

BOOK REVIEW: *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions*.

By Paul Mason. London : Verso, 2012. 237 pp. ISBN: 9781844678518 (pbk). £12.99

No follower of the economic crisis could fail to ignore the analysis and commentary of BBC *Newsnight* Economics Editor Paul Mason. His clear deconstruction of international finance and engagement with political economy is refreshing amongst a British media which largely tends to regurgitate, rather than seriously examine, neoliberal economic policy. In the academic realm, Mason's latest text would surely serve as a highly stimulating topic for discussion in any media studies, international relations, politics, or sociology seminar.

In a racing journalistic style Mason describes the 'kicking off' of the Egyptian revolution, Iran's pro-democracy movement, the British student unrest at Millbank and Westminster, the resistance to austerity in Greece, the crippling poverty of the American mid-west, and finally the 'soladaristic' slums of Manila contesting urban clearance. Interspersed within this street reportage the reader is abstracted to theoretical musings from the author, including Marxism, Anthony Giddens' Third Way, Friedrich August Hayek, Network Theory, and comment on the 1878 Paris Commune. This motley philosophy and Mason's observations lead him to conclude that the global 'kicking off' phenomenon can be attributed to six key factors: the economic crisis and globalisation; the empowering effect of social media for a neoliberalised atomised generation; the synergy of such media for this 'new' generation of protest and everyday life; the proliferation of disenchanting graduates with no prospects; the power of networks to overcome hierarchies; and finally particular critical junctures, such as in Egypt, where a con-joining of the student/graduate group, unions and workers, and the urban poor emerges.

An orthodox Marxist critique of Mason's analysis would highlight the neglect of the organised working class as a force in the 'new revolutions'. The UK public-sector strike of 30 November 2011, the incessant industrial action in Greece, occupations and strikes by anti-regime unions' in Egypt offer evidence to legitimate such a view. By briefly raising the Egyptian local debate on whether workers actions were either simply part of a second wave to the mass unrest or decisive in casting the military adrift from Mubarak, Mason alludes to the importance of the working class and reveals an awareness of the likelihood of criticism in regards to this in the book; however, there is insufficient attention in the book to the social structures that weaken the state fulcrum of power.

Mason's argument rests on two key inter-twined features: (i) the strength of social media through its rapid and extensive dissemination of information and the tactical benefits for activists, which hierarchical organisations, such as governments and corporations, are helpless to control; and (ii) the 'generational schism' of wealth and opportunities where the recently university educated are denied access to life's 'asset ladder'. Mason's astute contribution is that a powerful synergy of technological change, and a disenfranchised generation's mastery of it, is also commensurate with a common trait in the worldwide upturn in protest. This, however, has to be qualified by the diverse composition of some of the social movements which are arising. Disabled, elderly, and veteran activists have been prominent in anti-austerity protest in the UK; while hospital and local government employees have occupied workplaces in Greece. Further, aligning the social unrest predominantly with a more middle-class aspirational group, such as university graduates, under-estimates the role of working-class communities and associated kinship networks that may be integral to revolt.

Through its commentary, *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere* tends to replicate existing academic sociological comment; such as that on new social movements and anti-globalisation protests theorised by Diani and Castell's social morphology of the 'networked society'. The strength of Mason's book lies in its ability to highlight the inter-generational dualism inherent in the 'networked revolutions' and a social network that is

increasingly more powerful. In a rush to contemporise the tumultuous events in North Africa, the Middle East and parts of Europe, Mason inevitably omits some theoretical perspective and context to events. This reviewer concludes, therefore, by suggesting a compelling follow-up to *Why It's Kicking off Everywhere*; perhaps taking the form of an edited collection of responses to the book from thinkers, writers, and activists.

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