

LOST A JOB FOUND AN OCCUPATION

The past two years have seen numerous mass movements erupt across the world in the wake of the global financial crisis, at a scale which has been unimaginable for a long time. The languages of all these diverse movements have been different, the immediate questions that they have been trying to answer have varied as have the provisional answers that they have come up with. Yet their voices – **from the Arab countries toppling decades old dictatorships to the demonstrating students in London, the striking miners of Maricana, South Africa, the Occupy activists across the world and the rioters on the streets of Greece** – sound in unison against the existing order of things. These movements have emerged at such a time when the first campaign for world proletarian revolution has failed and the second is yet to start; a time when the revolutionary transformation of society seems to be a very marginal idea in the society compared to the hegemony of ruling class ideology, even among workers and student-youth. Yet it is a time when capitalism faces one of its gravest structural crisis generated from its own bastion and is still uncertain how to handle it. Such is the time when collective struggles are breaking the boundaries of sectors, countries or even regions on a mass scale when aspiration for a new society seemed an old idea amidst a celebration of 'difference' and the 'local'.

THE GLOBAL CRISIS

The periodic crises of capitalism hold the dual possibility, both of a revolutionary transformation and that of capitalism's internal reconfiguration, determined by the striking force of the masses and their ability to turn the crisis of capitalism into a revolutionary rupture. Yet, this journey is far from being a simple and linear movement from the womb of capitalism into a socialistic tomorrow. Despite the heavy blows dealt to capitalism by the working masses of various countries and entire continents at different points of time in its history, the previous crises of the capitalist order marked not the birth of a new society but the emergence of new and more flexible and global forms of capitalist accumulation. The oil crisis of '73 led to the aggressive establishment of the neo-liberal regime and its enforcement across the globe, accompanied by greater flexibility in production, transfer of manufacturing in third world countries providing cheap labour and an even deeper integration of the world economy with the financialization of capital in a way where savings in China sponsored consumption in the US.

However, this crisis smells different and seems resolute to linger longer than it was expected to. It has also been in the making for a while. The attack made by the neo-liberal regime on workers unions and their real wage left the large mass of society unable to consume without credit, primarily in the advanced capitalist countries. With the weakening of the real economy, a speculation driven financial sector increasingly became the engine of capitalist growth. As investment became more and more flexible, the inflation and eventual busting of 'growth bubbles' in various sectors became the primary location for profit making for capital. The East Asian crisis in the late 90s, Russian debt crisis, burst of the dotcom bubble and the crisis in Latin America in 2000-01 are all part of the build up to the crisis that we face today. However, this time, after playing cat and mouse by transferring its crisis from one region to another and from one growing sector to the next, capitalism's contradictions have struck it at its heart, the nerve center of the current global order, i.e. the financial system of the US. Try as hard as they may to pump up the economy **the crisis has refused to go away** despite initial claims of recovery and the attempts of global capital to transfer its crisis on to the people. **At the same time, the generalization of the struggles of the people from one sector, country and continent to another has brought about a qualitative transformation in the character of these protests, where the consciousness of global solidarity and action has emerge as it hasn't any time in the near past, at least not since the mass movements of the 70s.**

WE STAND WITH YOU as YOU STOOD WITH US!

On the 17th of December 2010, Mohamad Bouazizi a Tunisian vegetable vendor immolated himself reflecting the deep frustration of the vast section of society fed up of steep inflation, high unemployment rates and poverty. What ensued was the most wide ranging sequence of protests that the world has seen in more than half a century. Tunisia inspired Tahrir Square, Tahrir Square gave inspiration to the Spanish 15th March demonstrations or Occupy Wall Street and so on. Connected and in conversation with each other despite all their differences, these protests shattered the sectional isolation that neo-liberalism seemed to have imposed on the struggling masses of the world where protests had for a long time remained mostly local and confined to one industry or one issue, even as the regime of exploitation and accumulation had become increasingly integrated and global. **The internationalism emergent within these movements was also reflected in the forms of political action**

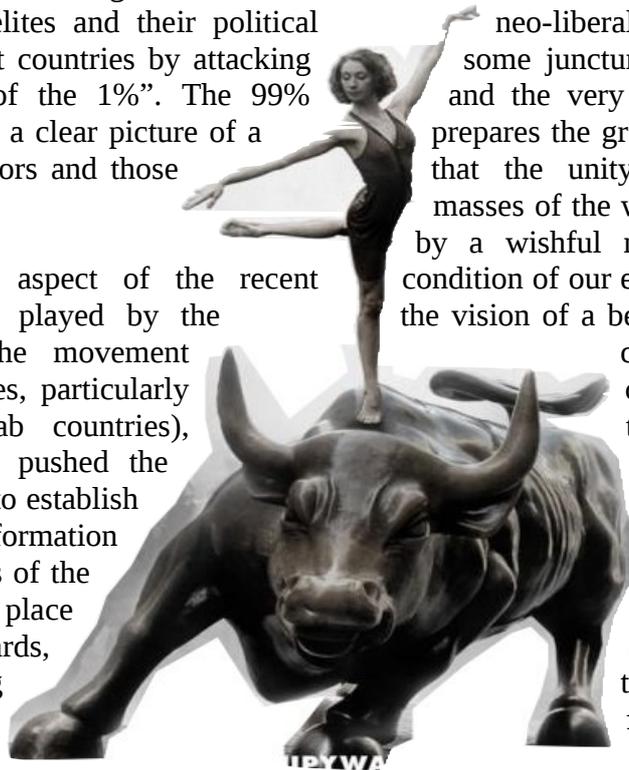
and the creative use of technology that were adopted. Slogans from one country reverberated on the streets of another. Solidarity actions were organized and coordinated demonstration took place across continents, particularly during the Occupy movement.

These explosion of popular rage the world over have spared no variants of the state form of neo-liberal capitalism, be it authoritarian regimes or bourgeois democracies and has strongly contrasted these by its aspiration for *real democracy* – a setup where the right to vote cannot be isolated from the right to a living wage, where political freedom is exposed as meaningless in the absence of social and economic equality. The slogan for equality or bread and jobs undeniably reflect an aspiration for the redistribution of Arab wealth among the Arab people, and in that it challenges, among other things, the export of petrodollars from these countries to the financial centers of global capital. Anti-austerity movements across Europe refuse to pay for the bail outs of the big banks at the cost of the poor man's bread and gives the lie to the capitalist myth of free and unbridled consumption and choice. The Occupy movement voices the popular anger against the structural violence of the neo-liberal regime dominated by industrial and financial elites and their political stooges in advanced capitalist countries by attacking the “greed and corruption of the 1%”. The 99% standing against the 1% paint a clear picture of a world divided between creditors and those reeling under debts.

The other very significant aspect of the recent upsurges is the active role played by the working class in taking the movement forward. Massive strike waves, particularly in Egypt (among the Arab countries), America and across Europe pushed the limits of the initial agitations to establish questions of economic transformation as one of the central concerns of the movement. The strikes taking place in Tunisia from 2004 onwards, that of spinning and weaving workers at Mahalla-al-Kubra in Egypt in 2008 or that of

workers from the East Coast in the US a week before the start of the Occupy movement were crucial in determining the momentum gained by the larger protests, even though they have remained understated in the international media and many of the analyses of the movements. In one telling event on Feb. 20, Kamal Abbas sent a message from Tahrir Square to striking Wisconsin workers, saying "We Stand With You as You Stood With Us." Abbas spoke as a leader of the Egyptian workers struggling for their most elementary rights. His message of solidarity once again evoked the internationalist aspirations of the labor movement: solidarity among workers of the world, and populations generally. While this solidarity is still a long way from forging the iron fist that can deal a last and final death blow to global capitalism, it has definitely established that the enemy that the working masses of the world face, across national, linguistic, racial and gender differences, is one.

Finally, the most significant contributions made by these revolts and protests is to retrieve the question of wide ranging social transformation from the clenches of disappointment and skepticism that had set in among the struggling masses with the failure of past revolutions and the increasing attack by the neo-liberal order. They have shown that at some junctures of history time takes wings and the very materiality of our experiences prepares the ground for a wider generalization; that the unity of the struggling labouring masses of the world is not an abstraction made by a wishful mind but constitutes the very condition of our existence and reproduction – that the vision of a better future presents itself in the contradictions of present day capitalism. The many questions that we encounter while engaging with these movements therefore also reflect on our own concrete experiences with the neo-liberal regime in the country and are also crucial for enriching our understanding of the exploitation and oppression free future that we aspire to.



Global Economic Crisis and Revolts and Protests of the Masses

2nd Dec 2012 from 10 am to 8 pm at Gandhi Peace Foundation

KRANTIKARI NAUJAWAN SABHA & INQLABI MAZDOOR KENDRA

