

THE FUSION POLITICS RESPONSE TO 21ST CENTURY IMPERIALISM: FROM ARAB SPRING TO MORAL MONDAYS

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Introduction

The deepening 21st century crises of capitalism—from growing economic impoverishment to neo-fascism to literal destruction of planet earth—demand movements and visions of change unparalleled in quantities and qualities of response. Anti-capitalist responses to these crises range from helplessness to spontaneous activism. Often political reactions ignore the history and context of the crises and the movements that have come before that have planted the seeds of fundamental social change. This paper will survey movements of social change in the era of neoliberal globalization suggesting both the breadth of such movements and the historical context from which they came. The tasks for today still require an analysis of the nature of existing systems and responses, visions of desirable alternatives, and contextualized discussions of moving from here to there. “Moving Beyond Capitalism” requires such a grounding of the future in the past and the present.

21st Century Imperialism: Post-Cold War Perspectives on Global Political Economy

The collapse of the Soviet Union transformed world affairs, scholarly analyses of international relations, punditry, and rationales for imperial foreign policies. A new buzzword became part of political discourse to describe the international system: “globalization.” Almost immediately a large literature was generated suggesting that the world had changed. Globalization was replacing the system of often hostile nation-states that had characterized the world since the sixteenth century.¹

While interpretations of globalization varied, the common conception of the term suggested that a process of relations was occurring in which interactions between nations, business and financial organizations, groups, and peoples had become so frequent and intense that they were creating one global society.² Major globalizing institutions included multinational corporations, especially the 200 largest global corporations with production, distribution, and decision-making facilities in many countries, and international financial institutions engaged in speculative activities all across the globe. At the cultural level a handful of media conglomerates produced a large percentage of the cultural products, images, artistic endeavors, and print and electronic information that the world consumed. Finally, international institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the newly created World Trade Organization brought international influence to bear on states that resisted the globalization process.

In conjunction with the collapse of socialism on the world stage, apologists for globalization celebrated it as transformative, leading to a new world order.³ With increasing interaction, it was claimed, old inter-state conflicts would be reduced in part because the salience of states was declining. Also, globalization was bringing people together with shared economic endeavors, social values, and culture. The process of global integration would over time lead to the creation of truly global institutions and society. And, some commentators suggested that globalization was an inevitable byproduct of a technological revolution.

Another set of theorists, global dialecticians,⁴ responded to the new theorizing by reminding people that globalization was not new. In fact, they argued, globalization was a characteristic feature of capitalism as a mode of production. Marx, in *The Communist Manifesto*, recognized that capitalists sought markets, cheap labor and natural resources all across the globe. Having reminded readers of the historic nature of the globalization process, the global dialecticians suggested that particular features of contemporary history made the globalization process more likely; the United States as the last remaining superpower and the transformation of communications via the internet for example. For the dialecticians, the process of globalization was new and old at the same time. It had its roots in the rise of capitalism out of feudalism and it was transformed by economic, political, military, and technological changes that had occurred over the last fifty years.

Importantly for global dialecticians, “globalization” did not just happen. As a process globalization was encouraged by interests and institutionalized in policies promoted by the largest capitalist countries in the world. These policies were known everywhere (but the United States) as “neoliberal” policies. The name came from the historical labeling of classical political economy approaches that described and defended market, capitalist economies.

The theoretical foundation of “classical liberalism” in the economic sphere was linked to the writings of Adam Smith. The emphasis in Smith’s theoretical paradigm as adopted by contemporary policy makers was the market, a venue for the buying and selling of commodities. Through this mythical market place, societies experienced individual freedom and economic development. Out of the self-interested conduct of “rational actors,” the entire economic system survived, grew, and provided for the needs of most participants.

Politically, “liberalism” referred to the market place of political discourse and advocacy among diverse groups, each advocating public policies that met their interests. Political liberalism had its roots in philosophers such as John Locke, U.S. constitutional writer James Madison, French commentator on the United States Alexis De Tocqueville, and modern political scientists such as Robert Dahl, Nelson Polsby, and Theodore Lowi. Markets maximized individual and group behavior in the economic sphere and interest groups in the political sphere. That kind of liberalism was not the “big government” liberalism that talk show hosts targeted for constant rebuke. For analysts worldwide “neo” referred to the contemporary variant of the classical theories of Smith, Locke, and their compatriots.

Neoliberalism as it is understood in world affairs today constitutes a set of economic policies that governments adopt (or are forced to adopt) that promote globalization. These policies call for radically reduced government involvement in the economy and increased reliance on the global market place. Neoliberal policies have been imposed on most countries by international institutions that serve the interests of capitalist states and global capitalist interests, especially financial institutions and multinational corporations.⁵

Neoliberal international institutions that have the political and economic leverage to impose neoliberal policies on most countries include the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the G8 countries (the largest capitalist countries), regional international organizations and trade regimes, and private banks and corporations. Neoliberal policies are imposed by one or more of these institutions on vulnerable countries, essentially to promote global penetration of their economies; thus expanding globalization.

Of special relevance to the imposition of neoliberal globalization was the increased debt that nations began to incur in the 1970s. As oil prices spiked--due initially to Middle East crises—and banks accumulated huge quantities of profit from oil sales, bankers needed to put the surplus profits to use. Nations were encouraged and/or forced to accumulate dramatically increased debt. Countries began to import more oil than their exported goods earned. They had to borrow money to continue their development programs. They then found themselves at the door steps of international financial institutions and borrowing began. In exchange for receiving loans debtor countries were required to radically transform their economic programs. They were obliged to adopt neoliberal economic policies that spurred the process of globalization.

Neoliberal economic policies (sometimes referred to as policies of “austerity”) included the following. First, indebted nations were obliged to develop domestic policies that promoted “economic stabilization,” which meant cutting government spending. Countries must shift from economies based on state/market collaboration to market driven economies, whatever the short-term costs to those citizens who had depended on public services for basic safety nets.

Second, neoliberal policies required “economic restructuring.” Two key elements of restructuring included the privatization of public institutions. Many countries ran public institutions that provided services to their citizens: from health delivery, transportation, food subsidies, to public ownership of key natural resources. International financiers demanded that recipients of debt privatize their public institutions. From the time that the President of Mexico declared his country’s bankruptcy in 1982 until the 1990s, 800 of some 1,100 state-owned enterprises in that country were privatized. Privatization became a global elite mantra, spreading even to core capitalist countries. The other element of restructuring was deregulation, the demand that government efforts to regulate the way the private sector operated needed to be eliminated. Regulations, it was claimed, impaired the “magic of the marketplace.”

Third, countries receiving loans from international institutions were required to shift their economies from producing goods and services for domestic consumption to the development of exports. Countries were obliged to shift from diversification, often advocated in the 1960s, to the concentration on the production of a handful of commodities for sale on the world market. The goal was to earn scarce foreign exchange to pay back bankers and to channel foreign earnings into investments at home.

In the process countries, such as Mexico, which produced products, food for its people for example shifted to produce small numbers of goods for which there was international demand. The Mexican economy which enjoyed food self-sufficiency, with large percentages of the food produced by small farmers on individual plots of land and in cooperatives, began to produce broccoli, flowers, strawberries and other crops for sale in United States markets. The land was transformed into “factories in the fields” owned by huge agricultural corporations, while Mexico was forced to import corn for tortillas. From the 1970s to the present the neoliberal economic programs increased global penetration of local economies and reduced the capacity of these local economies to remain sovereign and self-sustaining.

Analysts of neoliberal globalization disagreed on its impacts. Globalization celebrants argued that the neoliberal policies in conjunction with the new technology would transform the world from underdevelopment to development and from domestic and international strife to harmony.

Critics of neoliberal globalization, largely the followers of theories of imperialism and dependency saw growing gaps between the rich and poor between countries and within countries directly attributable to the new policies. They saw a vast transfer of jobs from the industrial capitalist countries to poor countries where wages were lower and worker rights weaker. Dictatorial and class-divided societies facilitated foreign capital penetration at the expense of peripheral peoples. The economic divisions were exacerbated by cataclysmic environmental changes. And, since the end of the Cold War the frequency and magnitude of violence and war increased rather than decreased.

As to foreign policy, the “last remaining superpower,” as the United States was conceptualized, articulated a pro-active approach to world affairs rather than an “anti-communist” approach; that is the promotion of “market democracies.”

The State in the Era of Neoliberal Globalization

Among the critics of neoliberal globalization a significant debate emerged. Some writers argued that the state system still anchored, induced, and maintained neoliberal globalization. The United States remained the last remaining superpower but it worked in alliance with the other leading capitalist powers. Leaders of the G7 countries (the United States, Great Britain, Canada, France, Italy, Germany, and Japan) met annually to deliberate on the state of the world. After the fall of Soviet socialism, Russia was admitted to the select circle.

The United States took the lead economically, politically, and militarily in guiding global society in partnership with the other seven. In addition, each country pursued its own individual interests as well and all maintained alliances with smaller and weaker regimes. The first Gulf War, for example, was carried out under U.S. direction but with the support of some thirty countries, big and small.

Some theorists argued, from their understanding of the continued application of military force and the power the G7 held over international economic institutions that states still mattered. It was the state that maintained the force and regulated economic activities in world affairs. Ruling class control of the instrumentalities of the state still determined how successful global capitalism would be in the twenty-first century. States still mattered.

Other theorists suggested that globalization and the concentration of economic power was creating a transnational ruling class that dominated the economic and political life of the global political economy.⁶ They pointed to the transnational character of corporations, with their manufacturing facilities everywhere and headquarters in a variety of countries. Financial speculation, which defined the twenty-first century international system, occurred instantaneously all across the globe. The last barriers to transnational class rule came down with so-called “free trade” agreements such as the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the new world trade regime, the World Trade Organization (WTO). The exercise of state and local sovereignty became a violation of international agreements.

The transnational ruling class included the biggest, most powerful capitalists in the world who worked in conjunction with junior partners in weaker countries. Years ago, peace researcher Helge Hveem referred to an incipient “global dominance system” that was stratified from the apex of wealth and power to the very poor and oppressed. Those at the base of the diamond-shaped global society may have the power to make local decisions but lack the capacity to affect the global political economy. That capacity resides, he said, at the top. In this schema, the salience of nation-states was dramatically reduced. The transnational ruling class ruled.

While CEOs of corporations and banks, chairs of international organizations, presidents of the most prestigious universities, and an occasional trade union leader continued to have enormous latitude to direct international policy in the new century, they continued to rely on the instrumentalities of the state to maintain stability in the face of growing opposition. The new century was fraught with war and high and low tech military interventions. And increasingly as economic crisis imposed itself on the global economy, ruling classes in various countries disagreed on the direction of future policy. And finally, with the rise of resistance from the Global South and within countries from rebellious workers, youth, and indigenous peoples, the state assumed renewed importance as an instrumentality of repression. The state, it seemed, was almost as relevant in the era of neoliberal globalization as before.

The Transformation of the Relations of Production

The transformation from Socialist or heterodox policies in the Global South to neo-liberalism, while not stimulating incorporation into the global economy and development as promised, did facilitate changing work patterns. Neo-liberal policies, including privatization and shifting production from domestic consumption to exports, radically transformed rural work in many countries of the Global South.

Governmental pressures undermined traditional patterns of agriculture including land ownership and production processes. Land holdings were consolidated under the control of foreign or wealthy domestic investors. More productive and larger agricultural units began to produce commodities for sale in rich overseas markets. Peasant farmers who in the past produced food stuffs for domestic consumption were replaced by agricultural workers and new technologies to produce winter vegetables and flowers for foreign customers. Countries which had produced enough food for their own people became net importers of food products. In addition, agricultural subsidies characteristic of the United States and countries of the European Union made it all but impossible for poor farmers to compete with the cheap imported food.

As a result of the new agriculture, and farmers forced off their land, migration to urban centers magnified, as more and more rural dwellers sought work. Cities in the Global South doubled or tripled in size, becoming surrounded by make-shift dwellings of people looking for work. Some rural migrants were able to find work in the new export-processing zones or sweat shop industries rising in some countries of the Global South. The pool of cheap labor in the Global South, replenished by the transformation of agriculture, provided an attractive opportunity for textile, electronics, and other manufacturing employment, once basic to the manufacturing economies of the industrialized countries. The globalization of production occurred in tandem with the imposition of neo-liberal economic policies, and the transformation of agriculture.

These changes were reflected in changing employment/unemployment rates and the kind of work that became available in the Global South. From 1950 to 1990, there was a decline by almost 1/3 of those of working age in the world engaged in agriculture. The percentage of the world work force in agriculture in 1990 was down to 49%, from 67% in 1950 (In Latin America and the Caribbean the decline from 1950 to 1990 was from 54% to 25% in agriculture).

In addition, the growth in industrial employment between 1950 and 1990 was modest, not commensurate with the declining agricultural employment. (In Latin America, the decline in agriculture was more dramatic than the world figures while the increase in industrial employment was not greater than the world figures). International Labor Organization (ILO) data suggested that in the world at large “the share of employment in manufacturing declined between 1990 and 2001 in all economies for which data are available...” (ILO, 21 Nov. 2005).

Further, the world data (and the data for Latin America) indicated that the major sectoral growth in employment has been in the service sector. Increases in service sector employment ranged

from 8% to 16% among countries in different economic strata. The largest growth in the service sector occurred in the lower-middle income countries.

Finally, the most significant shift in employment throughout the world, particularly in the Global South, has been from the formal economy (agriculture, industry, and service) to the informal economy. Most workers in this growing sector of the work force are driven by a desperate need to provide the rudiments of life. Consequently, they are willing to do virtually anything to earn money. This may involve lucrative small street market sales, or low wage home work (from house cleaning to garment assembly), or prostitution, or drug dealing. Work in the informal economy is not regulated. Workers enjoy no work place health and safety protections. They receive no health or retirement benefits. And, of negative consequence to the national government, they pay no taxes.

In a report produced by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, “The Inequality Predicament,”⁷ a distinction was made between “haves” and “have-nots” in terms of employment. The former are employed in the formal economy. They are more likely “...to earn decent wages, receive job-related benefits, have secure employment contracts and be covered by relevant laws and regulations” (UN, 2005, 29). The informal sector represented the polar opposite in terms of wages, benefits, rights, and expectations of the regularity of work. The growth of the informal sector worldwide, the report said, was intimately tied to growing global inequality.

The UN report estimated that “informal employment accounts for between one half and three quarters of non-agricultural employment in the majority of developing countries.” They indicated that the percentage of those who worked in the informal sector varied across the Global South: 48% in North Africa, 51% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 65 % in Asia and 78% in Sub-Saharan Africa (UN, 30).

In addition, the report referred to studies that suggested that the informal sector accounted for significant shares of the overall income and gross domestic product of individual countries. One study of 110 countries in 2000 found that the 18% of the gross national incomes of OECD countries came from the informal sector, 38% in “transition” countries (formerly Socialist), and 41% in developing countries. The informal economy accounted for 42% of the GNP in Africa, 26% in Asia, and 41% in Latin America (UN, 30-34).

The New Precarious Classe: the Precariat

Data shows that unemployment around the world rose over the period from 1993 to 2002 and declined somewhat in 2003. What may be the most significant finding from this data is the fact that the seeming recovery of 2003 only imperceptibly impacted on unemployment rates. Even if sectors of the global economy experienced growth, some theorists suggested, recovery given the system of global capitalism was “jobless.” As recently as 2014 the International Labor

Organization reported that on a global basis “the number of unemployed and discouraged workers continues to increase.”⁸

The economic transformations initiated in the Global South in the 1970s occurred in the context of the concentration and globalization of capital and the declining resistance including the collapse of Socialism. The oil crisis, the rise of a global debt system, global policy shifts from state/market economies to neo-liberalism paralleled significant changes in work activity from agriculture and industry to service, to the rise of the informal sector and unemployment. The end product of these transformations has been increasing global inequality in wealth and income and the continuation of massive poverty, powerlessness, and precariousness.

While rates of poverty declined over the last twenty years of the twentieth century still half the world’s population in 2001 lived on less than \$2 a day. And the percentage declines in extreme poverty, less than \$1 a day, during this period masked the fact that more people in 2001 were in extreme poverty than twenty years earlier. The numbers of people in extreme poverty increased in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and India. The numbers of those in poverty declined in East Asia and the Pacific and China.

Also, it is clear that income inequality has been increasing between richer and poorer regions of the globe. With the OECD countries representing the rich countries, on a per capita income basis, shares of income of peoples in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean have declined between 1980 and 2001. Weller, Scott, and Hersch (2001) reported that in 1980 median income in the richest countries (top ten percent) was 77 times greater than the median income in the poorest countries (the bottom ten percent). By 1999, the gap had expanded to 122 times. In 2005, the wealthiest 20 percent of the world’s population accounted for 76.6 percent of the world’s private consumption. As recently as 2013, 3 billion people lived on less than \$2.50 a day.

The transformation of employment from agriculture and industry to service and the informal sector—a shift that has been characterized as one from “have” to “have-not” jobs—has been reflected in the continuation of massive poverty around the globe and substantial evidence that the distribution of wealth and income has worsened over the period of neo-liberal policy influence. “The Inequality Predicament” made it clear as well that income inequality was reproduced in the distribution of access to health care, education, housing, access to water, and sanitation.

As suggested above, data like these led Samir Amin (2003) to predict that the transformation of the global political economy was precipitating a crisis of poverty and human misery that will transcend the expectations of the most well-meaning humanists. Amin described the emergence of “precarious classes” in both rural and urban areas. Estimating that half the world’s population (3 billion people) lived in the country, he predicted that nearly 2.8 billion of them would become

economically redundant. That is, given technology, 20 million people could provide the food needs for the planet. In the cities, 1.5 billion of 3 billion people were marginalized workers who experienced work temporarily and/or who always lived with the insecurity of job and income loss. Over four billion people of the six billion living on the planet, Amin wrote, constituted “the precarious classes,” made redundant because of declining employment and being reduced to perpetual employment insecurity due to the exigencies of the pursuit of profit in an era of neo-liberal globalization. This situation, Amin asserted, constituted a coming global crisis not seen in human history. And this was before the global economic crisis that began in 2007 which was followed by global protest against dramatically escalating economic insecurity, authoritarian regimes, and outrage at a continually growing economic inequality and political powerlessness.

In a recent book, Guy Standing,⁹ former Director of the International Labor Organization Socio-Economic Security Program, echoed Amin’s characterization of a decade ago. “The precariat consists of a growing number of people around the world who live in social and economic insecurity, without occupational identities, drifting in and out of jobs and constantly worried about their incomes, housing and much else.”¹⁰ He coined the term by combining “precarious” and “proletariat.” He warned that: “Unless the cries from the precariat are heard, the stirrings that have been heard and seen in the streets and squares of Greece, Spain, England and elsewhere will only be the harbinger of much more anger and upheaval.”

Resistance From Below

Vijay Prashad published an interesting volume in 2007, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World*, that appropriately made the narrative of world history more complicated. As the sub-title suggested, Prashad was inspired to reexamine post-World War II international history from the lens of Howard Zinn’s classic history, *A People’s History of the United States*. The fundamental proposition of the Zinn volume was that history is not just made by the powerful (monarchs, generals, popes, bankers, CEOs of major corporations or even hegemonic states) but by masses of people who have lacked the traditional attributes of power. Zinn’s history of the United States emphasized the role of native peoples, workers, women, people of color, and peace and justice activists in shaping the larger political and economic agendas of the United States. Zinn’s approach, along with a new literature on labor studies, African-American studies, and Women’s Studies, suggested that historical change was the resultant of the dialectical, often conflicted, struggles between the rich and powerful and the weak and powerless.

Prashad applied the Zinn methodology to the history of international relations in the twentieth century. *The Darker Nations* describes the rise of anti-colonial struggles, the emergence of newly independent nation-states out of global colonial empires, the creation of solidarity among elites from these “new” nations, and the efforts they engaged in to gain influence over global economics and politics to make the international system work for them.

Prashad described the creation of the non-aligned movement; a body of nations prioritizing global economic justice rather than attachment to one or another Cold War superpower. He discussed international conferences that addressed the exploitative character of the global economy, brutal and desperate wars to maintain colonialism, the condition of women, and overcoming the bipolar world. Attention was given to the Global South's introduction of the idea of a New International Economic Order (NIEO) which included proposals for reforming the global economy. Prashad pointed out that for a time, with U.S./Soviet contestation for the "hearts and minds" of the new nations, the NIEO figured prominently in debate in international organizations.

Prashad's story is also a story of the declining power of the countries of the Global South, as the first generation of anti-colonial leaders left the scene, some countries embraced neoliberal policies, and political factionalism grew in many countries. But, Prashad suggests, world affairs must be seen as a resultant of the dialectical relations between the core and periphery, a view not too different from that proposed by dependency theorists.

However, Prashad's story departs from Zinn's in that Prashad concentrates on states and elites in the Global South, and social/political movements less so. A real 'bottom-up' portrait of global struggle would include a much expanded portrait of grassroots movements for social change, sometimes involving cross-national networks of relationships. An updated rendition of the Prashad portrait of world affairs would have to include the global impacts of Arab spring, the uprisings in the Heartland of the United States, the Occupy movement in the United States, the more recent Moral Mondays campaign, and its reverberations all across the Global North and South. Theory about twenty-first century global life should draw upon theories of imperialism and dependency, bringing challenges from the Global South to the history, and elements of theories of globalization and neoliberalism that suggest cross-national connections of peoples' movements from the grassroots, often motivated by protests against the neoliberal policy agenda.

Global Mobilizations and the History of Resistance

Just as globalization today has its roots in five hundred years of trade, investment, exploitation, and capital accumulation the global justice movements of our day also have their roots in the patterns of resistance since the beginning of capitalism.

In a recent article Zahara Heckscher¹¹ pointed out that: "In virtually every society the Europeans invaded, people rose up to protest the cruelty of slavery, theft of land, and plunder of resources." While many of the protests were local, provoked by singular transgressions, and were inwardly oriented (from destroying crops to committing suicide to fleeing), many were national in their mobilization or even international.

Heckscher provided examples of resistance movements against globalization that occurred well before "the Battle of Seattle" in 1999. For example, the Tupac Amaru II uprising in Peru (1780-1781) was a multi-class, multi-ethnic rebellion of 6,000 armed protestors who opposed the effort

of the Spanish colonial government to impose tariff reductions to flood local markets with cheap Spanish goods, increase taxes, and in other ways force economic integration between the colony and the Spanish economy.

Heckscher also offered the example of nineteenth century cross-national campaigns to ban slavery. She described the social movements in Europe that vigorously opposed the brutal Belgium colonial administration of the Congo at the end of the nineteenth century. She reflected on the efforts of the First International Workingmen's Association in Geneva to prohibit manufacturers from importing strikebreakers to replace striking workers. In the process workers from Europe and North America began to mobilize in solidarity against an increasingly cross-national capitalism. Finally, in her brief survey she mentioned the Anti-Imperialist Movement that opposed U.S. occupation and control of the Philippines after 1898.

Each of these movements addressed economic and political issues together. Each was a response to the globalization of a great power, usually in pursuit of economic exploitation. And each of these movements created a shared consciousness, a solidarity among resisters across national boundaries. Even these movements were responses to local issues they represented a form of resistance to the globalization of capitalism.

The World Social Forum

At the dawn of the new century, a new tradition, inspired by the hundreds of years of resistance, was launched. Ten thousand activists-representing 1,000 groups from 120 countries, industrial and agricultural workers, indigenous peoples, environmentalists, anti-globalization activists-met at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil in January, 2001. This disparate assembly shared one idea: "Another World is Possible."

Naomi Klein¹² reported on this first WSF highlighting its exuberant and chaotic character. Neither defining it as a strength or a weakness she pointed out the fact that "...what seemed to be emerging organically out of the World Social Forum (despite the best efforts of some of the organizers) was not a movement for a single global government but a vision for an increasingly connected international network of very local initiatives, each built on direct democracy."

Subsequent to the first WSF, the organizing committee prepared a "Charter of Principles" which included the following: providing an environment for open and democratic debate; becoming a permanent process of building alternatives, particularly building a "world process;" bringing together and linking civil society groups, NGOs, and social movements from all countries; and increasing "the capacity for non-violent social resistance to the process of dehumanization" and introducing "onto the global agenda the change-inducing practices" that could create a "new world in solidarity."

The US Social Forum

Each year after, the WSF met in Brazil or India, or Kenya, or Venezuela. In 2007, a U.S. Social Forum was held in Atlanta, Georgia. Ten thousand people, mostly young and people of color attended the hundreds of panels and plenary sessions. Over 100 local and national groups displayed their literature and dialogued with conference participants.

As their call suggested: “The US Social Forum is more than a conference, more than a networking bonanza, more than a reaction to war and repression. The USSF will provide space to build relationships, learn from each other’s experiences, share our analysis of the problems our communities face, and bring renewed insight and inspiration.”¹³

Activists from nearly 100 organizations held the next US Social Forum which took place from June 22-26, 2010 in Detroit. It occurred in the midst of a global economic crisis, multiple wars, the rise of neo-fascist forces around the world, and efforts of the United States to forestall the rising global resistance to neo-liberalism.

The National Planning Committee indicated that the USSF would address movement building, organizing and outreach, and improving structure and programming of the USSF movement. Of particular relevance to 2010, they wrote, were the following goals:¹⁴

- Strengthen and expand progressive infrastructure for long-term collaboration and work for fundamental change.
- Disseminate effective models for democratic participation and movement building.
- Shape and influence the public conversation in ways that convey momentum and hope.
- Model diverse, representative movement building that is cross-cutting, democratic, and effectively integrates process and outcomes.
- Continue to be a space in which grassroots lead, while being inclusive of other sectors. Develop a collective systemic understanding and analysis of the current economic and political moment.
- Create a shared vision of the society and world that challenges poverty and exploitation, all forms of oppression, militarism and war, and environmental destruction.
- Articulate and practice concrete internationalism through consciousness of today’s global context and the power of radical movements in the Global South, and awareness of our power in coming from the US and our responsibility to the broader international movement.
- Identify convergences that have already happened.

- Work toward greater convergence between working class struggles and progressive movements.
- Build on the strengths and convergences of the 2007 USSF.
- Further develop Black, Immigrant and Indigenous Nations' solidarity.

The goals and vision of the US Social Forum were truly ambitious. It was unclear how the Social Forum movement could create enough ideological commonality, organizational structure, leadership sensitive to its grassroots base, and global solidarity to make another world possible. It was clear however that the Social Forum movement was part of a long history of resistance and struggle against capitalism, and as such is as necessary now as at any time in history.

World Protests 2006-2013¹⁵

Isabel Ortiz, Sara Burke, Mohamed Berrada, and Hernan Cortes, Institute for Policy Dialogue and Freidrich-Ebert-Stiftung New York,¹⁶ reported on a longitudinal project of 843 protest incidents between 2006 and 2013 in 87 countries, categorizing these incidents by grievances, participants, protest methods, targets of protest, achievements, forms of repression, and the major policy demands of protestors. They found an increase in protest events every year with a particular spike in such activities after the onset of the 2010 financial crisis and the concomitant austerity measures that most governments adopted to stem the crisis at the expense of the vast majorities of people. About a third of protests occurred in higher income countries, and twenty percent in Latin American and Caribbean countries but protest activity seemed to emerge all across the globe.

More than half the protests related to economic justice and anti-austerity issues and a little less than half were about lack of democracy. Often multiple issues motivated protests and these included global justice and human rights issues. The authors claimed that twenty-five percent of the protests linked the lack of economic justice to a parallel lack of democracy. The data indicated that protesters included traditional activists, trade unionists, and an array of young and older protestors "...who are increasingly joining activists from all kinds of movements, not only in marches and rallies...but in a new framework of protest that includes civil disobedience and direct action..." They list as newer forms of protest computer hackers and whistleblowers. Data showed that violence and looting occurred in less than ten percent of the cases.

The data indicates that protests are allayed against governments and policy-makers but also target corporations, political and economic elites, the financial sector, and dominant global economic institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. While protestors usually did not achieve their goals, data indicated that the size of protest activities had increased and some have led to longer term organizing efforts. The authors concluded from their research:

“The set of policies at the national and global levels to address the grievances ...cross over virtually every area of public policy, from jobs, public services, an social protection to taxation, debt, and trade.” Basic to all the protests is “the demand of real democracy.”

The Project of the Darker Nations Today

What we have witnessed over the last two years perhaps constitutes what Prashad, regards as a new stage in the development of the Third World Project.

First, the Middle East revolution, if we wish to call it that for shorthand reasons, can be seen as a direct reaction to the profound global economic crisis that has been brought on by neoliberal globalization.

Second, it clearly is motivated by goals similar to those NAM endorsed in the 1950s, that is some kind of New International Economic Order.

Third, the movements seem to be secular, as well as religious, perhaps reflecting a rejection of the counterrevolutionary programs of Third World elites who promoted division and reaction to further their own interests.

Fourth, the movements appear to incorporate vast numbers of young people, men and women, workers and small business people, intellectuals and artists, as well as those who identify with their religious traditions.

Fifth, the labor movement and the growing percentages of unemployed and underemployed workers have been playing a passionate and committed role in the struggles. The estimated 40 percent of the world’s population in the so-called “informal sector” have a stake in revolutionary change as do workers in transportation, electronics, construction, and manufacturing.

Sixth, this revolution has been largely a nonviolent revolution. “Revolutionaries” are saying no or enough, and are doing so in such numbers that the institutions of government and the economy cannot continue to operate. This culls up memories of the Gandhi struggles against the British empire and the civil rights movement in the U.S. South.

Seventh, this is an electronic revolution. As a result of the computer age time and space as factors confounding communicating and organizing have been eliminated. Cell phones and social networks do not make revolutions but they facilitate the kind of organizing that historically was more tedious and problematic.

And, the new technology insures that revolutionary ferment in one part of the world can be connected to revolutionary ferment elsewhere. In a certain sense, now all youth can be participants, not just observers.

In a recent interview Prashad summarized some of these elements of the ongoing struggles:

“The Arab revolt that we now witness is something akin to a “1968” for the Arab World. Sixty per cent of the Arab population is under 30 (70 per cent in Egypt). Their slogans are about dignity and employment. The resource curse brought wealth to a small population of their societies, but little economic development. Social development came to some parts of the Arab world...

The educated lower-middle-class and middle-class youth have not been able to find jobs. The concatenations of humiliations revolts these young people: no job, no respect from an authoritarian state, and then to top it off the general malaise of being a second-class citizen on the world stage...was overwhelming. The chants on the streets are about this combination of dignity, justice, and jobs" ¹⁷

Some of the differences from before

Comparing the period of the Third World Project with today suggests some differences and similarities. As Prashad and other historians of the Third World make clear, the rise of the non-aligned movement gained some influence because of the Cold War contest between the Soviet Union and the United States.

Now the world consists of a variety of new powers, some from the original movement (such as India, China, Egypt, and Brazil) whose economic, political, and military capabilities are challenging the traditional power structures of international relations. Also, global capitalism is in profound crisis and the causes of the revolutionary ferment as well as its escalation are intimately connected with the Middle East revolutions.

Today the danger of escalating state violence and repression remains significant. Global capitalism is in crisis. Some Third World regimes are still driven by fundamentalisms of one sort or another. And, finally, key decision makers in centers of global power seem committed still to archaic ideologies, for example suggesting that Islamic fundamentalism will take over revolutions, democracy is dangerous, and that the one “democracy” in the Middle East, Israel, will be further threatened by the movements in the region.

In addition, the Egyptian revolution, while exciting and inspirational, suffered from some of the same weaknesses Prashad described at the dawn of the Third World Project. Looking back 50 years, the leaders, and the various participating sectors of the mass movement, had not articulated a systematic and compelling ideology, beyond the programmatic demands of the NIEO.

Several countries in the forefront of the NAM were military regimes. Placards of Nasser were prominently displayed in Liberation Square during Arab spring. Nasser was a military leader of the “Free Colonels” movement that overthrew King Farouk in 1952. The same “revolutionary” military created a Hasni Mubarak many years later. While the military in Egypt today may act in

ways that curry the favor of the protesters, it must be clear that military institutions are driven by their own interests, not the interests of the people.

So the mass mobilizations since early 2011 that were so exciting, inspiring hope for the world, have been fraught with danger. The people now must struggle to articulate, advocate for, and institutionalize a program of humane socialism in every country where they are victorious. The task of progressives in the Global North is to support the new project and to link its causes and visions to the struggles that are experienced everywhere.

Protest Movements in the United States

Along with anecdotal evidence aggregate data confirms the continuation and expansion of activist groups and protest activities all across the face of the globe. For example in the United States, Mark Solomon in an important essay “Whither the Socialist Left? Thinking the ‘Unthinkable’” discusses the long history of socialism in the United States, the brutal repression against it, damaging sectarian battles on the left, the miniscule size of socialist organizations today and yet paradoxically the growing sympathy for the idea of socialism among Americans, particularly young people. He calls for “the convergence of socialist organizations committed to non-sectarian democratic struggle, engagement with mass movements, and open debate in search of effective responses to present crises and to projecting a socialist future.” Again, the Solomon article does not conceptualize “left unity” and “building the progressive majority” as separate and distinct projects but as fundamentally interconnected. For him, and many others, the role of the left in the labor movement and other mass movements gave shape, direction, and theoretical cohesion to the battles that won worker rights in the 1930s.

Solomon’s call has stimulated debate among activists around the idea of “left unity.” The appeal for left unity is made more powerful by socialism’s appeal, the current global crises of capitalism, rising mobilizations around the world, and living experiments with small-scale socialism such as the construction of a variety of workers’ cooperatives.

Effective campaigns around “left unity” in recent years have prioritized “revolutionary education,” drawing upon the tools of the internet to construct an accessible body of theory and debate about strategy and tactics that could solidify left forces and move the progressive majority into a socialist direction. The emerging Online University of the Left (OUL), an electronic source for classical and modern theoretical literature about Marxism, contemporary debates about strategy and tactics, videos, reading lists, and course syllabi, constitute one example of left unity. The OUL serves as resource for study groups, formal coursework, and discussions among socialists and progressives. Those who advocate for “left unity” or left “convergence” celebrate these many developments, from workers cooperatives to popular education, as they advocate for the construction of a unified socialist left.

The Occupy Movement, first surfacing in the media in September, 2011, initiated and renewed traditions of organized and spontaneous mass movements around issues that affect peoples’

immediate lives such as housing foreclosure, debt, jobs, wages, the environment, and the negative role of money in U.S. politics. Perhaps the four most significant contributions of the Occupy Movement include:

1. Introducing grassroots processes of decision-making.
2. Conceptualizing modern battles for social and economic justice as between the one percent (the holders of most wealth and power in society) versus the 99 percent (weak, economically marginalized, and dispossessed, including the precariat).
3. Insisting that struggles for radical change be spontaneous, often eschewing traditional political processes.
4. Linking struggles locally, nationally, and globally.

During the height of Occupy's visibility some 500 cities and towns experienced mobilizations around social justice issues. While significantly less today, Occupy campaigns still exist, particularly in cities where larger progressive communities reside. Calls for left unity correctly ground their claims in a long and rich history of organized struggle while "occupiers" and other activists today have been inspired by the bottom-up and spontaneous uprisings of 2011 (both international and within the United States).

A third, and not opposed, approach to political change at this time has been labeled "building a progressive majority." This approach assumes that large segments of the U.S. population agree on a variety of issues. Some are activists in electoral politics, others in trade unions, and more in single issue groups. In addition, many who share common views of worker rights, the environment, health care, undue influence of money in politics, immigrant rights etc. are not active politically. The progressive majority perspective argues that the project for the short-term is to mobilize the millions of people who share common views on the need for significant if not fundamental change in economics and politics.

Often organizers conceptualize the progressive majority as the broad mass of people who share views on politics and economics that are 'centrist' or "left." Consequently, over the long run, "left" participants see their task as three-fold. First, they must work on the issues that concern majorities of those at the local and national level. Second, they struggle to convince their political associates that the problems most people face have common causes (particularly capitalism). Third, "left" participants see the need to link issues so that class, race, gender, and the environment, for example, are understood as part of the common problem that people face.

At this point in time as the recent data set called "Start" shows (<http://www.startguide.org/orgs/orgs00.html>) there are some "500 leading organizations in the United States working for progressive change on a national level." START divided these 500 organizations into twelve categories based on their main activities. These include progressive

electoral, peace and foreign policy, economic justice, civil liberties, health advocacy, labor, women's and environmental organizations. Of course their membership, geographic presence, financial resources, and strategic and tactical vision vary widely. *And*, many of the variety of progressive organizations at the national level are reproduced at the local and state levels as well.

In sum, when looking at social change in the United States at least three emphases are being articulated: left unity, the Occupy, and building a progressive majority. Each highlights its own priorities as to vision, strategy, tactics, and political contexts. In addition, the relative appeal of each may be affected by age, class, gender, race, and issue prioritization as well. *However, these approaches need not be seen as contradictory. Rather the activism borne of each approach may parallel the others.*

The Emergence of Moral Mondays in the U.S. South

Moral Mondays refers to a burgeoning mass movement that had its roots in efforts to defend voter rights in North Carolina. Thousands of activists have been mobilizing across the South over the last year inspired by Moral Mondays. They are fighting back against draconian efforts to destroy the right of people to vote, workers' and women's rights, and for progressive policies in general. Paradoxically, many progressives in the South and elsewhere have not heard of this budding movement.

Moral Mondays began as the annual Historic Thousands on Jones Street People's Assembly (HKonJ) in 2006 to promote progressive politics in North Carolina. Originally a coalition of 16 organizations, initiated by the state's NAACP, it has grown to include 150 organizations today promoting a multi-issue agenda. In 2006, its task was to pressure the state's Democratic politicians to expand voting rights and support progressive legislation on a variety of fronts.

With the election of a tea-party government in that state in 2012, the thrust of Moral Mondays shifted to challenging the draconian policies threatening to turn back gains made by people of color, workers, women, environmentalists and others. Public protests at the state house weekly in the spring of 2013 during the state legislative session led to over 1,000 arrests for civil disobedience and hundreds of thousands of hits on MM websites. Similar movements have spread throughout the South (Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida) and in some states in the Midwest and Southwest (Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Missouri).

To kick off the spring 2014 protests, MM organizers called a rally in Raleigh, North Carolina on February 8 which brought out at least 80,000 protestors. Rev. William Barber, a key organizer of the movement, has grounded this new movement in history, suggesting that the South is in the midst of the "third reconstruction." The first reconstruction, after the Civil War, consisted of Black and white workers struggling to create a democratic South (which would have impacted on the North as well). They elected legislators who wrote new state constitutions to create democratic institutions in that region for the first time. This first reconstruction was destroyed by white racism and the establishment of Jim Crow segregation.

The second reconstruction occurred between Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954 and President Nixon's 1968 "Southern Strategy." During this period formal segregation was

overturned, Medicare and Medicaid were established, and Social Security was expanded. Blacks and whites benefited. Dr. King's 1968 Poor People's Campaign envisioned a defense and expansion of the second reconstruction.

Now we are in the midst of a third reconstruction, according to Barber. Political mobilizations today, like those of the first reconstruction, are based on what was called in the 1860s "fusion" politics; that is bringing all activists—Black, Brown, white, gay/straight, workers, environmentalists—together. Fusion politics assumes that only a mass movement built on everyone's issues can challenge the billionaire economic elites such as the Koch brothers and their Wall Street collaborators with masses of people (the 99 percent). Fusion politics, he says, requires an understanding of the fact that every issue is interconnected causally with every other issue. Therefore, democracy, civil rights, labor, women's, gay/lesbian, and environmental movements must act together (<http://youtu.be/sOMn8jLjVLE>).

At the February action in Raleigh five general demands were articulated as guides for their spring activism. While economic, political, and historical forces vary from state to state the demands can serve as a model for action elsewhere as well. The North Carolina demands are:

- **Secure pro-labor, anti-poverty policies that insure economic sustainability;**
- **Provide well-funded, quality public education for all;**
- **Stand up for the health of every North Carolinian by promoting health care access and environmental justice across all the state's communities;**
- **Address the continuing inequalities in the criminal justice system and ensure equality under the law for every person, regardless of race, class, creed, documentation or sexual preference;**
- **Protect and expand voting rights for people of color, women, immigrants, the elderly and students to safeguard fair democratic representation.**

Co-Revolutionary Theory Becomes Practice: The Road Ahead

David Harvey¹⁸ has written about a "co-revolutionary theory" of change. In this theory Harvey argues that anti-capitalist movements today must address "mental conceptions;" uses and abuses of nature; how to build real communities; workers relations to bosses; exploitation, oppression, and racism; and the relations between capital and the state. While a tall order, the co-revolutionary theory suggests the breadth of struggles that need to be embraced to bring about real revolution.

Harvey's work mirrors many analysts who address the deepening crises of capitalism and the spread of human misery everywhere. It is increasingly clear to vast majorities of people, despite media mystification, that the primary engine of destruction is global finance capitalism and political institutions that have increasingly become its instrumentality. Harvey's work parallels the insights of Naomi Klein, Joseph Stiglitz, Robert Reich, Noam Chomsky, and a broad array of economists, historians, trade unionists, peace and justice activists and thousands of bloggers and Facebook commentators.

Of course, these theorists could not have known the ways in which the connections between the co-revolutionary theory and practice would unfold. Most agreed that we are living through a global economic crisis in which wealth and power is increasingly concentrated in fewer and fewer hands (perhaps a global ruling class), and human misery, from joblessness, to hunger, to disease, to environmental devastation is spreading.

But history has shown that such misery can survive for long periods of time with little active resistance. Even though activists in labor, in communities of color, in anti-colonial/anti-neo-colonial settings are always organizing, their campaigns usually create little traction. Not so since 2011. Tunisians rose up against their oppressive government. Larger mobilizations occurred in Egypt. Protests spread to Yemen, Algeria, Oman, Bahrain, and Libya.

Assuming that working people, youth, women, and various professional groups would remain quiescent in the United States, right wing politicians saw the opportunity to radically transform American society by destroying public institutions and thereby shifting qualitatively more wealth from the majority to the minority. In Wisconsin, and later in Ohio, Indiana, and around the country a broad array of people began to publicly say “no,” “enough is enough.” Even those with criticisms of President Obama continued their mobilization to secure his reelection and the defeat of the rightwing.

The resistance in the Middle East has been about jobs, redistribution of wealth, limiting foreign financial penetration, and democracy. In the United States the issues are even more varied: the right of workers to collectively bargain, opposition to so-called Right-To-Work laws, beating back challenges to public education, raising demands for free access to health care including the defense of reproductive health care, and greater, not less, provision of jobs, livable wages, and retirement benefits.

Where do we go from here? I think “co-revolutionary theory” would answer “everywhere”. Marxists are right to see the lives of people as anchored in their ability to produce and reproduce themselves, their families, and their communities. The right to a job at a living wage remains central to all the ferment. But in the twenty-first century this basic motivator for consciousness and action is more comprehensively and intimately connected to trade unions, education, health care, sustainable environments, opposition to racism and sexism, and peace. So all these motivations are part of the same struggle.

It is fascinating to observe that the reaction to economic ruling class and political elite efforts to turn back the clock on reforms gained over the last 75 years have sparked resistance and mobilization from across a whole array of movements and campaigns. *And activists are beginning to make the connections between the struggles.*

It is way too early to tell whether this round of ferment will lead to some victories for the people, even reformist ones. But as Harvey suggests, “An anti-capitalist political movement can start

anywhere....The trick is to keep the political movement moving from one moment to another in mutually reinforcing ways.”

Arab Spring to Moral Mondays

Between 2011 and the summer 2014, mass movements emerged projecting very different, even counter-hegemonic ideas about building a better world. Young people, workers, women, secularists, started going out in the streets in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Bahrain. They demanded democracy and economic justice. They began to mobilize in public spaces, such as schools, union halls, and mosques and churches. They communicated via cell phones and sent messages in silly shorthand sentences and (to me) incomprehensible letters. The sun and warmth of the Arab Spring blossomed.

In very different places economically, politically, and geographically, the bitter heartland of America, revolt was stirred up as well: Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan for starters. Workers, students, women, political progressives, health care advocates, educators began to stand up and say no to the steamrolling right wing political machine, now not too different from the historic “centrist” consensus in U.S. politics. Like their comrades, the heartland radicals too haltingly began to suggest that another world is possible. And in 2013, Moral Mondays in North Carolina became visible and stimulated similar campaigns across the South, parts of the Midwest, and in selected states in the Southwest in 2014.

At the same time that revolt was spreading around the world the United States carried out an assassination mission killing Osama bin Ladin and encouraged a NATO-led war on the Gaddafi family dictatorship in Libya and is now in the process of resuming interventions in Iraq, Syria, Ukraine, and Venezuela, and across the African continent. At home stories about the need for austerity programs to reduce the federal deficit fill the air waves and state legislatures controlled by the Tea Party and its allies adopt anti-worker, anti-women, anti-Black, and anti-environmental policies. For most U.S. politicians, the country’s problems are not about capitalism or neo-liberal economic policies. Many of these claim that problems stem from too much government.

The forces of ideological hegemony say we need to keep our guard up and be prepared to kill those who threaten us or who are claimed to be threats. Criminal justice systems and norms against violence are to be ignored. At home we must challenge the idea that political institutions, government, must serve the needs of the people.

However, recent evidence suggests that resistance is growing all across the globe. The new precariat are seemingly playing a major role in the new resistance, demanding changes in the distribution of wealth and income, expanding access to medical care and education, jobs, and political empowerment. Whether the mobilizations will lead to a renewed socialist left—left unity-- committed to building a new social order, a non-capitalist one, remains to be seen.

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