

Editorial

A changing world: new opportunities, new dangers

Shiraz Durrani¹

During the short lifetime of ISJ, there have been momentous changes in global economies and, with it, global politics. Free market capitalism has been clearly exposed for what it is: a “free” market for global financial and linked interests to control the lives and resources of the people of the world in order to maximise profits. At the centre of globalised capitalism is the banking sector whose actions have adversely affected the lives of millions of people around the world. While this aspect of capitalism is becoming obvious to people in the West over the last few years, the countries of the South have been victims of the same manipulation and massive systematic siphoning off of resources from the poor to the rich for generations. But this was not on the conscience of the world as the victims were poor, powerless – and far away.

Unemployment is rising at an alarming rate, food prices have soared, industries and agriculture are suffering. This vicious circle of lack of production and employment is then feeding yet another round of poverty and unemployment for the majority of people. At the same time, the armament industries are prospering with wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan and new ones being planned.

The background of this crisis of capitalism in the West is often forgotten. The crisis is a reflection of the changing global dominance of the West. As Jacques (2009) says, “we stand on the eve of a different kind of world, but comprehending it is difficult” (p.8). He quotes Goldman Sachs that in “2017 China will overtake the United States as the world’s largest economy” (p.12). By 2050, the largest economies in the world will be China, followed by USA and India. These will be followed by Brazil, Mexico, Russia and Indonesia and Japan in that order. Only two European countries will feature in the top ten, UK and Germany in ninth and tenth places respectively (ibid, p.3). “The rise of China”, says Jacques, “will change the world in the most profound ways” (p.12).

¹ Senior Lecturer in Information Management, Department of Applied Social Sciences, London Metropolitan University, UK. Email: s.durrani@londonmet.ac.uk

At one level, the current economic, social and political crises can be seen as symptoms of a tectonic shift of global power, with all its social and political consequences - what Jacques refers to as "the changing of the Guard".

There are obvious dangers to people and societies in this situation. The principles of social and economic justice are the first ones to be sacrificed in such a crisis situation. Hutton (2009) highlights an important danger facing us today:

The biggest risk is...that our society is being taken over by a new class of super-rich unaccountable oligarchs – in finance and in the media – with little interest in our culture, civilisation or vitality of our public realm.

These changes call for greater vigilance to ensure that key values associated with democracy and justice are not lost. Factors that are also relevant here are the power relations between and within societies and the central role that communication and media play in the way "power strategies are played out" (Castells, 2009).

At another level, together with rapid changes in science and technology generally, there have been almost revolutionary changes in information and communication technologies. This has changed the way we communicate with each. The central role that communications play in these changing times is highlighted in Castells (2009):

We live in the midst of a revolution in communication technologies that affects the way in which people feel, think, and behave. The media have become the space where power strategies are played out. (*from publicity of the book*)

Castells (2009) highlights the relationship between power and communication:

Power is based on the control of communication and information...power relies on the control of communication, as counterpower depends on breaking through such control...Communication power is at the heart of the structure and dynamics of society. (p.3)

It is this power of social communication and the control over communication and information that forms important concerns of ISJ.

This issue of ISJ comes out when the changes outlined above affect all aspect of our lives today. An aspect that is not often mentioned or analysed is the resistance of people to forces that are out to destroy their very livelihood – the "counterpower" as Castles calls it. The political movements, the strikes and demonstrations seen in Latin America, in Europe, in India, in South Africa and other countries are aspects of resistance to capitalist values that remain hidden from mainstream news broadcasts and newspaper pages. The increasing militancy of working class and the trade union movement, official and unofficial, taken as a whole, are strands of resistance to the *status quo*. They are likely to be the basis of new social and political approaches to meeting the needs of people in these changing times. There are new forms of resistance at government level, with Cuba, Venezuela, and Ecuador setting out a new approach to economic and social development. At another level is the global environmental movement and various single issue movements, all forming a global network of resistance linked by new methods of electronic communication.

It is in this situation that ISJ brings out this issue with focus on trade unions, particularly in Nigeria and Kenya. The Kenyan aspect will be explored further in February 2010 when London Metropolitan University hosts one of its "Debates and Lectures" events celebrating the achievements of the founder of the modern trade union movement and organisation in Kenya, Makhan Singh.

Trade unions remain an important tool in the hands of working people to ensure that their rights are not sacrificed in order to allow finance capital to continue its global control. While legislation in many countries over the last 30 years or so have sought to reduce the power and impact of trade unions, the economic situation today can give a new life to this powerful organising and uniting method of struggle available to working people. The first articles in this issue of ISJ take up this search for relevance for trade unions: Nwoko discusses Trade Unionism and Governance in Nigeria, Ogunkoya looks at the social and political issues while Osiki examines the role of individuals as the locomotive of history. ISJ welcomes these contributions from Nigeria, which, in some circles in the West, is seen only in terms of corruption and poverty. Its vast intellectual wealth often goes unnoticed and unrecognised. Durrani takes a historical look at trade unionism in Kenya. The Kenyan aspect will be explored further in February 2010 when London Metropolitan University hosts one of its "Debates and Lectures" events celebrating the achievements of the founder of the modern trade union movement and organisation in Kenya, Makhan Singh.

This issue of ISJ also carried another article in the irregular series "Debating and Documenting Africa", the first one having been published in Vol. 1 No.2 (June 2008). This issue carries a discussion between Katy Hickman, Senior Producer at BBC World Service Religion and Ethics and Prof. Abdul Sheriff, formerly Professor of History at the University of Dar es Salaam and Director of Zanzibar Museums and the author of forthcoming titles, *Dhow Cultures of the Indian Ocean: Cosmopolitanism, Commerce and Islam* and *The Early Dhow Culture in the Indian Ocean: From the Periplus to the Portuguese*.

The context of this debate is BBC Radio's "Return to Zanzibar" programme in their series, Heart & Soul. Setting the scene is Katy Hickman's contact with Prof. Sheriff in which she enclosed an early outline of the programme. This is followed by Prof. Sheriff's response which raises various key issue of relevance to the study of Africa. This is followed by Katy Hickman's response which explains how the final version was influenced by points raised by Prof. Sheriff. Also included is a later piece by the presenter of the programme, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown. While not part of this discussion, the latter is included to provide the presenter's perspective. At the same time, we carry an outline of the actual programme as it was finally broadcast, together with a link to hear it again. All these provide a look behind the scene on debates that take place before programmes are made and bring out the key role that historians, researchers and academicians can, and need to play, in social communications.

Finally, we regret the delay in publishing this issue of ISJ – due to circumstances beyond our control. We expect the December 2009 issue to be out in time.

Note from the Coordinating Editor

As I look forward to retiring from London Metropolitan University in March 2010, I have decided to resign as the Coordinating Editor of ISJ. This has been a valuable experience in trying to link learning and teaching and in opening new avenues for academicians to talk to other academicians, professionals and social activists. ISJ has also sought to offer writing and publishing opportunities to students and those who may not have had such

opportunities in the past. It is a matter of great satisfaction that ISJ is being guided by a strong Editorial Team based all around the world, providing a unique perspective on issue of relevance to people everywhere today.

I am pleased to announce that the post of Coordinating Editor has been taken over by Dr. Usman A. Tar who, as a founder member of ISJ and as the current Managing Editor, has been closely associated with all aspects of ISJ work. The continued success of ISJ is due in no small measure to Dr. Tar's commitment and hard work for the Journal. He will continue to be the force behind ISJ and provide the necessary skills, commitment and continuity.

At the same time, the Department of Applied Social Sciences (DASS) of the London Metropolitan University will continue to host ISJ and provide support as in the past. Particular thanks to Prof. John Gabriel, Head of Departmental as well as administrative and technical staff who have been working behind the scenes to ensure ISJ is available to all.

I would like to express my appreciation of the support I have had from the ISJ Editorial Board, DASS, contributors and reviewers and others active behind the scene to ensure continued existence of ISJ. Shiraz Durrani, London: 08 October 2009.

References

Castells, Manuel (2009): *Communication Power*. Oxford: OUP

Hutton, Will (2009): This attack on the BBC is specious. *Observer*. 30-08-09, p. 15.

Jacques, Martin (2009): *When China rules the world: the rise of the Middle Kingdom and the end of the Western World*. London: Allen Lane.