



2011: from indignation to hope

ICC statement on the social movements of 2011

This is an international statement that tries to draw a provisional balance sheet of the social movements of 2011 in order to contribute to a wider debate about their significance

The two most important events in 2011 were the globe crisis of capitalism, and the social movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Spain, Greece, Israel, Chile, the USA, Britain...

Indignation has taken on an international dimension

The consequences of the capitalist crisis have been very hard for the immense majority of the world's population: deteriorating living conditions, long-term unemployment lasting years, precarious work making it impossible to have even a minimum of stability, extreme poverty and hunger...

Millions of people are concerned about the disappearance of the possibility of having a stable and normal life and the lack of a future for their children. This has led to a profound indignation, attempts to break out of passivity by taking to the streets and squares, to discussions about the causes of a crisis which in its present phase has lasted 5 years.

This anger has been exacerbated by the arrogance, greed and indifference shown towards the suffering of the majority by the bankers, politicians and other representatives of the capitalist class. The same goes for the powerlessness of governments faced with such grave problems: their measures have only increased poverty and unemployment without bringing any solution.

This movement of indignation has spread internationally: to Spain, where the then Socialist government imposed one of the first and most draconian austerity plans; to Greece, the symbol of the crisis of sovereign debt; to the United States, the temple of world capitalism; to Egypt and Israel, focus of one of the worst and most entrenched imperialist conflicts, the Middle East.

The awareness that this is an international movement began to develop despite the destructive weight of nationalism, as seen in the presence of national flags in the demonstrations in Greece, Egypt or the USA. In Spain solidarity with the workers of Greece was expressed by slogans such as "*Athens resists, Madrid rises up*". The Oakland strikers (USA, November, 2011) said "*Solidarity with the occupation movement world wide*". In Egypt it was agreed in the Cairo Declaration to support the movement in the United States. In Israel they shouted "*Netanyahu, Mubarak, El Assad are the same*" and contacts were made with Palestinian workers.

These movements have passed their high points and although there are new struggles (Spain, Greece, Mexico) many are asking: what did this wave of indignation achieve? Have we gained anything?

Take to the streets! The common slogan of these movements

It is more than 30 years since we have seen such multitudes occupy the streets and squares in order to struggle for their own interests despite the illusions and confusions that have affected them.

These people, the workers, the exploited who have been presented as failures, idlers, incapable of taking the initiative or doing anything in common, have been able to unite, to share initiatives and to break out of the crippling passivity to which the daily normality of this system condemns them.

The principle of developing confidence in each others' capacity, of discovering the strength of the collective action of the masses, has been a morale booster. The social scene has changed. The monopoly of public life by politicians, experts and 'great men' has been put into question by the anonymous masses who have wanted to be heard.

Having said all this, we are only at a fragile beginning. The illusions, confusions, inevitable mood swings of the protesters; the repression handed out by the capitalist state and the dangerous diversions imposed its forces of containment (the left parties and trade unions) have led to retreats and bitter defeats. It is a question of a long and difficult road, strewn with obstacles and where there is no guarantee of victory: that said the very act of starting to walk this road is the first victory.

The heart of the movement: the assemblies

The masses involved in these movements have not limited themselves to passively shouting their displeasure. They have actively participated in organising assemblies. The mass assemblies have concretised the slogan of the First International (1864) "*The emancipation of the working class is the work of the workers themselves or it is nothing*". This is the continuation of the tradition of the workers' movement stretching back to the Paris Commune, and to Russia in 1905 and 1917, where it took an ever higher form, continued in Germany 1918, Hungary 1919 and 1956, Poland 1980. General assemblies and workers' councils are the genuine form of the struggle of the proletarian struggle and the nucleus of a new form of society.

Assemblies which aim to massively unite ourselves point the way towards breaking the chains of wage slavery, of atomisation, "everyone for themselves", imprisonment in the ghetto of a sector or a social category.

Assemblies in order to think, to discuss and decide together, to make ourselves collectively responsible for what is decided, by participating together both in the making of decisions and their implementation.

Assemblies in order to build mutual confidence, general empathy, solidarity, which are not only indispensable for taking the struggle forward but can also serve as the pillars of a future society free of class and exploitation.

2011 has seen an explosion of real solidarity that has nothing to do with the hypocritical and self-serving "solidarity" that the ruling class preaches about. The demonstrations in Madrid called for the freeing of those who have been arrested or have stopped the police detaining immigrants; there have been massive actions against evictions in Spain, Greece and the United States; in Oakland "*The strike Assembly has agreed to send pickets or to occupy any company or school that punishes employees or students in any way for taking part in the General Strike of the 2nd November*". Vivid but still episodic moments have happened, when everyone can feel protected and defended by those around them. All of which starkly contrasted with what is "normal" in this society with its anguished sense of hopelessness and vulnerability.

The light for the future: the culture of debate

The consciousness needed for millions of workers to transform the world is not gained through being handed down by the ruling class or through the clever slogans of enlightened leaders. It is the fruit of an experience of struggle accompanied and guided by debate on a massive scale, by discussions which take into account the past but which are always focused on the future, since as a banner said in Spain "*There is not future without revolution*".

The culture of debate, that is, open discussion based on mutual respect and active listening, has begun to spring up not only in the assemblies but around them: mobile libraries have been organised, as well as countless meetings for discussion and exchange of ideas... A vast intellectual activity has been carried out with very limited means, improvised in the streets and squares. And, as with the assemblies this has reanimated a past experience of the workers' movement "*The thirst for education, so long held back, was concerted by the revolution into a true delirium. During the first six months, tons of literature, whether on handcarts or wagons poured forth from the Smolny Institute each day, Russia insatiably absorbed it, like hot sand absorbs water. This was not pulp novels, falsified history, diluted religion or cheap fiction that corrupts, but economic and social theories, philosophy, the works of Tolstoy, Gogol, Gorky*". Confronted with this society's culture that is based on the struggle for "*models of success*" which can only be a fount of millions of failures, the alienating and false stereotypes hammered home by the dominant ideology and its media, thousands of people began to look for an authentic popular culture, making it for themselves, trying to animate their own critical and independent criteria. The crisis and its causes, the role of the banks etc, have been exhaustively discussed. There has been discussion of revolution, although with much confusion; there has been talk of democracy and dictatorship, synthesised in these two complementary slogans "*they call it democracy and it is not*" and "*it is a dictatorship but unseen*".

The proletariat is the key to the future

If all of this makes 2011 the year of the beginning of hope, we have viewed these movements with a discerning and critical eye, seeing their limitations and weaknesses which are still immense. If there is a growing number of people in the world who are convinced that capitalism is an obsolete system, that "*in order for humanity to survive, capitalism must be killed*" there is also a tendency to reduce capitalism to a handful of "bad guys" (unscrupulous financiers, ruthless dictators) when it is really a complex network of social relations that have to be attacked in their totality and not dissipated into a preoccupation with its many surface expressions (finance, speculation, the corruption of political-economic powers).

While it is more than justified to reject the violence that capitalism has exuded from every pore (repression, terror and terrorism, moral barbarity), this system will however not be abolished by mere passive and citizen pressure. The minority class will not voluntarily abandon power and it will take cover in its state with its democratic legitimacy through elections every 4 or 5 years; through parties who promise what they can never do and do what they didn't promise; and through unions that mobilise in order to demobilise and end up signing up to all that the ruling class puts on the table. Only a massive, tenacious and stubborn struggle

will give the exploited the necessary strength to destroy the state and its means of repression and to make real the oft repeated shout in Spain "*All power to the assemblies*".

Although the slogan of "*we are the 99% against the 1%*", which was so popular in the occupation movement in the United States, reveals the beginnings of an understanding of the bloody class divisions that affect us, the majority of participants in these protests saw themselves as "active citizens" who want to be recognized within a society of "free and equal citizens".

However, society is divided into classes: a capitalist class that has everything and produces nothing, and an exploited class -the proletariat- that produces everything but has less and less. The driving force of social evolution is not the democratic game of the "decision of a majority of citizens" (this game is nothing more than a masquerade which covers up and legitimises the dictatorship of the ruling class) but the class struggle.

The social movement needs to join up with the struggle of the principle exploited class -the proletariat- who collectively produce the main riches and ensure the functioning of social life: factories, hospitals, schools, universities, offices, ports, construction, post offices. In some of the movements in 2011 we began to see its strength, above all in the wave of strikes that exploded in Egypt and which finally forced Mubarak to resign. In Oakland (California) the "occupiers" called a general strike, going to the port and gaining the active support of the dockers and lorry drivers. In London striking electricians and the Saint Paul's occupiers carried out common actions. In Spain certain striking sectors have tended to unite with the assemblies in the squares.

There is no opposition between the class struggle of the modern proletariat and the profound needs of the social layers exploited by capitalist oppression. The struggle of the proletariat is not an egotistical or specific movement but the basis for the "*independent movement of the immense majority to the benefit of the immense majority*" (The Communist Manifesto).

The present movements would benefit from critically reviewing the experience of two centuries of proletarian struggle and attempts at social liberation. The road is long and fraught with enormous obstacles, which calls to mind the oft repeated slogan in Spain "*It is not that we are going slowly, it is that we are going far*". Start the most widespread possible discussion, without any restriction or discouragement, in order to consciously prepare new movements which could make it clear that capitalism can indeed be replaced by another society.

International Communist Current 12.03.11

See: The economic crisis is not a never-ending story, <http://en.internationalism.org/internationalreview/201203/4744/editorial-economic-crisis-not-never-ending-story>. Along with the global crisis of the system, the serious incident at the Fukushima nuclear power station -Japan- shows us the enormous dangers that humanity is facing.

It is not without significance that *Time Magazine* made The Protester as its "Man of the Year". See http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2101745_2102132_2102373,00.html.

John Reed: 10 days that shock the world. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/reed/1919/10days/10days/ch1.htm>