of many Russian immigrants, and especially the effects of Israel's economic neoliberal transformation in creating a heavily unequal society and leaving the Jewish as well as Arab poor far behind.

The Nazi holocaust itself was the product of the most frightful regression in history, right in the heart of modern European civilization. No society is immune from its frightful potential. A decent future is never guaranteed; it must be constantly fought for.

Without trying to summarize Achcar's discussion of the post-1948 era, which is detailed and finely nuanced, it's possible to make a certain generalization: When the struggle for Palestinian freedom involves the greatest mass participation and when the internal and global political situation holds the possibility of an authentic solution, the impulses toward "mutual recognition" and even mutual solidarity come to the fore.

We are speaking here of relations between peoples, not diplomatic or political elites. In such moments the cancers of holocaust denial on the Arab side, and "the Arabs always hate us" on the Israeli Jewish side, tend to fade.

Toward a Human Future

Tragically, in moments like the present one where no solution (whether it's "two-state" or "one-state" or anything else other than brutality and apartheid) appears on the horizon — and where the hopes that Palestinians and their allies placed in Barack Obama have been as cruelly dashed as any illusions could ever have been — all "the old crap" associated with political and religious reaction tends to re-emerge. And it always serves the interests of the oppressors.

In early 2009, shortly after the height of the Israeli massacre in Gaza, a memorable article appeared in The New York Times about Friday prayers at Cairo's main Al-Azhar mosque. The sermon, vetted and authorized as always by the Egyptian authorities, whipped up the worshippers with all the rhetoric calling Jews the descendants of pigs and monkeys, despoilers of Jerusalem and the Muslim holy places, and all the rest.

Then at the conclusion the police stood up in the mosque and announced, "prayers are over. It's time go home" — and home everyone went, because the message was clear. You can listen to all the anti-Jewish hate rants you want every Friday, but if you go into the streets to demand that the Egyptian regime open the Rafah crossing to Gaza, you'll have your head split open.

Perhaps today's democratic revolution beginning in Tunisia and Egypt will start to clear away

the accumulated poison of political, social and intellectual regression that Gilbert Achcar deplors. These events make The Arabs and the Holocaust an even more timely confrontation with the tangled threads of history and ideology on both the Arab and Jewish sides, locating the origins of the present reality in the hope of transforming it. As he concludes:

“(I)t is not possible to look toward a peaceful future until accounts have been settled with the past and its lessons assimilated. But in order for the efforts of those who are trying to promote mutual comprehension among Arabs and Jews to bear fruit, the violence must come to an end; only then can the political currents inspired by the universal heritage of the Enlightenment drive back, in both the Arab world and Israel, the many forms of political and religious fanaticism that, today, have the wind in their sails.” (296)

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Review - Towards a Queer Marxism?

Scholarly approaches to sexuality since the 1980s have become increasingly divorced from practical sexual politics, and both have largely given up on earlier attempts to engage with Marxism. Now this may be changing. A stimulating new book by Kevin Floyd (*The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism* by Kevin Floyd Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, 271 pages, \$25 paperback for *Against the Current*) maintains that people in queer studies are paying more attention to Marxism’s “explanatory power.” (2) From the activist side, Sherry Wolf of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) has made an impressive effort (*Sexuality and Socialism: History, Politics, and Theory of LGBT Liberation* by Sherry Wolf, Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009, pages, \$12 paperback) to sum up LGBT (lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender) theory and practice from a Marxist perspective.

Both books make a useful contribution. Wolf is especially strong on gay labor activism, the dangers of the Democratic Party and the flawed logic of biological determinism. Floyd applies Marxist concepts developed by the Hungarian Marxist György Lukács in fascinating ways to problems of sexuality and recent queer theory.

Unfortunately, the two books reflect — from opposite sides of the divide — the estrangement of politics from academia. Wolf gives too short shrift to the contributions of recent gender and queer studies. Floyd (who teaches English) focuses more on novels like Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* and films like “Midnight Cowboy” than he does on politics.

At the same time, these two very different books have some limitations in common. Neither draws

much on the body of socialist-feminist thought that has been developed since the 1970s. Wolf’s Marxism links women’s and LGBT liberation, but does not sufficiently integrate feminism. Floyd makes important connections between gender and sexuality, but focuses one-sidedly on U.S. middle-class gay men. And while both books show the historical character of the categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality, neither focuses on queer radicals’ efforts today to challenge the gay/straight binary.

The strongest parts of Sherry Wolf’s *Sexuality and Socialism* are its sections on class and party politics. She has a keen eye, backed up by statistics, for class divisions in LGBT communities. Her portrayals of the gay commercial scene, the lesbian/gay bourgeoisie and the rise of the “homocons” are unsparing. Her book also gives a solid and useful account of lesbian/gay labor organizing. It rightly insists, “Any attempt to try and live sexually liberated lives under the current material circumstances will always come up against the real limitations of people’s daily existence.” (276)

A special strength of *Sexuality and Socialism* is its history of lesbian/gay subordination to the Democratic Party. Despite Obama’s belated delivery on Bill Clinton’s 1992 promise to eliminate anti-gay discrimination in the military, Wolf’s conclusion stands up well: LGBT activists’ relationship to the Democrats has been “dysfunctional ... — the Democrats court gays’ and lesbians’ votes and money but offer few gains.” (139)

Democrats in Congress helped pass the Defense of Marriage Act and have kept the United States from having a national anti-discrimination law, years after most other advanced capitalist countries enacted one.

Uneven Theory

The theoretical basis of Wolf’s politics is more uneven. Her starting point is, I believe, the right one: “LGBT oppression, like women’s oppression, is tied to the centrality of the nuclear family as one of capitalism’s means to both inculcate gender norms and outsource care for the current and future generations of workers at little cost to the state.” (19)

As she writes, mustering historical evidence, it was capitalism that “created the conditions for people to have intimate lives based on personal desire.” (21) She cites John D’Emilio’s key essay “Capitalism and Gay Identity” to explain how this played out in the 19th- and 20th-century development of lesbian/gay communities and identities. Wolf includes a useful capsule summary of recent work on U.S. lesbian/gay history.

In one of the book’s most valuable chapters, Wolf shows the superiority of a social and historical approach to the biological determinism that pervades the media. Putting most “science journalists” to shame, she dissects the fallacies

underlying studies that conclude there must be a “gay gene.”

She looks insightfully and in depth at studies of childhood sexual development. As she writes, “The prevalence of a sexual binary in most gay gene studies flies in the face of both long-standing empirical research and at least some LGBT people’s lived experience: much of sexual identity is fluid and not fixed.” (217-8)

In all these ways Wolf’s analysis converges with the socialist-feminist analysis of LGBT oppression and liberation that was developed beginning in the 1970s. But she shies away from the word “feminist.” This is not mere semantics. It has deep roots in the Marxist tradition, as well as more recent roots in Wolf’s own political current.

Almost all Marxists in the Second and Third Internationals, including pioneering thinkers on women’s liberation like Clara Zetkin, dismissed feminism as a middle-class ideology and rejected the idea of a broad, cross-class, independent women’s movement. Only in the 1970s did socialist-feminists begin to forge a new synthesis of Marxism and feminism, which gradually won over many Marxist currents.

Wolf’s own organization, the ISO, at first played a significant role in this socialist-feminist breakthrough; its early leader Barbara Winslow was a prominent reproductive rights activist and a socialist-feminist theorist. By the early 1980s, however, the ISO’s British parent organization, having renamed itself the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), turned away from learning from broad social movements and towards a more self-promoting version of Leninist party building. It dissolved the autonomous women’s paper it had sponsored, *Women’s Voice*, declared that Friedrich Engels’ book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* was still a sound basic text on women’s emancipation, and essentially purged Winslow when she protested.

The ISO broke with the British SWP several years ago, so it is now free to rethink its position on feminism. Unfortunately, *Sexuality and Socialism* suggests that it hasn’t. Wolf hardly mentions feminism except to attack what she calls “patriarchy theory,” the idea that men’s domination of women is an independent oppressive system separate from capitalism.

Wolf never mentions the extensive, sophisticated debates among socialist-feminists on this very issue, beginning with Iris Young’s pioneering 1980 article “Socialist Feminism and the Limits of Dual Systems Theory.” [1] She does not engage at all with the analysis that many socialist-feminists share today of patriarchal capitalism as a unified system in which gender as well as class is a “moving contradiction” (in Stephanie Coontz’s term).

Wolf still believes that “Marx and Engels ... provide the theoretical tools necessary to both analyze and wage a successful battle against [LGBT]

oppression.” (9-10) She makes the questionable assertion (based on only a couple of references to an extensive feminist debate) that “Engels’s theoretical conclusions [in *Origin of the Family*] have been substantiated by more recent historical research.” (26)

Essentially she credits Marxists with understanding that the ruling class divides in order to rule. This is a useful idea, up to a point. But it is not enough to understand the power of the heterosexual norm, or the persistence of anti-LGBT prejudice even in the absence of direct or visible ruling class influence.

“Polishing a Turd”

Wolf rightly defends the early record of the German Social Democratic Party and the Russian revolution, refuting some crude anti-socialist distortions. She highlights the young Soviet regime’s decriminalization of homosexuality. But her account, based largely on the indispensable work of historian Dan Healey, cherry-picks the bright spots and underplays the problems.

For example, she rejects Healey’s criticism of Lenin’s disparaging remarks about Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai’s efforts to promote sexual freedom. Wolf blames the Bolsheviks’ limitations entirely on “the impossible conditions that revolutionaries faced.” (99) After 90 years, the Bolsheviks don’t need this kind of uncritical defense.

Against the Current readers will agree with Wolf that later Soviet, Chinese and Cuban homophobia reflected these regime’s departures from Marxism’s democratic essence, not Marxism’s inherent homophobia. But she goes further: she dismisses the idea of a homophobic strain within Marxism as a myth. [2]

After citing some of the notorious homophobic remarks from Marx and Engels’ letters — complete with a jokingly expressed fear of getting fucked — she comments, “There is no sense in trying to polish a turd here.” (77-8) Yet she proceeds to try something very like it. In the face of Marx’s suggestion that Engels attack gay socialist Johann von Schweitzer by circulating homophobic jokes about him, Wolf’s discussion of Von Schweitzer’s political sins is at best irrelevant.

Wolf’s lack of a critical Marxism that theoretically integrates feminism has political consequences. Based on their understanding of male domination and class domination as distinct though interlocking, socialist-feminists argue for an independent women’s movement that chooses its own leadership and charts its own course alongside an independent labor movement — in both of which socialist-feminists need to fight for their politics.

Lacking this theoretical basis, Wolf never makes a case in her book for an independent women’s or LGBT movement. Given the manipulative practices of some groups that have helped discredit Marxism in LGBT and other movements, this is a problem.

The Marriage Debate

Wolf's lack of an explicit feminist politics also has consequences for the political issue that *Sexuality and Socialism* focuses on most: same-sex marriage. Her vigorous defense of equal rights for same-sex marriage rightly underlines the urgency of same-sex partners' practical needs for health benefits, tax breaks, immigrant status and housing rights. But she does not leave enough room for a critique of the institution of marriage as such.

This is inconsistent with her basic critique of the way the capitalist nuclear family privatizes the satisfaction of social needs. Wolf claims that legalization of same-sex marriage "creates an obvious confrontation with the very idea that there is anything natural about the heterosexual nuclear family," (36) without pausing to consider how the spread of same-sex marriage might extend the sway of the nuclear family.

She acknowledges in one sentence that Judith Butler, probably the most influential of today's queer theorists, opposes homophobic attacks on same-sex marriage; then in the next sentence Wolf turns around to attack Butler for suggesting that a focus on the demand "somehow diminishes the alternative lifestyles of LGBT people with no partner or with multiple partners, and attempts to promote an image of gays as 'a religious or state-sanctioned set of upstanding couples.'" Well, doesn't it? [3] However much marriage has evolved over the past century, isn't it still part of the nuclear family?

This fits a general pattern in *Sexuality and Socialism* of sniping at what Wolf calls "gay separatism" and "identity politics" — including much of radical LGBT activism. She has a long diatribe against ACT UP that uses criticisms from the left and right almost indiscriminately. Her account downplays the breadth of the organization — how many progressive groups manage to bring 500 people to a weekly general meeting, as ACT UP New York did at its height? — and the victories it won.

On at least one point she gets the record wrong: she claims that ACT UP's fight for universal healthcare only began in 2007. (189) An ACT UP committee worked hard in the late 1980s and early 1990s to build a coalition for a national march for single-payer health insurance. The effort failed, not because of lack of support from ACT UP, but because progressive unions and NOW never really got on board with money or staff. Queer Nation's tone of self-affirmation and even bitterness in the early 1990s was in large part a response to the lack of solidarity from those who should have been LGBT allies. [4]

Wolf has little sympathy for today's radical, queer-identified activists, admitting to a strong personal distaste for the word "queer." Her call for "a truce on the issue of LGBT nomenclature," and her argument that she like other oppressed people has

the right to call herself what she chooses, seem reasonable. (17-8) But the problem goes deeper. She sees queer activists' provocative language and tactics as "an embrace of social exile." (184)

She fails to acknowledge queers' rightful anger at the heterosexual norm that pervades society or the creativity of queers' challenge to it. [5] She even rejects the concept of "straight society" outright, arguing that it's wrong to apply the same concept to working-class and middle-class straights. (198)

Unsympathetic to queer activism, Wolf shows little understanding of the queer theory that sometimes inspires it. Her long critique of Michel Foucault and queer theory makes valid points about the retreat from class. But she throws every thinker who's ever been called "postmodernist" into one noxious stew.

She hardly gives any account of Foucault's or Butler's contributions. For example, she does not discuss Butler's exploration of the way gender is "performative:" not only socially constructed, but creating roles that must be reenacted and reinvented on a daily basis. She does credit Butler with the insight — crucial for transgender and intersex activism — that even sex, and not just gender, can sometimes be socially constructed. But she suggests that Butler's questioning of identity undermines collective organizing — an implication that Butler has rejected. [6]

Constructing Manhood

Kevin Floyd is more knowledgeable than Wolf about contemporary queer theory and more attuned to its insights. He shows that the "performative" masculinity and femininity that Butler has analyzed are not eternal, but emerged under specific historical conditions.

The capitalist societies of the 19th century were less concerned with masculinity than with "manhood." Like masculinity, manhood was a social construction; but it emphasized the kind of rigid personality structure that was required for male participation in the production process and for reproduction of the working class. Contemporary masculinity and femininity, with their focus on everyday behavior and clothing, are better suited to today's capitalism, with its dependence on consumption and the desires that are needed to stimulate consumption.

Insightful as Floyd is on this point, his account would have benefited from more reliance on socialist-feminist historians who have mapped this and other transitions in U.S. social history. Stephanie Coontz, for example, wrote over twenty years ago about the socioeconomic trends from the 1890s to the 1920s that propelled the shift in gender roles:

"Men had their own identity crisis in this period. As an impersonal work and political order ignored men's individual values, skills, and reputation, masculinity lost its organic connection with work and politics, its material base. The loss of

opportunities for middle-class men to succeed to self-employment and the growing subordination of skilled workers to management contradicted traditional definitions of manliness. The qualities men now needed to work in industrial America were almost feminine ones: tact, teamwork, the ability to accept direction. New definitions of masculinity had to be constructed that did not derive directly from the work process.” [7]

Unfortunately, Coontz and other socialist-feminists are not to be found in Floyd’s footnotes. However, Floyd cannot be accused of trendiness when he relies on past Marxist thinkers like Lukács, who made the concept of “totality” central to his presentation of Marxism in his 1922 book *History and Class Consciousness*.

For historical materialism, economics, politics and ideology cannot be understood as separate domains, but only as parts of a structured whole. Floyd shows that the structures of gender and sexuality can and should also be seen as integral parts of a capitalist totality. Gender and sexuality are not merely local aspects of a social formation — though too many Marxists have treated them as such — but central to the process of capitalist accumulation. Production, reproduction and consumption are all gendered from their inception.

Another key concept that Floyd borrows from Lukács is “reification.” Marx had shown in *Capital* that commodities are fetishized in capitalist societies; people attribute an almost magical power to them, which tends to conceal the social relations that make them commodities and give them their social function. Lukács deepened that insight by further developing the concept of reification: an overarching term for the ways in which relations between human beings are disguised in capitalist societies as relations with, or even between, things.

For Floyd, homosexuality and heterosexuality, two categories that only emerged under capitalism, are examples of reification. Only under capitalism do people consistently and centrally classify their own desire according to the sex of the people at whom it is directed, abstracting maleness and femaleness from the network of kinship and social ties in which other societies embed them.

Male and female bodies are thus reduced to things that can and must be obtained, notably by acquiring all sorts of other things (from one’s own gym body to the right brand of deodorant). This application of the concept of reification to gender and sex explains people’s fierce attachment to their gender and sexual identities more convincingly than Wolf’s invocation of ruling class divide-and-rule does.

As Floyd notes, Lukács in 1967 criticized his own earlier use of the concept of reification in *History and Class Consciousness* by writing that he had blurred the distinction between reification and objectification. In human interactions, including production and sex, people continually alternate

between being active subjects and passive objects that are acted upon by others. By confusing this temporary objectification with permanent reification — by suggesting that people are reduced to things whenever they are acted upon by others — Lukács later wrote, he had repudiated the materialist basis of Marxism. [8]

Oddly, Floyd himself repeats Lukács’ confusion, while turning it upside down. He sees that objectification is an innocent and even inevitable part of sexuality, and concludes that reification (as in the reification of desire into heterosexual and homosexual desire) is equally innocent and inevitable. He goes further, arguing that reification is essential for sexual liberation. Following Foucault, Floyd writes that reification of desire should be celebrated as “a condition of possibility for a complex, variable history of sexually nonnormative discourses, practices, sites, subjectivities, imaginaries, collective formations, and collective aspirations.” (74-5) He suggests for example that the homosexual images in physique magazines of the 1950s constituted a break with postwar mass production and undermined the dominant masculinity.

Homonormativity

As Floyd shows, Herbert Marcuse was one Marxist who was exceptional in recognizing the potential role of reified “perversions” in the liberation of sexuality. Yet Floyd criticizes Marcuse for celebrating homosexual Eros and other “subversive utopian fantasies” but not “the noun form of ‘homosexual.’” (150) Here Floyd breaks with some of the most radical pioneers of lesbian/gay liberation in the 1970s who, influenced by Marcuse, saw its ultimate goal as the abolition of both heterosexuality and homosexuality as social categories. [9]

Contemporary queer theorists like Lisa Duggan are also exploring the limits and taboos (“homonormativity”) of contemporary gay sexuality, challenging gay organizations that have grown respectable, and inspiring more boundary-defying queer activists. Like 1960s gay liberationists, today’s queers offer a critique of the gay commercial scene, which Marcuse saw as part of late capitalist “repressive desublimation.”

By comparison, the way in which Floyd uses Marxism to champion actually existing gay identities — though he is more interested in images than political movements, and not at all in drafting a program — leaves some key political questions unanswered. He suggests that the physique magazines of the 1950s and the gay clone culture of the 1970s “actively wreaked havoc with the presumed heterosexuality of masculinity itself.” (164) But the history of early lesbian/gay liberation suggests that both gender-subversive and gender-conformist potentials were present from the start.

The two tendencies clashed, for example, in the 1969 split in New York between the substantively

radical, multi-issue Gay Liberation Front and the tactically radical but single-issue Gay Activists Alliance. Floyd himself contrasts gay male New Leftists who admired macho straight revolutionaries with anti-macho gays like the Effeminists and Flaming Faggots and the Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries, without indicating any preference. (168-70)

Floyd's argument that the gay niche market constituted a break with Fordist mass production is not borne out by the recent history of neoliberal capitalism. Fordist mass markets, though shrinking in relative terms as labor's share of income has declined, have coexisted comfortably with a growing range of capitalist niche markets. He describes how the expanding gay commercial scene has been marginalizing and dispossessing less affluent queers, less conformist queers and queers of color; but he never clarifies the crucial distinction between gay and queer.

While Floyd's application of the concept of reification to sexuality is brilliant, therefore, the way he uses it is not above criticism. The same applies to his conception of capitalism as a totality. The French Marxist Louis Althusser in his *Reading Capital* criticized Lukács and others for a conception of totality in which developments at one level of capitalism are expressed simultaneously at other levels. Capitalist social formations do not in fact develop in this synchronous way, either at different levels (economic and cultural, for instance) or in different regions (North America and Africa). Floyd sometimes neglects this unevenness in capitalist development and the relative autonomy of different levels.

For example, Floyd pays no attention to the slower pace and lesser extent to which the category of homosexuality initially influenced working-class as opposed to middle-class men (as Foucault noted and George Chauncey has documented). [10] He claims that there is "an ongoing, radical uncertainty about whether gay male sexual practice feminizes any of the men involved" (64); in fact, this uncertainty exists mainly at transitional moments or locations, between a transgender model that insists that same-sex practice does feminize one partner and a gay model that insists just as emphatically that it does no such thing.

Floyd writes of a "heterosexual matrix" in which "masculine identification presupposes the exclusion of desire for a masculine object" (164); but it is precisely this matrix that gradually gave way in the 20th century to an equally rigid gay/straight binary, in which either straight women or gay men can desire masculine men. [11]

Nor does Floyd recognize the disproportionate importance of transgender among poorer people in dependent countries. In the United States too, transgender politics is increasingly the cutting edge of LGBT activism today. This suggests that the categories of lesbian/gay, bisexual and straight may already be losing some of their centrality for sexual politics. Yet Floyd gives middle-class gay

male sexuality pride of place in his account, and neglects the openings in crisis-ridden capitalism that may make it possible to begin moving beyond it.

But all these are discussions that are framed and in part made possible by Floyd's trailblazing work. We can hope that Wolf and Floyd's books will only be the first of many to open the way to a reinvigorated queer Marxism.

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„Peter Drucker is a gay activist in The Netherlands. Originally from the US, he was from 1993 to 2006 Co-Director of the International Institute for Research and Education in Amsterdam. He has written books and articles on the LGBT movement worldwide, and notably has edited and introduced a pioneering anthology on Third World gays and the left, called Different Rainbows

NOTES

[1] Socialist Review no. 50/51 (summer 1980), 169-88, reprinted in Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham, *Materialist Feminism: A Reader in Class, Difference, and Women's Lives*, New York: Routledge, 1997.

[2] Socialist Review no. 50/51 (summer 1980), 169-88, reprinted in Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham, *Materialist Feminism: A Reader in Class, Difference, and Women's Lives*, New York: Routledge, 1997.

[3] For an attempt to defend same-sex marriage rights while linking this fight to a critique of the institution of marriage, see the text "On lesbian/gay liberation" adopted by the 15th World Congress of the Fourth International (2003), <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article177>, point 17.

[4] For my analysis at the time, see Peter Drucker, "What is queer nationalism?" in *Against the Current* 43 (Mar./Apr. 1993.)

[5] For a more nuanced assessment of queer activism, see Peter Drucker, "The new sexual radicalism," *Against the Current* 146 (May-June 2010), <http://www.solidarity-us.org/current/node/2803>.

[6] For a critical Marxist appreciation of queer theory, see Gabriel Girard, "Théories et militantismes queer: réflexion à partir de l'exemple français" (2009), <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article14760>; a shorter English version is available at <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article14759>.

[7] Stephanie Coontz, *The Social Origins of Private Life: A History of American Families, 1600-1900*, London/New York: Verso, 1988, 339.

[8] Georg Lukács, "Preface to the new edition" (1967), in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, Cambridge [Ma]: MIT Press, 1968, xxiii-xxv.

[9] See Dennis Altman, "The end of the homosexual?" in *Homosexual Oppression and*

Liberation, New York: Avon Books, 1971, 227-38; Mario Mieli, "Polymorphous 'perversity,' bisexuality and trans-sexuality," in *Homosexuality and Liberation: Elements of a Gay Critique*, London: Gay Men's Press, 1980, 23-31; David Fernbach, "Sexual liberation and gender liberation," in *The Spiral Path: A Gay Contribution to Human Survival*, London: Gay Men's Press, 1981, 105-12.

[10] See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, New York: Pantheon, 1978, 121; George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, New York: Basic Books, 1994, 27.

[11] Floyd himself (91) gives an example of a location in this transition, when one male character in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* remarks to another in Spain, "I'm fonder of you than anybody on earth," adding, "I couldn't tell you that in New York. It'd mean I was a faggot."

Sweden - Stieg Larsson in the Struggle



Stieg Larsson is world famous as a result of his "Millennium series" of crime novels, all published since his death in 2004. His less known political history is sketched here by Håkan Blomqvist, editor of the Swedish revolutionary socialist paper *Internationalen* from 1979-1999.

Stieg Larsson came to support the Vietnamese liberation struggle in 1968, when he was only 14 years old. He joined the *Kommunistiska Arbetarförbundet* — (The Communist Workers League), the Swedish section of the Fourth International -- around 1974 in the northern town of Umeå. There he distributed the party's paper for soldiers –*Röd Soldat* (Red Soldier) — among the conscripts in his infantry regiment.

After completing his military service he worked at a paper mill and later as a postman. In 1977 he went to Eritrea to deliver money collected by the party and solidarity groups (including the Fourth International, according to his companion Eva Gabrielsson) to the Marxist-oriented EPLF liberation movement. During his stay with the guerrillas he helped train women soldiers in handling mortars, which he learned in the army.

Back in Sweden he and his companion Eva moved to Stockholm where they joined the northern branch of the party in the capital. He carried out ordinary party work and began his trade at the Swedish press agency TT, where he worked with graphics.

In the late '70s he also started writing for the party's weekly journal *Internationalen* (the

International). During the '80s he wrote many well-researched feature articles about U.S. imperialism, right-wing extremism and fascism. He also contributed with articles on cultural and scientific matters — his first feature was about Jules Vernes.

Together with Eva and other comrades he was active in the Grenada-Swedish friendship association, and wrote about the revolution in *Internationalen*. In 1982 he went with a group of comrades to Grenada to experience the revolution. Back in Sweden when the Coard faction organized its coup d'état and Washington invaded, he interviewed by phone comrades who were in Grenada on solidarity teams.

During the early 1980s, after years of left-wing hegemony in the streets, Swedish racist and fascist groups became active. In 1984, inspired by the British Anti Nazi League, members of the Swedish section worked with others to organize *Stoppa Rasismen* (Stop Racism) and carry out countermobilizations. By 1985 it became a national organization; Stieg was a member of the party's fraction in this broader organization. Together with other comrades he developed contacts with the British comrades and their journal, *Searchlight*.

He contributed to *Internationalen* and the journal of the Swedish *Stoppa Rasismen*, but I think it was during these years he developed the idea of a Swedish *Searchlight* — becoming the project of Expo in 1995 (which he started together with other former activists in the *Stoppa Rasismen*).

The "fall of the wall" together with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the "Eastern bloc" brought a dramatic shift of the political and ideological climate in the 1989-91 period — and of material realities. The 1991 Swedish general elections led to the first right-wing victory since 1928. As head of the victorious conservative party Carl Bildt became prime minister.

Furthermore, for the first time ever a racist, populist and anti-immigrant party, *Ny Demokrati* (New Democracy), was elected to parliament. This was followed by an upsurge of street racism with the so called *Lasermannen* (The Laser man) as its most horrible expression: He was a cold-blooded killer who used a laser aim to shoot immigrants in Stockholm.

Fighting the Rise of Racism

The year of *Lasermannen* (from 1991-1992), the right-wing turn in politics, together with the vanishing of the workers states in Eastern Europe made some comrades take new decisions. For Stieg, who since he moved to Stockholm had concentrated on fighting right-wing extremism and racism — both in his articles and in his practical work — the decision was to concentrate on the issue where he thought he could make a difference. He was very active, together with other journalists, in writing books about the threat of right-wing extremism.

Stieg never formally left the party, which became the Socialistiska partiet (Socialist Party) in 1992, but his membership dues were paid less frequently and then stopped altogether. With a declining membership, the northern Stockholm branch was dissolved. In that context Stieg's membership came to an end.

I have read an inaccurate article in Wikipedia that Stieg actively left the party in 1987 because he "didn't want to defend socialist regimes of a dubious democratic character" ["inte ville försvara utländska socialistiska regimer av tvivelaktig demokratisk halt."]. This is ridiculous, both in relation to chronology and to political content.

The Swedish section of course never defended the Stalinist regimes but on the contrary was active in supporting — including through clandestine work — the democratic and working-class opposition in the East. We were allied with Charter 77, KOR, Solidarnosc and the clandestine unions of the Soviet Union.

Stieg's last article for *Internationalen* in 1989 expressed the strong hope for a democratic socialist development in the Soviet Union and internationally, a hope we all shared. The headline was: "Glasnost in the streets of Moscow — like a warm wind."

Stieg was continuously active in *Stoppa Rasismen* together with other comrades. But the organization, which was democratic, non-violent and oriented towards mass action, suffered a decline as a younger generation oriented towards direct action, including physical fights against fascists.

Stoppa Rasismen vanished by the mid '90s. Stieg was occupied with the Expo project in which antiracists of different political colors cooperated. But as I recall no party comrades were active in the project.

We still met in antiracist work, he always kept contact with the comrades at Searchlight and the comrades in Sweden active in the antiracist movement. He now and then contacted *Internationalen* for information and an exchange of views. We would sometimes ask him for advice and sources of information for articles we were planning. Shortly before he died he invited me up to the Expo office for a chat.

Stieg was in some ways a "product" of our movement (of course without diminishing his subjective history, development and other influences) where he learned to combine a revolutionary socialist perspective with democracy, feminism, antiracism and internationalism. He was "educated" in study circles on revolutionary Marxism with the books and pamphlets of Ernest Mandel, Trotsky, Lenin, Marx and Rosa Luxemburg...

I never heard of him leaving his socialist ideals — but he was never a "Marxist teacher" (although he contributed to the internal debates of the Fourth International around issues like Grenada and

the Falkland/Malvinas war). He was a socialist "digging" journalist who came to concentrate his efforts on exposing right-wing extremism, imperialism, racism and fascism. That's how we knew him, and remember him.

We hope to be able to publish his *Internationalen* articles for an international audience.

ATC 151, March-April 2011

„Håkan Blomqvist, born in 1951, Stockholm, is a doctor of philosophy in history, specialised on the labour movement, socialism, racism and anti-Semitism. Starting late in life with academic career, Blomqvist has a background as a worker, journalist/editor and lecturer in labour adult education. Together with the academic tasks he is still actively involved in evening courses and education for unionists and other participants in older or newer social movements.

Antinuclear solidarity, financial solidarity...

Pierre Rousset, Danielle Sabai

Unlike France, Japan is not a military nuclear power, and its population suffered the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki - the most serious of war crimes. However, in the post-war period, it has been like France the victim of a pro-nuclear consensus among the elites that has marginalized and prohibited any form of democratic choice over the issue. Japan has, like France, been held hostage by the nuclear industry.

Chernobyl showed in 1986 what happens when a nuclear state is in crisis. Today, Fukushima shows where the thousand small and big lies of nuclear management lead on the day the unexpected happens. However, all states one time or another face crises, and the unexpected is inevitable. If we do not put the kibosh on the nuclear industry, Chernobyl and Fukushima are our future.

Faced with such a test, international solidarity is a common struggle against a common danger, to break the grip of the elite pro-nuclear consensus. That is what our Japanese comrades argue.

Millions of people living in areas affected by the earthquake, the tsunami disaster and Fukushima are surviving in extremely precarious conditions. In this too, they need our support. Major NGOs in France have ruled there was no need to raise funds for solidarity; Japan is a rich country. Financial assistance would only be justified as a remedy for third world failed states. They have apparently learned nothing from the social drama of New Orleans, which was hit by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Even in "developed" countries, the poorest are the least rescued, and workers must pay the bill for the crisis. Who can leave the risk areas or receive fuel or medicine? Who will be able to find a job tomorrow among those whose businesses have been destroyed - and under what conditions?

We want to send a little material assistance in a situation where the needs are immense. We want this aid to go primarily to "those from below". We want these contributions to help to strengthen activists and social movements so they can play a role in the crisis and defend the interests of the powerless during the time of reconstruction. In this way we want to link emergency humanitarian action with the ongoing social struggle.

With this in mind the association Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières has launched an international appeal for financial solidarity. The ESSF has links with various groups in Japan. For now, the money collected will be sent primarily to an independent trade union coordination active in the particularly affected region of Miyagi / Sendai and Fukushima: the Zenrokyo (National Trade Unions Council, NTUC). This particular centre has established links in France with Solidaires (in particular South-PTT, for its postal federation). We want to work with other initiatives engaged in the same type of work, with Via Campesina and Attac, for example.

You can send donations via Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF), Europe in Solidarity Without Borders

Pierre Rousset is a member of the leadership of the Fourth International particularly involved in solidarity with Asia. He is a member of the NPA in France.

Danielle Sabai is one of IV's correspondents for Asia.

Cheques to ESSF in euros only to be sent to:

ESSF 2, rue Richard-Lenoir
93100 Montreuil
France

Bank Account:

Crédit Lyonnais
Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)
10 boulevard Chanzy
93100 Montreuil, France
ESSF, account number 445757C
International bank account details :
IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12
BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP
Account holder : ESSF

