



Global Crises and Popular Resistance: *a critical analysis of the present historic conjuncture*

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Global crises and popular resistance;

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by

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Introduction

The current global situation marked by severe crises has lasted thus far for half a decade and is not abating. Its first salvo was that of sharp increases in the prices of food, resulting in riots across several countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. By August 9, the first inkling of financial crisis reared its head. This was when the European Central Bank had to release £75bn to bailout eurozone banks². When it hit the United States its generalisation became definite. What started as a Global Financial Crisis became the Great Recession's opening moment and the beginning of the most inexorable economic crisis since the Great Depression. While the first wave of recession receded after two years, the spectre of a global economic crisis still stalks the world, particularly in its most hallowed chambers i.e. Europe and North America. There seems to be no succour from the pangs of a long and dire depression and nothing tried by the elite of policy-makers and captains of industry/finance seems to make much sense in providing a solution.

As the economy roils in turmoil what could arguably be considered as natural disasters also became more frequent. Earthquakes, tsunamis, droughts & such like have hit several parts of the world in the earth's vengeance. This is part of a broader environmental crisis. In Fukushima, we could very well see how such "natural" disasters and the placing of profit over human safety could lead to nuclear disasters.

These variegated crises (economic, social and environmental) have contributed immensely to eroding the legitimacy of several regimes, a critical element of political crisis that has both undermined and reinvigorated the ethos of democracy³. They have as well been central to an ideological crisis that has invaded both the academia and the boardrooms of establishment politics. In short, what cannot be refuted is the fact that modern industrial society is at the historic conjuncture of a *systemic crisis*.

The ferment of working people and youths has been a central element within this *organic crisis* of the world capitalist system. These waves of upheavals have been both resistances against different dimensions of the catastrophe humankind now faces and also part of the atmosphere of turmoil, taking several shapes and producing diverse results thus far. The most resounding of these, have been the ongoing revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East. The Occupy Movement in the United States, the "Squares Movement" of "the indignants" in Greece and Spain, mass strikes across Europe, the electoral rise of the radical Left (and worrisomely of the far-right as well) in France and Greece, fractures within the post-apartheid power bloc in South Africa and eruption of angst in the mines and communities, upsurge of students power on the streets in Quebec and Chile, exacerbation of protests in China, the merging of protest and elections in the removal of Abdoulaye Wade as President in Senegal and anti-fuel subsidy removal revolts in Nigeria are major signposts of intensified class struggle. These have entailed and witnessed the combination of old and new methods and tactics of popular resistance in the unfolding era.

The contents, forms and narratives of these tumultuous, popular, mass resistances have been shaped by the context of social, economic, political and ideological pressures they confront,

² Callinicos, A 2012, "The Long Depression is going from bad to worse" *Socialist Worker* issue 2315,11 August, viewed 12 August, 2012, < <http://socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=29283>>

³ In this sense, we find liberal democracies such as Greece and Italy installing so-called technocratic governments to push through unpopular austerity measures on one hand. But from below, we find the democracy of the street in general assemblies and people's committees as with the *los indignados*, the Occupy movement and in the Egyptian revolution.

the political opportunity structures that they could seize and the dynamics of organisation(s) they encompass. These include what could be considered as structural or traditional in the sense that they have been historically established and those elements that could be considered as conjunctural or tactical in the sense that they are responses to the particular forms in which the master class of big business and pro-establishment politicians (try to) make the working masses bear the cost of recovery from the crisis. There is of course, as this paper unveils a close-knit dialectical relationship between the structural and the conjunctural, both in terms of the crises and the revolts they have called forth. Humankind definitely makes history, but within the confines of the concrete reality each generation inherits from all things bright and beautiful, as well as all that is sordid and malignant, from its past

In the light of the foregoing, this paper argues that we are in the midst of a general crisis of modern industrial society and of its neoliberal incarnation in particular, which is rooted in the logic and nature of capitalist development. Thus, the question of *transitional* transformation is posed. The crisis itself is one that will obviously be long-drawn and the resolution of this posed question will involve the evolution of the character of the social forces in contention for the re-shaping of the world. The centrality of the working class to the politics from below which challenges the *status quo* is identified. While not being oblivious of the importance of technology and communication, this paper stands by the otherwise self-evident fact that it is human beings as social groups and not mobile phones, laptops or any form of communication technology that wage *class struggle*. The popular resistance waged by students, oppressed nationalities, and the entirety of the working masses is put in perspective within the broad canvass of the dispossessed people's struggle to win emancipation and reclaim the earth. The contradictions and bridges between reforms and social revolution are examined in an effort to understand the problems and prospects before the mass upsurge we now witness and its unfurling future.

To achieve its set tasks, the paper is structured into two main sections. In the first (growth, development, crises and social transformation), the social-historical context of the present moment of revolt is captured, with particular emphasis on the tumultuous era of the Great Depression. An understanding of crises and revolts in general, which puts the similarities and differences of these in perspective, is considered essential for understanding the current situation. Considering the fact that this paper's primary concern is the relations between social and economic pressures and the nature, growth and development of mass movements, such an historical excursion takes on added significance. The second main section explores the forms, contents & narratives of the popular resistances, explored in the light of the established general perspective. Finally, in conclusion, the paper explores problems and prospects for the ongoing mass movements with regards to the emancipatory quest for social transformation.

Growth, development, crises and social transformation

Pre-capitalist societies were quite static. In their idyllic balance with nature, today could very well have been yesterday and tomorrow just like today. Traditions and superstitions were, not surprisingly, very dominant. There was as well no supposed separation of the economy from society as a whole. Social life had a rhythmic blend with nature. Capitalist development liberated humankind from the stagnation of this past, but at a price. Growth became an obsession as well as *both* a real and perceived need. At the heart of *this* growth is accumulation. Related to this accumulation are cycles and circles of prosperity and destitution, progress and retrogression, in short, in different times/spaces, development and under-development. This structural dynamis of modern industrial society accounts for the

general thrust of economic pressures that bear on mass movements of working people and youths at moments of crises such as the present conjuncture.

Growth and development; the logic of capital accumulation

The “growth paradigm” as Gareth Dale defines it (2012), “refers to the proposition that economic growth is *good, imperative, essentially limitless*, and the *principal remedy* for a litany of social problems.” Along with the “liberal creed”⁴ central to capitalism came a disembowelling of the economic moment from the holistic rhythms of social life, making it the master of other processes of national and global life and consequently modelling the modern industrial world in the image of the capitalist master class. Karl Marx, the German thinker and revolutionary activist described it thus:

Accumulation for the sake of accumulation, production for the sake of production: this was the formula in which classical economics expressed the historical mission of the bourgeoisie in the period of its domination⁵

He however pointed out that capitalist development marked a turning point for humankind, separating it from the backwardness of pre-modern society. It did represent in its emergence, a huge leap forward for social progress and the acme, of development, at that point in time. The logic of its trajectory, located in prioritization of profit over people and greed over human need, however leads to the ruin of society as it is. It thus bears the seed of its destruction, within it.

In the progressive era of capitalism, accumulation driven by competition in the animal spirits of the market spurred growth like never before. In its infancy and early youth between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries, it brought about *transitional* transformation. In four hundred years, humankind’s mastery of nature and development of the specie’s productive powers surpassed that of the preceding four thousand years of human history combined. This expansion of the horizons of production (and consumption) stretched beyond national and regional barriers. The traversing of the Cape of Hope, the “discovery” of the Americas, and the West’s conquest of the Far East were all part of the processes driven by this drive to growth. It involved as well as resulted in the materialization of a world market and gradually what could be called a global world, socially politically and in a sense culturally⁶.

To what extent such stupendous growth has resulted in development is however one that quite often has been asked and keeps being asked. The point of departure for the question is often what is considered as “development”. This could be because, as Walter Rodney (1973, p.6) puts it “development in human society is a many-sided process”. As he further notes “more often than not, the term ‘development’ is used in an exclusive economic sense-the justification being that the type of economy is itself an index of other features” (*ibid*, p.8). He then goes on to show that humankind in general has had economic development (even in pre-capitalist societies) to the extent that in different regions at different times human beings have increased their collective capacity to utilise nature and its fruits for beneficial purposes.

⁴ Polanyi, K 1954, *The Great Transformation*, Beacon Press, Boston

⁵ Marx, K. 1976, *Capital Vol. 1*, Penguin books, Harmondsworth, p. 742

⁶ In this sense, on a level we find the universalization of knowledge without a commensurate spread of the powers to utilise such for equal development and on another level we find the spread of consumerism in the form of the coca-cola, denims and MacDonald’s culture

Economic development requires the formulation of policies that would engender such processes as those of industrialisation, modernization⁷ and strengthen institutions which promote these. In a manner of speaking, economic growth could possibly be fully on auto-pilot. Economic development though, requires conscious measures, amongst which the actions of states are central, towards ensuring transition from more traditional (pre-capitalist or more properly speaking, peripherally capitalist) economies to more advanced capitalist production of goods and services⁸. It could be argued that, it is aimed at utilising the expanding prosperity of a country for the increase of its citizens' social well-being and the expansion of political liberties (O'Sullivan & Sheffrin, 2003).

It is hardly surprising that concern for economic development in an explicit manner was after World War II, at a time when state capitalism became pivotal for the development of capitalism as a whole. The means of production as well as that for destruction (the latter being well demonstrated in the two world wars) had become so enormous that the mass poverty which was palpable could not but be confronted both practically and theoretically within countries and internationally. Arguably, economic growth should lead to economic *and human* development⁹ both within nations and globally, but this did not seem to be the case. Sixty two years back, no less notable figure than President Harry Truman of the United States observed at his inauguration that:

More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate, they are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas. For the first time in history humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people¹⁰.

The reality today is that economic growth and development has not only resulted in an increasing number of people living in conditions that do not merely approach misery, but rather make misery an understatement. It has equally led the world into a state of intense crisis. This is despite the policies and programmes of governments and declarations and goals of multilateral economic and political organisations, supposedly aimed at the contrary.

To understand *why* the current crisis and *how* it has taken shape, it is of the utmost essence to grasp the reason(s) for this seeming paradox which really is no paradox at all. It is the impoverishment of the many that is the basis of the super wealth of the few. The labour of the toiling masses is what creates social wealth. But this wealth is appropriated by the few who own the means with which it is generated. It is not impossible to win some level of re-distribution of wealth through struggle from below leading to compromise of some sorts by the owners of capital. But "capital exists and can only exist as many capitals"¹¹. Thus, competition between the different owners of capital results in the continued expansion of extended reproduction of commodities for the market, for which there is no guarantee of consumption. This competition as well as the short-term benefit of increased profits forces

⁷ While industrialisation could be considered as being at the heart of modernization, it would include other dimensions such as democratisation. The more advanced capitalist countries more often than not pass this off as adding up to "westernization", as do several new elites in neo-colonies.

⁸ It is in this sense that advanced capitalist countries are considered as "developed" as against "developing", "under-developed", "less developed" or "under-developing" countries. This of course reflects value judgment. This is however not of direct concern within the scope of this particular paper.

⁹ Sen, A 1983, "Development: Which Way Now?", *Economic Journal*, Vol. 93 Issue 372, Pp.745-762. While such perspective which has informed the formulation of the Human Development Index and the compilation of Human Development Reports are of immense use for benchmarking, it does not address the fundamental question of transitional transformation beyond the capitalist system

¹⁰ Truman, H 1949, "Inaugural address", January 20, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, viewed 7 August 2012, <<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/calendar/viewpapers.php?pid=1030>>

¹¹ Marx, K 1973, *Grundrisse*, Penguin books, Harmondsworth, p. 414

the “many capitals” to invest in increasing the productivity of labour¹². The flipside of this “progressive development of the social productivity of labour”¹³ is a general tendency for the rate of profit to fall. Such decline in the rate of profit results in the capitalists’ sharp contraction of production and consequently economic crisis. All the most flowery of words and declarations will never compel the captains of industry and finance to pump in investments without a whiff in the air of an upturn in the rate of profit.

Development, underdevelopment and crises

General crises of the capitalist system are multi-dimensional in their manifestations. It is not so much that the different dimensions of such crises merge as that they are organically combined producing one over-arching atmosphere of chaos. The critical elements of the general crisis, as is well known now include: a global financial crisis; a world economic crisis and; a food crisis. Emerging from these material crises is political contention and crisis in the realms of ideas, which we will look at in more depth in the subsequent section. These material crises did not just come out of the blues. At their roots is the *for profit* nature of capitalist economic development. This engenders expansion and contraction in a cycle of development and underdevelopment, prosperity and crises.

Accumulation and business cycles before the neoliberal “counter-revolution”

Since its age of puberty, in the 17th Century, capitalism had always had its cycles of booms and bursts, periods of expanding economic expansion turn into the murky waters of recessions (O’Sullivan & Sheffrin, *Op cit* pp 57; 310). This is not something magical it is an inescapable dynamic of the capitalist accumulation. But what seems so simple now did not seem so to the earliest of liberal economists or even to their later day scions either. Economic crises in the 18th Century was considered as extraneous to the workings of capitalism, with wars, famine and other episodic catastrophes being thought to account for these¹⁴. It was the Utopian Socialist, Jean Charles Sismondi who first deciphered economic crisis as being part of the cycle of capitalist development in 1819. In his view, at the root of the perennial cycle of booms and bursts were the twin problems of overproduction and, primarily, in his view, under-consumption.

As spirals of prosperity and depression dogged the capitalist world throughout the 19th and early part of the 20th Centuries, business cycle theories became a central theme in understanding the nature of modern industrial society’s development. The Austrian economist, Joseph Schumpeter codified these into four on the basis of their periodicities¹⁵. Crises were however portrayed by the neo-classical school of economics dominant at the turn of the 20th Century as passing disruptions of economic equilibrium, a mechanism within the deemed self-regulating nature of liberal economic development. The Great Depression confirmed the worst fears of the more attentive of pro-establishment social scientists on the dangers of economic crisis, with its attendant social upheavals. It also spurred efforts, on their part, to overcome this Achilles’ heel of the system.

John Maynard Keynes provided what was perceived as the key emblazoned with the mantra of counter-cyclical countervailing measures to address under-consumption or otherwise put, the question of effective aggregate demand. This gave birth to the field of macroeconomics,

¹² Callincos, A. 1983, *The Revolutionary Ideas of Karl Marx*, Bookmarks, London p. 170 (Fourth reprint, 2010)

¹³ Marx, K 1971, *Capital Vol 3*, Progress Publishers, Moscow p.212

¹⁴ Batra, R 2002, "Economics in Crisis: Severe and Logical Contradictions of Classical, Keynesian, and Popular Trade Models", *Review of International Economics*, vol. 10, issue 4, pp. 623-44

¹⁵ Schumpeter, J 1954, *History of Economic Analysis*, London, George Allen & Unwin

representing a bold attempt to overcome the anarchy of business cycles within the confines and indeed, *on the basis of* capitalist development. It did seem to have been a successful attempt for many decades, ushering in the Golden Age of capitalism which spurred the Welfare State in the developed West and the developmentalist state in ex-colonies (in an era where imperialism was re-structured such that manufacturing by transnational corporations in these neo-colonies where labour was cheaper helped forge a “triple alliance” which included the state and a nascent national bourgeoisie¹⁶). In both instances, the state assumed a strongly interventionist role in ensuring social policy reforms, regulating the finance sector within national borders and guaranteeing the real economy’s continued production.

In this period which lasted from the end of World War II to the early 1970s, it did seem that severe global slumps had been banished. The post-War Order established at Bretton Woods in 1944 institutionalised some form of regulation for international financial and commercial relations. Central to this was the International Monetary Fund and what would become the World Bank. It also heralded the hegemony of the United States as the guardian of global capitalism, even as it led to the establishment of the United Nations. The seeming state of tranquillity within this order began to evaporate by the late 1960s, took a nosedive with the collapse of the Bretton Woods arrangement by 1971 and ended with the 1973-74 crises. The subsequent period of neoliberalism with its unbridled spirit of deregulation, privatisation and cuts in the funding of social services is considered by some as being instituted on the foundations of some form of counter-revolution.

It is however of practical significance for today’s scholars and activists to consider just to what extent it was that Keynesian ideas and policies helped to stem the spread of the Great Depression and spur the so-called Golden Age of capitalism. As Keynes argued and not without justification, ideas rule the world! And today, within the melee of contending ideas is that of possible salvation from the road trod with Keynes *General Theory*. The reality might not be as simplistic as it appears. Between the Great Depression and the Golden Age lies a bloody chapter which explains the room for re-construction and with it the re-birth of flourishing capitalism. This was World War II.

Instituting transformation; class relations, the state and world orders

Social transformation *within modern society* emerges from the dynamics of development, encapsulating in broad strokes, the contradictory surge immanent in the multi-faceted processes of social change. Such contradictory reflection of objective progress arises from the fact that what transformation at any time amounts to, involves intense political and ideological contention. Thus, it could be argued that moments of general crisis of capitalism present the most significant conjunctures from which social transformation tends to result. In the wake of the Long Depression of the 18th Century’s last quarter, the world witnessed what Karl Polanyi describes as *The Great Transformation*. This was the *belle époque* which lasted till the Great Depression. At its heart was the reverence of the “liberal creed”. Its collapse led to the Keynesian transformation pointed out earlier. The neoliberal transformation of the 1970s-90s would be the last of the “great transformations” of a very eventful 20th Century. These transformations have brought about massive restructuring of society economically, socially and politically. These have been within countries, regionally and in the form of some world order or the other. Questions, lessons and unresolved developments from the past weigh heavily on the choices and alternatives open to contending forces at this present conjuncture.

¹⁶ Cf: Evans, P 1979, *Dependent Development*, Princeton University Press, NJ

It is however important, for several reasons, not the least of these being for understanding the geography of the current popular resistances to a global crises, as well as how this crisis has taken shape in different regions of the world, to put in perspective the fact that while there have been universal manifestations of social transformations, the magnitude and facets of these in different regions of the world reflect the uneven and combined nature of socio-economic and political development which imperialist domination kindles. It is not accidental that countries in which the local master class could not exercise the powers of sovereignty, even in a formal sense during the inter-war years have had a relatively significant difference in the trajectories of crises and revolts that now shake the world¹⁷. In looking more closely at the relationship between crises and social transformations towards, and in the wake of the two major crises before the current conjuncture, it would be worthwhile to have this in mind, to better understand and draw lessons from the unfolding character of mass struggles that we now witness. Central to the revolts across the lines of “developed” and “underdeveloped” countries as we shall see though, are the critical issues of how social relations of production have taken formation and related to this, the forms and character of class struggle arising from this and the global context, which largely is determined by world orders entrenched by the dominant *imperialist* powers, being the advanced capitalist countries.

Another important point of note is that dark nights of angst and the fury of revolt hardly ever just fall on us. They creep in with heralds in the twilights of preceding eras. It is impossible for example to understand the Great Depression and the dynamics of class struggle in that period outside the wake of the First World War and the interval of the roaring twenties. Similarly, the crises of the mid-70s have roots that go beyond 1968 and which were manifested in the turmoil of that year.

From “the Age of Catastrophe” to the “Golden Age”

The Great Depression was part of the organic crisis of capitalism starting with World War I, leading to and ending with the final hours of World War II. At its centre was the Western world. The rest of the world was under its imperialist domination as colonies or semi-colonies. While farmers as a social group had become “little but objects of nostalgia” by the beginning of the 21st Century, “before the First World War, farmers composed the largest single group in every country” including in the centres of imperialism (Drucker, 1994). Workers had no social security whatsoever, there was no extra pay for overtime work, nor did an employee enjoy paid vacation. Except in Germany, there was no health insurance and unemployment benefit which was nothing but a pittance was paid only in Britain (and this started just two years before World War II). Patriotic passions were stirred by the master class in the countries of the Allies and the Central Powers alike. Working people were brought to face each other on the battlefields of the human carnage that cost 9 million lives.

The end of the war marked the curtains for four great empires and the re-drawing of the map of Europe (Keegan 2000, p.7). It also marked an era of revolutions of which the 1917 Russian revolution had the most lasting significance. With this reign of chaos and the threat it presented to the order of the Gilded Era, the first concerted efforts at establishing an institutionalised world order, beyond the complex dynamics of sheer balance of European powers politics, were taken. This took the form of the League of Nations (LON), formed in 1919. It was clear to the master class of industrialists, statesmen and politicians in the

¹⁷ This argument is pursued further by this author in understanding the “missing link” in Alice Amsden’s separation of “the Rest” from “the Remainder” (Aye’, 2012 p. 40)

different capitalist countries that concessions had to be made to the working class if the legitimacy of capitalist order in general was to be maintained. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) was thus formed as an organisation of the LON, to promote tri-partite “pluralism”. Within countries though, socialist organisations that could influence workers along radical lines were hounded and revolutions such as those in Germany and Hungary were smashed with the utmost ferocity.

The 1920s opened with this background. From the murk of death, destruction and disease wrought in World War I and its aftermath, Euro-American economies stumbled through a brief recession, into the “roaring twenties”. Spurred by the expansion of the corporation and particularly international finance capital, the consumption of fruits of technological advancement such as electricity, telephone, radios and automobiles became diffused. America was particularly best placed to be at the heart of this decade of prosperity, it was the least battered of the Allies. It had entered World War I barely a year to its end and was far removed from the main theatres of destruction. The American state had also much more brutally than any Western state confronted the spectres of communism and working class mobilization headlong on the eve of the 1920s. A “red scare” had been whipped up, with strikes and socialist organisations portrayed as satanic footholds of Bolshevik revolution. In quick succession, the Espionage and Sedition Acts were passed in 1917-18. Private police supplemented the state police in attacking activists and workers. In some instances, union activists and striking workers were murdered by such police, while the state declared martial law.

The September 1919 US Steel Corporation workers strike was a turning point in the routing of workers’ power which was central to the roaring of the 1920s. Almost half a million employees of the company spread over 50 towns in 10 states walked out when management refused to recognise their right to be unionised. For three months the strikers remained adamant despite the most horrendous of attacks. The government in Gary, Indiana declared martial law and company police killed 26 strikers in Pennsylvania. Thugs were brought to break picket lines and the homes of many strike leaders were burnt down by unknown persons. The defeat of the strike by January 1920 signalled the defeat of organised labour. The massacre of almost 100 coal miners in the “battle of Blair Mountain” the following year confirmed the determination of employers and the state to ensure that organised labour remained emasculated.

The modern mass society could be said to have its foundations in this decade. Urbanisation expanded at rates mind-boggling rates, with an ever increasing proportion of the population living in towns and cities. Advertisement, the mass media and the novel cinema led to the flourishing of consumerism which in turn engendered the spread of large-scale production. Having successfully beaten the unions into retreat, the master class could be “magnanimous”. There was so much optimism such that in his inaugural speech as president, Hubert Hoover, claimed that: "We in America today are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land". This was in 1928, barely a year before millions of Americans sank into the deepest depths of poverty, with tens of thousands at the very least living in “Hooverilles”.¹⁸ These were shanties with “houses” built using cardboard, scrap metal, wood from crates, and old newspapers.

¹⁸ Mink, G & O’Connor, A 2004, *Poverty in the United States: An Encyclopedia of History, Politics, and Policy*, Volume 1, ABL-CIO, SB

The 1930s were like never before, a decade of “crisis and revolts”. The events of the current conjuncture are often compared to those of that period. This is not surprising. Lehman brothers collapse on September 15, 2008 seemed to echo the “Black Tuesday” of October 29, 1929, when the New York Stock Exchange crashed. Three years after that crash, one quarter of the workforce in the United States were unemployed. Not unlike what would befall eleven heads of states and governments in the current crisis, President Hoover lost his bid for re-election that year. Franklin Roosevelt won the elections on the platform of establishing a “new deal” that would bring the crisis which hurt capitalists and the working masses alike, *but in very different ways*, to an end. His election did not bring mass anger to an end.

There were massive movements of the working masses as job losses went along with the loss of homes foreclosed when “poor folk” could not pay mortgages. Soup kitchens sprang up as charities ventured to provide food for many who could otherwise have starved to death. Anti-eviction movements, riots in urban centres and “farm strikes” became the order of the day. But of the greatest significance was the rise of working class militancy, particularly, but not limited to the form of mass strikes. Waves of “sit-in” strikes spread like wild fire from 1934 to 1937. Workers *occupied* their factories, confronting employers and the state in sometimes bloody battles. Within the cauldron of crisis, a revival of the working class was established, and with it, its leadership of the revolutionary pressures from below of the mass of Americans. In the course of this its hour of rebirth, the American working class: won recognition of unions as a right; established some of its largest unions and, related to this; organised around industrial lines, including the formation of a federation of this new mammoth expression of union combination, the Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO).

The series of “new deals”¹⁹ were meant to contain this tornado of rebellion, restore the profit incentive for business and, reconcile these two otherwise extreme class poles. They were of course also geared at ensuring the continued tenure of the Roosevelt administration which represented this pseudo-bonapartist “balance”. The first new deal constituted a Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), through which \$500m was made available for soup kitchens and unemployment benefits (Lowe 1988, p. 117). The second new deal involved bolder interventions which made the state the biggest employer of labour in liberal America. These included: the establishment of the Works Progress Administration, to try curtailing the rising unemployment rates; the Wagner Act, through which labour unions became legally recognised; the passage of laws declared to be aimed at safeguarding workers’ social security, fair labour standards, poor farmers’ tenancy security, and housing for the working masses (Kennedy 1999, p.4).

These steps on one hand reflected the turns and twists of the Great Depression, as the recession of the late 1930s made the earlier recession at that conjuncture seem mild. On the other hand, they did play a role in shaping the dynamics of the mass movements of that hour, largely because they were not unsuccessful in winning, particularly the leading strata of the trade union movement to the cheerleaders’ club of the “new deal”. But the avalanches of mass anger from below, just like the depression which had ignited it, could not be placed back into the bottle of normalcy. The pathway to recovery and some form of class compromise waded through the damp, dark disaster of World War II.

With regards to the massive rise of the working class movement in this period there are some critical elements of note, first, socialist organisations, activists and ideas were central in the

¹⁹ contrary to the view of a “new deal”, there were actually two new deals in quick succession i.e. 1933-34 & 1935-38

mobilisations. This is not to suggest some conspiracy or the other as McCarthyism would do in the subsequent period. But there was a sense in which within the mass upsurge, there was this grasping for a different reality from that which crisis-ridden capitalism presented them. The fact that the USSR, which was portrayed as a workers' state was probably the only country of note that was not sucked into the labyrinth of depression gave a sense of concreteness to this aspiration. The Communist Party for example, grew at an exponential rate. Its militants and those of several other far-Left groups were active not only in the trade unions but as well in popular resistance through such mass organisations as the anti-eviction movement, the Unemployed Councils and Negro rights movements. Second, the more liberal trade union leaders, in particular those of the more radical Congress of Industrial Organisations which was nodal within the mood of the moment stood for reforms. In this they openly and enthusiastically stood by Roosevelt. While being staunchly anti-communist, they utilised the energy and enthusiasm of socialist cadres to build the movement and subsequently dumped these.

With regards to the new deals; these were not policies and actions that were resolved on by the master class on the basis of a consensus. Arriving at them involved *intra*-class contestation on what was to be done to save the system which the politicians and entrepreneurs both stood for. Second, the new deals did not represent some well thought out Keynesian policy framework. Keynesianism would be the ideology of the *post*-World War II era. Practice prefigured policy and policy foreshadowed theory towards what would become the post-World War II era which collapsed with the mid-1970s crisis.

The great depression was arguably the first truly global crisis of capitalism. While the United States was undoubtedly its epicentre, it equally hit not only other Western countries but as well the semi-colonies of Latin America and the colonies in Africa and Asia, with varying levels of intensity. This as well spurred revolts which were critical to the form that the subsequent world order would take.

In Europe, social discontent took many forms which challenged the *status quo*. This involved radicalization of the working masses for social change, as well as that of right wing forces along ultra-nationalist lines, including the rise of fascism. The population of officially unemployed workers in Britain rose from 1million to 2.7million persons, sparking off a series of strikes and "hunger marches"²⁰. France witnessed a spate of riots and severe parliamentary instability which saw to the collapse of five governments in less than two years. The most severe of the anti-parliamentary riots in the country during this period was that organised by right-wing nationalist forces in February 1934²¹. Germany was particularly hit as the American Dawes plan meant to ameliorate the blows of reparations *and which tied American investments intricately to European capital* seized in the light of the depression.

The semi-colonies and colonies outside Europe and North America were hit badly. This was largely through the channels of trade as the prices of primary commodities exported from these countries hit the dust. The shock of mass upheavals in Latin America on the heels of the 1929 crash paved the way for an era of authoritarian rule, established through passive revolutions (from above). Arguably the most significant of this phenomenon was in 1930 Brazil. Getuilo Vargas, "the father of the poor" emerged as president through a revolution schemed by the military's top brass. Throughout the 1930s he ran programmes similar to

²⁰ Lavalette, M & Mooney, G 2000, *Class Struggle and Social Welfare*, Routledge, UK

²¹ Soucy, R 1995, *French Fascism: The Second Wave, 1933-1939*, Yale University Press, New Haven

Roosevelt's new deals. His emergence was marked by the "entrance of new important groups into national politics" (Edwards 2007, p. 51). These included the nascent bourgeoisie, a technocratic bureaucracy and the working class. This, to a great extent, was the situation across the under-developed world. The period of the Great Depression marked the entry of the working class and with it the urban working class onto the stage of *global* history. In the Caribbean, a wave of strikes and protests hit hard at the underbelly of British colonialism. Asia was not spared while strikes and anti-tax revolts of women, peasants and urban poor confronted the colonial masters in West African countries such as Nigeria and Ghana. In the Middle East and North Africa, the Moslem Brotherhood arose as an expression of mass anger and resistance (Mitchell, 1969). This movement rooted in Islamist ideology flourished with the provision of welfare and solidarity for the urban poor (Lia, 1998).

The Soviet Union was immune from the worst pangs of that long depression. After the 1917 revolution, it had battled with foreign intervention and civil war that had left the country in a terrible state. Foreign trade which was a major channel of the crisis' transformation had reduced to the barest minimum. Besides, at this point in time, socialism had become a strong modernizationist ideology guiding such policies as the five year plan, massive electrification and industrialization drive, etc, in short, state capitalism was being built "in one country". This, equally, was pursued with the most totalitarian of authoritarian rule which utilised the stratagems of purges, deportation and sundry means.

Beyond 1968; three decades of the neoliberal locusts

The "age of catastrophe" of which the Great Depression was a centre of gravity ended with World War II. "The Second World War prepared the conditions for a massive revival in the rate of profit and for a golden age of capital accumulation. The principal reason for this was the destruction of capital during the War" (Brooks, 2012 p. 76). By the late 1960s this era came to a screeching slowdown, as enhanced productivity pushed the rate of profit into stiff decline, culminating in the global crisis of the mid-1970s. 1968 was the loud dénouement of that golden era and the class compromise which it fostered and rested on. Chris Harman aptly captures the spirit and details of that period²². Its eventual end was in the ashes of the 1973-4 crisis, which was "the first generalised crisis of capitalism since the Second World War" (Brooks, *op cit* p.78). 1968 had a great deal of similarity with 2011. There was a plethora of popular resistances, but as Harman equally stated "there was more to the year than just a series of exciting events. Each upsurge of struggle inspired those involved in the next, creating the sense of an international movement. People who otherwise might have regarded their struggles as over particular grievances saw they had much more general significance"²³. In a sense, 1968 did not end until 1979/80 when in the United Kingdom and the United States, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan came to power, as incarnations of the neoliberal order that today's popular resistance challenges.

The three decades of neoliberalism could be understood, in my view as argued elsewhere as being comprised of three ten year periods²⁴. 1979-89 represented neo-liberalism's globalisation and rabid contestation for dominance. By 1989, its Washington Consensus seemed to have ascertained neoliberal hegemony world-wide. The collapse of the Soviet

²² Harman, C 1998 *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After*, Bookmarks, London

²³ Harman, C *et al* 2008, "The year the world caught fire", *Socialist Review*, May, viewed 11 September, 2012, <<http://www.socialistreview.org.uk/article.php?articlenumber=10386>>

²⁴ Aye, B 2009, "Neoliberal Globalization and the Informalization of Work; a Critical Class Analysis of Trade Union Strategies in Nigeria and South Africa", *Labour Factsheet*, September-December, online at: <<http://solidarityandstruggle.blogspot.com/2009/04/neoliberal-globalization-and.html>>

Union affirmed this and we entered a decade of capitalist triumphalism in which history seemed to have ended with the neoliberal triumph. 1999 marked the beginning of the end for neoliberalism's seeming unbridled towering. The central arena of this shift was Seattle. The 2000s marked a period of intense contestations. But the ghosts of the Kremlin's claims and question marks of what another possible world would amount to (which is not wholly unbeneficial) dogged every step of the alter-globalisation movement which represented the anti-capitalist personification of this moment's popular resistance. This was a prologue to the spectre of today's global mass rebellion.

Context, forms and contents of current popular resistance

The upsurge of resistance that has swept across the world in recent years has taken different shapes and had its ebbs and tide. More often than not these waves of popular struggle have been presented as new movements. In some way and manner, they are. But more often than not, they represent contextual designs for the wheel of class struggle and not some re-invention. They have spurred the involvement of millions of people –many, for the first time– in (radical) politics. The roots of these movements go deep into the soils of anger and disillusionment with three decades of neoliberal onslaughts of capitalist development.

There have been new narratives which capture age-long expressions of the sense of exploitation and oppression, representing (not so new) imagery of class and class struggle. The concept of the rise of the 99% against the 1% of the master class does capture the “we” versus “them” view from the standpoint of the exploited and oppressed. It also deepens it showing quite clearly that “we” are in the most definitive of majority while “they” are an infinitesimal minority.

The geography of popular revolts, on one hand, shows a correspondence between the *economic* crisis and resistance. It is not accidental that apart from the Middle East and North Africa region, Europe and North America have witnessed the fiercest and most thorough-going of upsurge of mass struggle over the last few years. The countries in these regions have faced the most rabid of social and economic pressures that stem from the main heat of the crisis, in the form of austerity measures. On the other hand, the geography of revolts point at how *social-political repression* serves as a keg of gun powder which the ignition of added economic crisis could set-off as a conflagration of revolution. This section looks more closely at the *how* the popular resistance has taken place in different regions of the world and *what* the thrusts of these have been. It would however be beneficial to start with a grasp of the *context* of the crisis, taking forward threads from the last section.

A context of intensifying attacks on the working classes

Warren Buffet, in a New York Times interview on November 26, 2006 said "There's class warfare, all right, but it's my class, the rich class, that's making war, and we're winning."²⁵ This statement puts the view of “the rich class”, in the clearest of perspectives. It is in this light that we understand the spate of austerity which the working masses have been burdened with in a bid to ensure economic recovery. One clear fact to have in mind as a fundamental element of the social and economic pressures within which mass movements of protest have risen is that the master class is not being passive or simply reactive in the face of resistance, both within nations and internationally.

²⁵ Pirsch, M 2011, “Class Warfare, the Final Chapter” 15, March, viewed 11 September, 2012 < <http://archive.truthout.org/class-warfare-final-chapter68146>>

The elite's approach to waging struggle against the working masses, particularly at the global level, has involved subterfuge when it felt such would be more effective. Attempts have been made to incorporate as broad a spectrum as possible into proposed attempts at ensuring a mutually beneficial recovery (i.e. for the elite and the masses), particularly at the earlier instance of the crisis. The international trade union movement was involved in meetings of the G20, which itself was constituted as an instrument for maintaining the US/G7 hegemony. A pretentious listening ear was also presented to the International Labour Organisation's "Global Jobs Pact" in 2009. The truer face of the elite has however been unveiled with the spate of austerity measures designed by the IMF, EU & ECB. At the global level, the 2012 International Labour Conference equally launched what has been described as an "unprecedented attack on workers' rights"²⁶

There is no automatic link between crisis, its attendant attacks on the working classes, and the flowering of popular resistance²⁷. The struggles, organisations and ideas emanating from the preceding period become living wells from which spontaneous mass responses could grow as politics from below to pose a systemic challenge to the *status quo*. These rise up to shape the imagery and forms of the fight back which they give a soul to.

Idea, imagery and the intrusion of the popular from below

Lasting resistance is impossible without ideation of what is sought, beyond that which is rejected. In the initial moments of a revolutionary upsurge, as that of the current situation, this appears blurred, but the seed of the former can be gleaned from the latter. As the waves spread, subsequent entrances of the mass into the arena of politics become clearer about the movement's goals. Emancipation becomes the idea, taking on flesh and blood in struggles and the courage and sacrifices that go with these, particularly, but not limited to its militants. The movement ascribes its aims in slogans and demands, which capture the imagery of where it stands and where it aspires to take the country as a whole.

Ideas do not fall from the skies and mass movements' imageries are real abstractions. They reflect the level of development of the movement's consciousness of its place in history and create its voice and self-narration as it rudely intrudes into the sphere of national life, disrupting *normalcy*. There are of course counter- and other narratives of such intrusion from below. But these narratives are not primary in themselves, as post-modernist would have us believe. They express and are part of the material politics of other forces in contention or support, seeking to de-limit or help advance the intrusion which popular resistance makes into the monotony of normalcy.

In the general sense of popular resistance's imagery and self-narrative, there tends to be a *universal idea*. This is *freedom*. Freedom, or rather what is considered as freedom is shaped by the economic, social and political context of misery, deprivation, or dispossession in which politics from below and the self-narrative it engenders arise from. In each case, it aims at emancipation from the shackles of such context. The universal i.e. might be general to humankind, but its self-narration and awakening cannot but start from the particular. It is in the cause of struggle that its universalization emerges to the movement(s) itself, spurred on by solidarity. The different theatres of the current global rebellion have captured these ideas with the imageries of slogans.

²⁶ IndustriaALL, 2012, "Unprecedented attack on workers' rights at ILO", 16, June, viewed 27, July, 2012, <<http://www.industrialunion.org/unprecedented-attack-on-workers-rights-at-ilo>>

²⁷ Choonara, J 2009, *Unravelling Capitalism: A Guide to Marxist Political Economy*, Bookmarks, London

In understanding how the social-historic contexts have been critical to the trajectory of the different mass movements' development, it is not so much the slogans in each region or country that matters, as the similarities and differences between these. The key slogans in different regions will be identified and these similarities and differences pointed out, towards forging a clearer picture.

Ash-shab yurid isqat an-nizam ("the people want to bring down the regime")

A plethora of slogans blossomed in the Arab Spring reflecting the resolution of the people and their anger against the ruling class. But probably none had the resonance of *ash-shab yurid isqat an-nizam!* It started as a battle cry in Tunisia and rang out loudly and clearly in; Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen, Sudan, Jordan and Palestine. And in Syria for example, the government's arrest of youths spraying this slogan as graffiti marked the ignition of insurrection. As the sweep and phases of the struggles expanded, it was modified where need be. For example in Egypt after the fall of Mubarak and the continued intransigence of the military top brass, it became "*The people want to bring down the field marshal*". In Jordan, where the tempo of the "Spring" was relatively low, the slogan similarly took on a less ambitious tone as "the people want to reform the system".

This imagery of the revolutionary upsurge of the awakening captures the *political* idea of repression by the regime, which *the people* want to bring down and can only bring down by bringing down the regime. Of course, anti-democratic ethos was rife and still is rife in the region, *on the part of its ruling class*. Unelected kings and sheikhs and more or less life presidents have been the norm. But earlier sit-tight leaders such as Nasser and even the earlier Gaddafi had been able to starve off such ruptures from the humdrum of normalcy not because they were more charismatic than those now torn apart by the whirlwind of the spring. It was largely that they had been able to buy-off mass anger, at an earlier age of growth and stability earlier in the second half of the 20th century. This was with an admixture of massive infrastructural development, welfarist social policy and authoritarian paternalism. With the global crisis, immiseration which had been on the rise through the neoliberal age went from bad to worse. The regimes became the immediate faces of the increasing misery of the working masses.

Democracia real ya! ("For real democracy now")

The *los indignados* movement in Spain is one of the most significant of the waves of popular resistance that has swept through the Western world in the course of the current crisis. Sweeping through over 80 cities and towns, in a matter of months it had drawn millions of youths (and rank and file working people) into the fray of radical resistance. These insisted that despite the institutions of actually existing democracy, "no one represents us". Consequently, they demanded and marched for "real democracy now". This is a clear pointer to the *un*-representativeness of parliamentary democracy for the immense majority of the population.

It is not only a negative imagery that this narrative presents ("no one represents us"). It equally declares that there could be an alternative democracy which is *real*, in that it is *participatory*, i.e. essentially *from below*. With this, the May 15 Movement which personified this "idea" declared the intrusion of not just itself but the mass of toilers onto the terrain of active politics by not just demanding, but within the spaces it created *implementing* such democracy from below in the form of general assemblies. This particular element of the *los*

indignados moment was an inspiration for the Occupy Wall Street's instant of popular resistance.

"We are the 99%"; "Occupy everything!"

Naom Chomsky expresses the view that "the occupy movement is an extremely exciting development. In fact, it's kind of spectacular. It's unprecedented" (Chomsky, 2012 p.24). While this assertion could be considered arguable, it does capture the intrusion which the movement made on behalf of the 99%, disrupting the 1%'s conspiracy of normalcy. "The imagery of the 99 percent and 1percent" has brought "things that were sort of known, but in the margins, hidden" into the fore of national discourse (Chomsky, *ibid* p.70). In doing this, occupy movement does not only make explicit the antagonism between "we" and "them", it also does not just point out that "we" are much more than "them", it equally fosters the idea of co-operation, solidarity and the power of politics from below.

The fluidity of the image of Occupy is presented by one of its enthusiastic proponents Pham Binh, as being "more than a movement, less than a revolution and long overdue". He then adds that "occupy isn't about ideology, it's about the 99%". But this imagery itself is the projection of an ideology, albeit a counter-hegemonic one. It rather tries to capture the broad array of scope of the population which it stands for.

"Our future is not for sale", "we cannot pay and we will not pay"

The major slogan of the Chilean students says it all; "our future is not for sale". At the heart of this struggle is the countering of neoliberal "reforms" in the education sector. The students did not only agitate against the reforms, they made a counter-proposition "Social Agreement for Chilean Education". Similarly, the British students had in 2010 agitated against a huge increment in fees, insisting that "we cannot pay and we will not pay". This makes it clear that on one hand the fees are not payable and on the other the students are resolved *not to pay*. The imagery of this slogan, *not being limited to the studentry*, or the leaders of tomorrow as youths are often described, made it to find resonance in other struggles beyond that against the increment in university fees.

The lines of congruence and diversion between these non-exhaustive examples can now be identified. In each instance, we find both a refutation and an assertion. But the contents of this while essentially the same, in being emancipatory, reflect the *immediate* object of mass anger. In the Middle East and North Africa, where revolts culminated in revolution, this object confronted is the institutional personification of the state. States in general are the summation of the coercive powers of the master class. They manifest as regimes, including even the liberal democratic regimes. But, the expanse of democratic rights won in more democratic regimes one hand provide spaces for the exercising of such freedoms as those of assembly, speech and organising. With the constriction of this in such authoritarian states as those in the MENA region, direct confrontation of the powers that be from below, in an era such as this, could not but pose the question of state power in all in its nakedness, which basically is what a revolution is.

It would be an illusion though to think that in those more democratic states, where there is more than the mere iota of citizenship for the working masses the fangs of dictatorship would not be bared when push got to shove. Protesters were assaulted in various ways and manners in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, etc, as the militancy of the revolts became more salient. In Quebec, a law was hurriedly enacted to hold down the protest movement against increase in tuition fees.

This brings us to yet another convergence, even if with different hues. The mass in rising confronted and broke the laws of the master class. In Egypt, the martial law was defied and made redundant. The students in Quebec, marched in utter contempt of the then Law 78. The Occupy movement witnessed ultra-left expressions of such political disobedience with the activities of the black bloc, while in the United Kingdom; spontaneous riots expressed deeper derision for the system and its laws.

Forms, organisation(s) and trajectory of mass upsurge

Every upsurge of resistance at some point in time arrives at the crossroads where, like the Maoist *La Cause du Peuple* in 1969, it sees the need for “a new form of organization...”²⁸ More often than not; these “new forms” of struggle are actually adaptations of time-tested strategies and tactics. The differences such adaptations bring to bear provide an insight into the changes between different eras of crises and revolts, and particularly, the changes that have taken place in between these. The forms of the movement, as a whole, equally show the inter-play of the influences of classes, organisations and ideas within it. The actual form of such movement as a whole might not exactly reflect its contents and the narratives of these. Revolutions and radical reforms, which basically are the goals of popular resistance in moments such as this, become movements of the people, in a sense, inter-class alliances of the oppressed masses and *even sections or elements of the master class*. The decisive component of such “historic blocs” however, is the working class. This is not some metaphysical “belief” in that class, as not a few would argue, but because of the centrality of workers to the system and consequently their being key to bringing it to its knees, which is the worst blow, the elite could suffer.

There have been different forms which resistances have taken in the ongoing global rebellion. These have included the inter-play of diverse organisations, as well as the dominance of one form or the other, and led along the pathways of different trajectories. Basically, these have included: mass strikes; street demonstrations/procession and occupations. These trajectories have led to political revolutions, (offers of) reforms and electoral Left turns. They have equally met with the crackdown of reaction by the state and the mellowing of the working masses self-activity by the institutionalised platforms of the mediation between the working class and the master class, particularly the trade bureaucracy. Mass strikes and the Occupy/Squares Movement are considered as cases here, due to the limitations of space.

Mass strikes and street demonstrations; the new and the old

Mass strikes have been known as the most powerful weapon of the working class (Luxembourg 1906). These could be and have in the current period included strikes at enterprise and sectoral levels, as well as general strikes at local and national levels. There was even for the first time, mass mobilisation for a pan-European general strike for September 29, 2010. Eventually though, it was only in Spain that a strike held that day. Every mass strike is political, because it poses the question of power, even if at a localised level. The mass strikes called by trade unions at this conjuncture have been mainly on economic issues such as pensions, retirement age, job cuts and so on and so forth. They have had hitherto unprecedented levels of compliance by workers in many countries. But they have as well integrated broader demands and drawn in several other sections of the general populace such as students, small farmers and the urban poor, making them more and more political,

²⁸ *La Cause du Peuple* #3 New Series, February 1969, viewed 8 August, 2012, < <http://www.marxists.org/history/france/post-1968/gauche-proletarienne/cause-03-1969.htm> >

challenging the present order, even where they do not demand a holistic transcendence of it. This is because the general crisis of capitalism which has thrown up the economic issues of concern to the workers is such that the 99% is sucked into the abyss of being made to pay for the ineptitude of the system and the greed of its beneficiaries, the 1%. Thus, the strikes have not just been about downing tools. They have involved demonstrations and processions of workers and other aggrieved citizens.

There are arguably new tactics of mass strikes, which have unfolded in the course of the last few years. These have included workers marching to “obstruct” workers in non-unionised firms, who were then “forced” to be part of the strike. “But perhaps the most novel of (these) tactics” was that of the “rolling strikes”, in France, during the October 2010 general strike. To ensure that morale was kept up while minimizing the backlash of “no work, no pay” laws “at some point in time, some workers were allowed to work for some days while others were on strike, after which they would down their tools and some of those on strike days earlier would go temporarily back to work”²⁹. The need for such new tactic reflects the heightened levels of job and income insecurity that the neoliberal regime has entrenched with its flexibilization of labour, over the last thirty years.

It is also noteworthy to point out that while CNN, Al-Jazeera and most other mainstream mass media have concentrated on the Squares and the streets, mass strikes were crucial in forcing the revolutionary situation in Tunisia and Egypt to the end game for Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak respectively. These of course were borne out of intense labour activism, *in defiance of the law*, for years as neoliberal policies had made life harder for the working class. Naom Chomsky identifies this as a major difference between the Egyptian Revolution and the Occupy movement, thus:

In fact, one striking difference between the Egyptian and Tunisian uprisings and the Occupy movements is that, in the North African case, the labour movement was right at the centre of it. And in fact, there is a very close correlation between such successes as there have been in the Middle East and North Africa and the labor militancy there over the years...as soon as the labour movement became integrated into the April 6 movement-the Tahrir Square movement-it became a really significant and powerful force.³⁰

Mass strikes have rocked sub-Saharan Africa as well in different ways in the present historic moment. The two main instances have been in the two largest economies within the region, Nigeria and South Africa. In Nigeria, where since 2000 General Strikes have always been accompanied with “mass protests”, the 8-day General Strike which became the backbone for two weeks of revolt in January 2012 brought the economy to its knees with an estimated loss of \$300bn. The mass protests that swept the country were equally unprecedented, sweeping across over 50 cities and towns. While the short lived uprising started as a revolt against the 140% increase in fuel pump price, by the time it ended, demands for regime change was in the air. The trade unions were of the view that this was beyond their mandate and, in a manner many in the civil society movement, *and on the streets*, found questionable, suspended the general strike.

²⁹ Aye, B 2012, *Era of Crises and Revolts*, Solaf Publishers, Ibadan p.93

³⁰ Chomsky, N 2012, *Occupy*, Penguin Books, London, pp. 58-9

Waves of mass strikes have hit South Africa since the early years of the current period. These started with the public services between 2008 and 2010. By 2011, the mining sector which had been relatively quiet since 2005 became the major theatre for such workers' upheavals. Starting with official strikes in the coal mines and then the gold mines, by 2012, these had led to wild cat strikes in the platinum mines, culminating in the Marikana massacre. These strikes have largely been for increase in wages, but as Andrew England points out they also reflect the fact that "There has also been mounting frustration with the level of poverty and gaping inequalities in South Africa, 17 years after the end of apartheid."³¹ The conjuncture of global crises here, *as with in other countries*, merges with the deeper lasting contradictions, which in a systemic sense, is part of the threads that wove the fabric of the crisis in the first place. South Africa's minerals-energy complex has been the central plank for the country's integration into the neoliberal order driven by global financialisation over the past 17 years of the post-apartheid regime. The mining sector represents the pillar as well as the major fault lines of capitalist development in the country.

Occupy and the Squares movement

Tahrir Square marked a new beginning in so many ways. The occupied square became the focal point of a power parallel to that of the status quo. The triumph of the January 25 revolution in Egypt which the Square personified became a tonic for mass protest of working people and youths across the world, which had been unfurling since the beginning of the global crisis. As the occupation in Cairo was on, over ten thousand protesters camped at the Capitol in Wisconsin against proposed anti-union legislation by Governor Scott Walker. This later became the seed for what would be the *We are One* (WR1), movement in the United States. The WR1 movement, which rested on traditional street demonstrations and processions, petered out within a few months without making much impact. But the *Occupy* form of resistance which commenced on September 17, 2011, in New York became what many see as a new form of mass protest. It was inspired by the Egyptian revolution, the encampments of squares and parks in Spain by the *los indignados* and the "Movement of the Squares" in Greece against continued austerity measures.

Before looking closely at the Occupy Movement which seems to have captured global imagination the more, largely due to its unexpected rise in the United States, it would be pertinent to point out what could be considered as the points of divergence of encampments movement in Greece and Spain from the Occupy Wall Street movement.

In Greece, the Squares Movement had a greater synergy with working class struggles than either Spain or the US. The roots of this could be traced to the traditions of alternative politics and ideas within the class in that country compared to the other³². There were no less than 17 general strikes in the last two years, in response to the austerity measures whip, which Greece was on the frontline of collecting from the IMF, EU & ECB. Syntagma (Constitution) Square which was the epicentre of the "Movement of the Squares" integrated this mass movement from the factories as strikers' processions had there as their take-off or end points. It is also instructive that while the indignant youths in Greece might have had distaste for what they could consider mainstream politics, radical parties such as the KOE, SEK & Synaspismos and coalitions-as-parties such as SYRIZA, & ANTARSYA were part of the Movement of

³¹ England, A 2011, "S African gold miners strike" 28, July, viewed September 3, 2012, < <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/ca05686e-b931-11e0-b6bb-00144feabdc0.html#axzz26A9D1RPo>>

³² A striking example of this is that far Left groups have closer ties with the trade unlike the situation in Spain and the US, where the "centrist" Socialist Party and the liberal Democrats are home for trade union leaderships

Squares, winning the confidence of mass and paving the way for a Leftward electoral turn in May/June 2012.

In Spain, there was greater disillusionment with partisan politics. The *los indignados* actually called for boycott of parliamentary elections in 2011. This could have contributed to the electoral loss of the unions-backed, social-liberalist Socialist Party, and the subsequent return of the conservative People's Party. The encampments in Spain more than anywhere else did try to coalesce, physically. While Puerta del Sol in Madrid, was its centre at the onset in May 2011, by "July there was the Indignant People's March from all parts of the country to Madrid where a new camp was set up at Paseo del Prado" (Aye, *Op cit* p. 101). At this new camp, *The Book of the People* was compiled for presentation to parliament. The Spanish indignant were also central to the "International March on Brussels", where as part of the Global Day of Rage called by Occupy Wall Street on October 15 an alternative vision of the way out of the crisis was presented the European parliament.

October 15 was the landmark point at which "occupy" in its most specific-idea form became, in a sense, generalised. The phenomenon of "Occupy" basically boils down to the establishment of popular assemblies, within encampments. This "new" form is not exactly as *new* as it seems. From the earlier sections of this paper, we find that there in the 1930s we had a wave of factories "occupation" in the United States, described as "sit-in" strikes, in that period. In the wave of revolt of 1968, factories were equally occupied in France for example, even while became the lodestone of "occupation". The shift of the locus of occupy from factories to campuses and now parks reflect a number of economic, social, ideological and demographic pressures stemming from the changing nature of capitalist re-production globally and particularly in the Western countries. The loss of faith in the trade unions and "vanguard" organisations reflected in the rise of situationism in the 1968 period and autonomism in the current period³³.

In looking at form, the typical "Occupy" encampment had General Assemblies enthroning, *participatory democracy* and propagating some form of *immediate democracy*, or the other. These worked through working committees which were recallable and discussions in them were open to all with the use of progressive tacks of would-be contributors to discussions, or the drawing of lots as in Athens. It is pertinent to point out that "The movement was not limited to its encampments. There were mobilisation in the streets which the state attacked spraying pepper/tear gas, hitting protesters with truncheons and arresting scores in several cities including New York and Auckland" (Aye, *Op cit* p.79). The movement spread beyond the New York and the shores of the United States, and with this the "idea" of occupy also expanded both within and outside its founding sites to become an *empty signifier*. In this sense, "it" became much more than occupied encampments to becoming "occupy everything", by a representative slice of the 99%.

While the occupy movement in its concrete form has become dissipated, not the least due to concerted attacks by the powers that be, it continues to inspire the still unfolding mass movements and angst against the 1% and the world it has moulded in its own image.

³³ There are several ways, in this author's views in which the *los indignados/Occupy movement*, seems a déjà vu of the "Enragés" and "Occupation Movement" of 1968 France. See Viénet, R 1968/92 *Enragés and Situationists in the Occupations Movement*, Autonomedia, New York, viewed September 11, 2012 < <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/enrages.html> >

In lieu of conclusion: problems and prospects

This essay has tried to put in perspective the dynamics between (global) crises and popular resistance with a view to showing how social, economic and political pressures have impacted on the trajectory, forms and ideas of the mass movements of popular resistance. It would be pertinent in concluding to summarily draw out possible problems and prospects that lie ahead for the movement as a whole.

The hegemony of the master class has been fractured but lies far from being shattered. On one hand, decades of its ideology have stunted revolutionary ideation in the popular milieu. On the other hand, the leaderships of traditional mass organisations such as trade unions and the formerly social-democratic reformist parties have to different degrees incorporated into the system, seeing no future beyond capitalism. But without a clarity of post-capitalist aims, the movement as a whole cannot but be stuck in the realms of the limited possibilities of reforms. In Europe, the electoral Left turn witnessed in France and particularly Greece for example represent the rise of radical *reformism*, which fills the void of disdain for the traditional reformist parties on one hand and the limited horizons of what “change” amounts to, in the masses, at this juncture³⁴.

Human beings are generally conservative. Revolutions break out not because the mass start out as being revolutionary, but because in the cause of resistance the strategy of reforming the system makes itself clear as being unworkable and the possibilities of more fundamental changes become more probable. Such confidence would rise from developments both within different countries and across countries. Indeed, the present period has confirmed the international character of revolutionary waves. Tunisia made the possible appear probable to Egyptians and the Egyptian revolution opened new vistas of possibilities to an ever expanding groundswell of global resistance.

The threat of a rising Rightwing is however not something to be discountenanced as a political pressure in the moment ahead. But it is unlikely that such forces would be able to win the necessary following that fascism won with the defeat of revolutionary alternatives in the 1930s Europe, both from within (the tactics of the Popular Front) and without (crushing by the state). The master class has however shown that it would not blink about taking off its democratic toga if pushed to the wall and the possibilities of its getting away with it can be gleaned.

There is however the possibility of some new “new deal” emerging as an appeasement to rising resistance. The immediate future seems bleak for capital accumulation and sharper crisis is more likely to widen the opened Pandora’s Box of rebellion. Intra-elite class contestation will most likely sharpen. But it is not likely that the carrot would be favoured over the stick in the immediate instance going by the gale of austerity measures and continued obeisance to the altar of neoliberalism even as its prophecy proves to be an utter failure.

Meanwhile, the confidence won by the rising masses is unlikely to be quelled in a hurry, not the least with the working and unemployed youths. Interlinking of activists, networks and organisations in the past few years would also most likely serve as springboards for the emergence of new, more radical platforms and the renaissance of more traditional Left forces.

³⁴ Callinicos, A 20012, “The second coming of the radical left”, *International Socialism*, Issue 135, Summer, viewed 12, September 2012, <<http://isj.org.uk/index.php?id=819&issue=135>>

Lessons have been learnt from the past and are being learnt from the present by the mass movements of the working people fighting against being made to bear the brunt of an “economic recovery”, which does not seem in sight. In learning from practice, the toiling 99% of this world is re-making its history. It is unlikely that transformations which will lead to transition from capitalism would be won in this instance. But the foundations are being laid for grasping a post-capitalist world, as a possibility, in the foreseeable future.

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