

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV448 May 2012

GREECE

What next for Greece?

ARAB REVOLUTIONS

Egypt's year of revolution

DOSSIER

USA: Greece

Mexico:
Environnement
Blockupy Frankfurt
Netherlands
Sri Lanka:
Italy:
Algeria:
Quebec
Malvinas
Argentina:

France
Spanish state
Pakistan
France:
Arab Revolutions
Argentina
Algeria
Mexico
Philippines
Japan

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International Viewpoint, the monthly English-language magazine of the Fourth International, is a window to radical alternatives world-wide, carrying reports, analysis and debates from all corners of the globe. Correspondents in over 50 countries report on popular struggles, and the debates that are shaping the left of tomorrow.

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CONTENTS

Mexico: — Populist candidate Lopez Obrador moves up in polls as his Keynesian impulses give way to appeals to business	P4
Environment — The issues in Rio+20: Policy statement of the organization committee of the People's Summit	P9
USA: — The Murder of Trayvon Martin	P11
Blockupy Frankfurt — From Frankfurt to Europe	P15
Netherlands — Dutch Socialist defenders of welfare state leading polls	P17
USA: — What Choice in 2012?	P19
Sri Lanka: — Speech in Jaffna at joint opposition protest on 1 May 2012	P23
Italy: — Transforming popular anger into political change	P25
Algeria: — Declaration on parliamentary elections	P26
Greece — What next for Greece?	P27
USA: — The war on women—and us all	P34
Quebec — Defiant Quebec students reject shabby government offer	P37
Malvinas — The Falklands oil rush and Thatcher's War	P40
Argentina: — Falklands fever and anti-imperialism	P44
Greece — The effects of the crisis on daily life	P46
France — Front national: Predictable progress, a danger to fight	P51
Spanish state — M15: A look toward the future	P53
USA: — The Gender of Occupy Wall Street	P55
Pakistan — The symbolic sentence on Prime Minister Gilani: what does it mean? – Pakistani capitalist state is in a mess	P59
France: — Don't let Le Pen represent the opposition	P61
Arab Revolutions — Egypt's year of revolution	P64
France: — Front de gauche: and now?	P70
Argentina — In defence of Argentina's right to recover its energy wealth.	P73
Greece — Seismic election results	P75
Spanish State — A strike with 100 per cent participation in the Basque Country	P77
Pakistan — Urgent Appeal : Death threat to activists imprisoned in Pakistan	P79
Algeria — The PST in the legislative campaign	P82
Mexico — Work begins on building a new focus for Mexican workers	P86
Philippines — Philippines in times of disasters: The State - In the Eye of the Storm	P88
Philippines — Revolutionary Mass Movements: Who shall Build and Strengthen?	P90
Japan — Rise of "Hashism" – From Osaka to the National Political Arena	P92
Quebec — Students call for a social strike in solidarity with their struggle	P96

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MEXICO:

Populist candidate Lopez Obrador moves up in polls as his Keynesian impulses give way to appeals to business

DAN LA BOTZ

López Obrador, the former mayor of Mexico City and the candidate who almost won the last presidential election in 2006, had at the beginning of the current race been running behind the two other leading contenders for the Mexican presidency. Now he has moved up into a tie for second place with an estimated 26 percent of the projected vote. Tied with him in second place, also with 26 percent of the vote, is Josefina Vázquez Mota, former cabinet minister in the government of President Felipe Calderón and standard bearer of the National Action Party (PAN). Enrique Peña Nieto, former governor of the State of Mexico and candidate of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) leads with 45 percent. Also in the race, Gabriel Quadri de la Torre, of the New Alliance Party (PANAL), a party created by the Mexican Teachers Union (el SNTE), trails far behind with only about 1 percent of the vote.

Neoliberalism vs. Keynesianism

López Obrador, a populist who until very recently espoused Keynesian positions, is running against three pro-business candidates with neoliberal programs, that is, conservative programs aiming to promote business. While PRI candidate Peña Nieto talks more than the other two pro-business candidates about a state with a sense of social responsibility, he, the PAN candidate Vázquez Mota, and the PANAL candidate Quadri de la Torre all argue that

Mexico's problems will be solved by completing the economic reform carried out over the last twenty years in order to create a free market in which capitalism can flourish. In particular, these three candidates would all privatize the Mexican oil industry and the electric power industry, and while the PAN attacks Peña Nieto for having blocked labor law "reform," all of these conservative candidates are committed to restricting and weakening the power of the labor unions. The labor law "reform" would among other things make it easier to fire workers, harder to organize unions or to change unions, and harder to strike.

Quadri, the candidate of the Mexican Teachers Union's political party, has adopted a surprisingly hardline, pro-business platform—or perhaps not so surprising given the checkered political history of the woman who gives him his marching orders, Elba Esther Gordillo head of the Teachers Union. Over the past few years she bounced back and forth between the PRI and PAN until she seemed to wear out her welcome with both parties, even though her million-member union represents a huge army of potential door-knockers. Vázquez Mota, the first woman candidate of one of the major parties, has descended in the polls, presumably because of her association with the current Calderón administration which has overseen the persistent economic crisis and the slaughter of 50,000 in the drug war, and will probably continue downward. In the next few weeks then, it is likely that this will be a contest between Enrique Peña Nieto of the Institutional Revolutionary (Party), the governor of the State of Mexico best remembered for his heavy-handed repression of the Atenco protestors a few years ago,

and López Obrador. The key issue in Mexico, as in the United States and Europe these days, will be the economy.

López Obrador Abandons his Keynesian Program

While best known as mayor of Mexico City for his public works programs and his support for old-age pensions, it now seems that López Obrador's candidate Keynesian impulses have been inhibited by his appeal to big business. Even in his days as mayor he worked closely with Mexico's richest businessman, Carlos Slim Helu, on the renovation of the city's historic center and the accompanying gentrification. Still, what distinguished him in Mexican politics was his populist rhetoric, his mass following among the poor, and his advocacy of government intervention in the economy. Among all the candidates, he is still the only one who opposes the privatization of the oil and energy industries and stands against the proposed labor law "reform."

In a recent article in the Mexico City daily *El Universal* [1], he described his program, in the traditional language of Mexican nationalism, as a tripartite development model, bringing together the state, the private sector, and the social sector. He wants in particular to support "national industry," to develop the backward South of the country, to build more gasoline refineries in order to escape dependence on foreign energy corporations, and to improve agriculture. He opposes monopolies and puts forward an ideal of "free competition." His specific platform planks for improving the economy and creating jobs, however, are strikingly conservative:

- To respect the autonomy of the Banco de México, the country's central bank.
- To maintain macroeconomic policies aimed at keeping down inflation.
- To reduce the current government budget by 15% by lowering salaries of high level officials and reducing waste.
- To take on no further government debt.

- To create no new taxes.

López Obrador's economic program is entirely utopian, hoping to find enough money for social programs and economic expansion simply by cutting the fat, taking away the politicians' perks, enforcing the tax laws, and ending corruption. The plan to cut government by 15% through these measures is either incredibly naïve or simply a disguised austerity program. The idea that there will be no new taxes, that is, no taxes on Mexico's billionaires, their corporations, and their profits means that the country's enormous economic inequalities will continue, and condemns tens of millions to continued poverty.

At times it seems that López Obrador has two faces and each one spouts a different economic plan, a populist and Keynesian plan for his base of working people and a conservative, pro-business plan for the media and the business community. The problem is that such duplicity only makes him appear unreliable to the elites and unfaithful to the people, and both are too smart to be fooled.

How one wonders, can this be what is left of the Mexican left? Why is there no socialism in Mexico? After all, there once was . . . wasn't there?

The Legacy of a One-Party State

The candidates and parties on the ballot in this election all have their roots in the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1940 and the state that it created. The Mexican Revolution of 1910 was fundamentally a revolt of peasants and workers against their conditions, but after the defeat of their movement led by Francisco "Pancho" Villa and Emiliano Zapata, it was the modernizing bourgeoisie led by Venustiano Carranza which founded the modern Mexican state. Following a political crisis and the assassination in 1928 of former president &AA-CUTEIvario Obregón, President Plutarco Elías Calles transformed the country's revolutionary caudillos and political leaders into the Mexican Nationalist Party (PRN), founding the one-party state.

The failure of Carranza, Obregón and Calles to solve the country's social questions led eventually to a populist movement in the 1930s led by President Lázaro Cárdenas who finally distributed land to the peasants, recognized the labor unions, and nationalized the foreign oil companies. At the same time, Cárdenas completed the construction of the all-encompassing one-party state by incorporating peasants, workers, public employees and other popular sectors into the ruling party.

Cárdenas changed the name of the party to the Party of the Mexican Revolution and adopted the slogan "For a Socialist Mexico." The Mexican state that emerged from the thirty year revolutionary process was, however, a capitalist state with a mixed economy and predicated upon tariff barriers to protect the national market. During the following decades, the ruling party—now called the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)—created a welfare state that provided education and health care and subsidized food, fuel and housing costs for low income people. The PRI's authoritarian, capitalist, welfare state began to run into problems in the 1960s and 1970s, just like the rest of the capitalist world. In Mexico, the crisis took the form of a national debt that multiplied astronomically. While its booming petroleum industry allowed it to continue to expand into the early 1980s, by 1985 the old system failed when Mexico could no longer pay its foreign debt.

The Rise of the PRI Technocrats

The breakdown of the old system which had lasted for two generations, from 1940 to 1980, led to a division within the PRI over economic policy. A new group emerged as the leadership of the party, the technocrats, as they were called, led by Miguel de la Madrid. The new leaders, educated at Ivy League schools in the United States, and under pressure from the United States and from international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, abandoned Mexico's nationalist model. Embracing the "Washington Consensus" as it was known, they

aimed to liberalize Mexico's economy and to bring the country into the world market.

When the technocrats took over the PRI, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, son of the former president Lázaro Cárdenas, created the Democratic Current on the basis of the party's old nationalist and social democratic political ideals. Cárdenas ran for president in 1988, but the election was almost surely stolen, and Carlos Salinas assumed the Eagle Throne. Under his presidency (1988-1994) Mexico sold off 1,000 state-owned industries and enterprise, permitted the sale of the collective land owned by peasant communities, and opened up the country to foreign investment. Salinas also ended the model of universal social security coverage, turning instead to a more limited program targeted at the most needy. Finally, Salinas negotiated with Canadian prime minister Brian Mulroney and with U.S. presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

The PAN in Power

The Institutional Revolutionary Party, now led by the technocrats, continued to run the country until Vicente Fox, the businessman candidate of the National Action Party (PAN), won the presidential election in 2000. Fox received votes from many on the right and on the left who wanted to end the one-party state, but there was a striking continuity between the PRI technocrats and Fox's PAN. The Mexican government not only continued its pro-business policies, but also reached a *modus vivendi* with the PRI's labor unions, allowing them to continue to dominate the country's workers movement so long as they carried on with their support for the government's economic policies as they had done under the one-party state.

Calderón continued the PANista's economic counter-revolution while carrying out a war on two fronts. On the one hand, he virtually destroyed the Mexican Electrical Workers union which continues to fight for its life, and battled the Mexican Miners Union, and on the other hand he mobilized 40,000

troops and tens of thousands of Federal police in a frontal assault on the drug cartels, a war that has taken 50,000 lives, left 10,000 missing, and caused thousands of others to flee their homes.

López Obrador—The Struggle Continued

2006 saw a bitter election battle fraught with charges of violations of election law and fraud in which the incumbent president Felipe Calderón defeated Andrés Manuel López Obrador. López Obrador and his multitudes of followers filled the plazas and boulevards of Mexico City to protest the fraud, paralyzing the center of the city for days, but ultimately Calderón took office. López Obrador, however, refused to recognize the official decision of the election authorities and in a ceremony in the national plaza proclaimed himself the "legitimate president of Mexico." He then spent six years traveling throughout the country and building organizations of his supporters in every state and virtually every significant city, town or village in the country. A few months ago he brought those followers together into his own organization, the Movement for National Renovation (MORENA), so that he did not have to rely upon the fractious and corrupt Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD).

A Country without a Socialist Alternative

López Obrador then is the candidate of the left, but not a socialist candidate. While at one time far left socialist and communist parties appeared on the ballot in Mexico, those alternatives are no longer an option to Mexican voters. During the 1970s, Mexican Communists and other leftists created political parties that gradually gathered an increasing percentage of the vote, eventually amounting to about 15% in national elections. While the Unified Socialist Party of Mexico (PSUM), the former Communist Party, got most of the vote, the Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers Party did well when it ran the first woman, Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, for President in 1982. Within a few years, however, all of that was gone.

When Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas left the PRI and founded the PRD in 1989, most Mexican leftists organizations of all stripes—pro-Soviet Communists, Maoists, Guevarists, Trotskyists and revolutionary nationalists—dissolved and joined the new organization. Other small leftist parties gradually lost their electoral support and finally their ballot status. The PRD subsequently evolved into a traditional electoral party, riddled with the factions of its founders, and corrupted by its involvement in the Mexican political system. Today López Obrador is the candidate of the PRD and two other political parties, the Workers Party (PT) of Maoist Origin, and the Citizens Movement (formerly the Convergence Party) with its roots in the PRI. He relies in large measure on MORENA to carry out his campaign.

During the 2006 election, López Obrador, with his radical populist rhetoric and his mass following among working people, was branded by the corporate media as the Hugo Chávez of Mexico, and portrayed as a violent revolutionary who would bring havoc and chaos to the country. Burned by that experience, during this campaign he has moderated his rhetoric, reached out to the business class, and sought to placate the corporate commentators. Finally he jettisoned his Keynesian economic program, replacing it with the shibboleths of the global corporate elite.

What's Left of the Left

Mexico actually still has a left made up of small Marxist parties, social movements, and radical labor union activists. Many of them, however, also signed on early to support López Obrador, believing that his political program and his social base of workers and peasants disillusioned with the establishment represented the best hope for the left. One wonders what they think now as their candidate wends his way to the right promising to reduce the federal budget, to take on no new debt, and not to raise taxes. Some outside left observers continue to be optimistic [2], but it is hard to see the basis for this. The rightward drift of López Obrador, carrying

along his socialist supporters, represents a serious problem for the Mexican left. The problem will be even greater if he loses, which is likely unless things change rapidly in the next month and a half.

May 19, 2012

From New Politics:

<http://newpol.org/node/629>

The issues in Rio+20: Policy statement of the organization committee of the People's Summit

The real structural cause of the crises is capitalism, with its classical and new forms of domination, that concentrates wealth and products social inequalities, unemployment, violence against people, criminalization of those who denounce it. The current production and consummation system – represented and imposed by corporations, financial markets and governments – products and accelerates global warming, hunger and malnutrition, extinction of forests and biological, social and cultural diversity, chemical contamination, drinking water depletion, oceans acidification, land grabbing and commodification of all areas of life in towns and countries.

The « Green economy », contrary to what its name suggests, is one more stage of capitalistic accumulation. Nothing in the « Green economy » questions or substitutes the economy based on extraction of fossil fuels, or the models of consumption and industrial production. On the contrary, this economy opens new territories to the economy that exploits people and environment, increasing the myth that unlimited economic growth is possible.

The failed economic model that has been dressed in green, aims at submitting all the vital cycles of nature to the market's rules and to the domination of technology, privatization and commodification of nature and of its vital functions, as well as traditional knowledge, strengthening speculative financial markets through carbon markets, environmental services, compensations for biodiversity and REDD+ mechanism (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation)

Transgenics, agro-toxics, terminator technology, agro-fuels, nanotechnology, synthetic biology, artificial life, geo-engineering and nuclear energy, among others, are described as "technological solutions" to the natural limits of the planet and the multiple crises, even though they do not address the real causes that trigger them.

Furthermore, the expansion of agro-industrial food system, one of the biggest causes of climate, environmental, economic and social crises, is promoted, deepening speculation about food, and promoting the interests of global agribusiness industry at the expense of local, peasant, family and indigenous peoples production, thus affecting the health of all.

Negotiation strategy in the Rio+20 Conference, is for some rich-country governments to propose a regression from the principles agreed at Rio 92, such as the principle of common but differentiated responsibility, the precautionary principle, the right to information and participation. They threaten the rights already acquired, such as the right of indigenous peoples, the right of peoples and nations and farmers, the right to water, the rights of working men and women, migrant rights, the right to food, housing, the city, the rights of youth and women, the right to health concerning sexuality and reproduction, education and cultural rights.

There are attempts to establish such Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which will be used to promote "Green economy", weakening further the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), already inadequate.

The formal process proposes to implement forms of global environmental governance, which role would be to administer and facilitate this "green econo-

my" through the World Bank and other financial institutions, public or private, national and international, which would result in a new cycle of debt and structural adjustment dressed in green. There can not be democratic global governance without ending the influence of corporation on the United Nations.

We reject this process and are appealing to all to come and strengthen demonstrations and constructions of alternatives in the whole world.

We struggle for a radical change of the current model of production and consumption, strengthening our right to expand with alternative models based on the various realities experienced by the peoples, truly democratic, respecting collective and human rights and in harmony with nature and social and environmental justice.

We affirm the collective construction of new paradigms based on food sovereignty, agro-ecology and non-profit economy, struggle for life and public property, on the affirmation of all threaten rights such as rights to land and territory, the right to the city, the right of nature and future generations, and on the elimination of all forms of colonialism and imperialism.

We appeal to all peoples of the world to support the Brazilian people's struggle against the destruction of one of the most important legal frameworks to protect forests (Forestry Code), which opens the door to increased deforestation in favor of the interests of agribusiness and strengthening of monoculture; also to support the fight against the implementation of Belo Monte mega water project, which affects the survival and life of forest peoples and Amazonian biodiversity.

We renew our invitation to take part in the People's Summit to be held from June 15 to 23 in Rio de

Janeiro. This is an important step in global struggles for social and environmental justice that we have built since Rio 92, particularly from Seattle, WSF, Cochabamba, where struggles have been amplified against the WTO and the FTAA, for climate justice and against the G20. We also include the mass mobilizations and popular struggles as Occupy, the Indignados, the struggle of Chilean students and the Arab spring.

We appeal to all global mobilizations happening on 5 June (International Environment Day), 18 June against the G20 (which will focus on "green growth") and 20 June for the March of the People's Summit in Rio de Janeiro and worldwide, for social and environmental justice, against "green economy", commodification of life and nature and for commons and rights of peoples.

For Unity and Mobilization of peoples

For Life and Commons, social and environmental Justice

Against Commodification of Nature and « Green economy »

Rio de Janeiro, 12th of May 2012

The International Coordination Group (CG) of the People's Summit for social and environmental justice

The International Coordination Group (CG) of Civil Society Facilitating Committee at Rio+20 (CFSC) in the People's Summit is made up of 35 networks, social movements and organizations from 13 different countries. Its representatives work together at National CG (with 40 represented networks) for methodological and political coordination of the People's Summit, parallel and critical event for Rio +20, which will gather millions of people to "Aterro do Flamengo" from 15 to 23 June..

USA:

The Murder of Trayvon Martin

MALIK MIAH ·

Marches, rallies and the defiant wearing of hoodies are forcing the authorities to take actions that would not have occurred only months ago with the murder of a young African American male — and the demand for justice has become an international campaign.

History and reality are rolled into the response to the murder of Trayvon Martin — mobilizations for justice on one hand, and racist/rightist backlash on the other. Martin, like Emmett Till in the 1950s, has become the rallying cry for resistance to the far right's goal to put us — Blacks, women, gays, unionists — back in our place. [The case of Emmett Till, the 14-year-old from Chicago tortured and murdered in 1955 while visiting relatives in Mississippi, became a symbol for the Civil Rights struggle — ed.]

Every Black family knows full well that the lives of Black boys and men are valued less than their white counterparts. More white youths than Blacks wear hoodies, but cops and vigilantes rarely if ever see a white boy in a hoodie as suspicious or a threat. Racial profiling of Black boys and men is so taken for granted that many African Americans internalize and accept it.

What happened on February 26 in Sanford, a Florida town of 50,000, has galvanized Blacks and the larger public because it wasn't a cop who murdered an innocent boy "Walking While Black," but a self-proclaimed neighborhood vigilante — who told the cop, "it was self-defense" and walked away a free man. There was no yellow tape, no interview of possible witnesses and definitely no assumption that the shooter, George Zimmerman, could be telling a lie.

Rightwing Backlash

Many on the far right initially were caught off guard by the community response demanding justice. But when civil rights leaders and the first Black president showed empathy with the slain boy's parents, their tone quickly shifted.

The victim was now at fault for wearing a hoodie — and President Obama was an "instigator" of racial divisions. Radio talk shows and Fox "News" launched a smear campaign to turn the victim into the criminal. The Zimmerman family and friends took up the defense of the vigilante as the "victim" of Martin's aggression. His brother said if he didn't shoot Martin, George Zimmerman would be dead or a mental vegetable.

Responding to this blatantly racist campaign, Sybrina Fulton, Trayvon's mother, told a news conference, "They have killed my son. And now they are trying to kill his reputation." This came after the local media reports of Trayvon's suspension from school and other minor incidents, such as writing graffiti, having nothing to do with his murder.

The facts are clear. Trayvon Martin, age 17, was walking home from a local 7-Eleven store with a bag of candy and ice tea in his father's neighborhood in Sanford, a city in the Greater Orlando area. He had done so many times without incident. Trayvon was wearing his hood up to protect himself from the rain.

A self-appointed neighborhood "watch captain," George Zimmerman, 28, a light-skin Latino, decided Martin was suspicious looking. He called a 911 Dispatcher who told him to stand down until the police showed up. Zimmerman, with a concealed gun, instead got out of his SUV vehicle and stalked

the innocent Black teenager. A confrontation occurred and Martin was shot dead.

When the cops arrived Zimmerman used a 2005 "Stand Your Ground" law that legalizes vigilantism if you declare a threat to your life. The police took his word that it was "self-defense" and he was allowed to go free. Zimmerman went home and for nearly two weeks lived his normal life. He expressed no remorse for his actions or issued any sympathy to Martin's family.

For three days the corpse of Martin lay at the Medical Examiner morgue, supposedly tagged as a John Doe. Yet the cops reportedly had Trayvon's ID, knew when Martin was born (1995) and had his cell phone. To the city and police, Martin was just another Black person in the morgue. African Americans in Sanford have always complained about inferior treatment and injustice at the hands of the cops.

Why did the police or medical examiner not contact Martin's father or mother, who were frantically looking for their missing son? They turned to the public and asked: Why wasn't Zimmerman charged? Why no homicide investigation?

Weeks of marches by civil rights groups, solidarity rallies in other cities, student walkouts and actions, hoodies worn by the Miami Heat basketball team and an intense national media spotlight (particularly by Black reporters) led to dribbles of information becoming known. This included the fact that the local prosecutor had wanted to file charges against Zimmerman for manslaughter. The state attorney general overruled him.

Mass pressure forced the appointment of a special prosecutor, who announced the arrest and second-degree murder indictment of Zimmerman on April 11.

License to Kill

Zimmerman and the police claimed Martin broke Zimmerman's nose, pushed him to the ground and

threatened to kill him. Martin, who weighed considerably less than Zimmerman, had no weapon.

As the news spread about the lack of justice, the Black community became outraged. The focus first centered on racial profiling — a common fear among Black men. Black parents already warn their sons growing up about cops being suspect of them. Now they must warn of legally armed vigilantes. (How many white mothers, sisters or daughters ever worry that their loved ones will be shot for "Walking While White"?)

The 2005 "Stand Your Ground" law says that "a person who is not engaged in an unlawful activity and who is attacked . . . has no duty to retreat and has the right to stand his or her ground and meet force with force, including deadly force if he or she reasonably believes it is necessary to do so to prevent death or great bodily harm."

Florida's legislative body adopted the law by an overwhelming majority of Democratic and Republican legislators. Republican Governor Jeb Bush signed it. Similar laws have been adopted by 23 other states.

The law is based on English Common law — the "Castle" doctrine, which states that everyone has the right to use deadly force to protect yourself and family if threatened in your home. The "Stand Your Ground" goes much further by allowing that self-defense argument to be used in any situation, and anywhere.

The police opposed the "Stand Your Ground" law since it put them in an awkward position legally of having to accept the killer's word after the victim is dead. Typically, as in the murder of Trayvon Martin, there is no serious investigation.

The results of the Florida law reveal its impact. According to the Tampa Bay Times, in the 130 cases it surveyed in which the law was invoked, 70% of the cases involved a fatality. A majority did not go to trial. The newspaper found the law used to justify shootings resulting from fights between neighbors. The state attorney noted that even "Gangsters

are using this law. The law is being used to excuse violence."

The lackluster investigation and failure to charge Zimmerman is par for the course. Most evidence was never processed at the scene of the killing. It is a clear travesty of justice. Of course, as every Black person knows, if Martin had been the stalker and shot Zimmerman, he would have been arrested and charged with murder.

What Zimmerman did was in line with his view that a person who is Black walking in "his" neighborhood is suspicious. Was race a factor? Clearly so, by his own comments that day. He sees a Black youth in a hoodie. Ignoring police orders, he initiates a confrontation.

Whether Martin fought back (his right of self-defense!) is irrelevant to the fact that at the end, the stalker murdered him.

The response of his parents, the Black community and national organizations like the NAACP and other civil rights leaders has changed the equation. There are Trayvon Martins murdered on a regular basis — many by cops, many by whites, or Latinos or other Black people. There is a culture of fear and suspicion toward Black men — more than toward any other ethnic group (including Arabs and Muslims).

Zimmerman's action sparked so much outrage because of how it happened, and the shield provided by the 2005 law.

The politics of racism and hatred — institutionalized and deeply woven into U.S. culture and white-supremacist ideology — adds fuel to the debate. When President Obama said that if he had a son he would look like Trayvon, the far right went ballistic. But a fact is a fact.

NRA and ALEC

The underlying truth is that the far right has been on a determined drive to roll back social gains of Blacks, women and labor since the 1970s. Rightwingers never supported the New Deal, the

social safety net or civil rights laws. Their view of "liberty and freedom" is the privileges of the wealthy, white skin and male domination.

It's not a surprise that the response of the right to Trayvon Martin's murder, once they got their racial bearings, was to blast the president, civil rights leaders and the liberal media for daring to talk about a local incident as a case of racial profiling and institutional racism.

The right does not want to discuss the big picture, because it exposes their organized agenda to roll back progress. The architecture of the "Stand Your Ground" law is an example of the broader game plan.

The conservative think tanks advocating the overturn of health care reform, a women's right to contraceptives and abortion, Black civil rights and unions' collective bargaining rights wrote the legislation for the state legislators. The Florida law spread to 23 states in a few years because of this coordinated effort.

Two prominent organizations have pushed these laws — the National Rifle Association (NRA) and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). The NRA seeks to make concealed weapons' permits available and applicable across state lines, and even in schools and workplaces.

ALEC is the reactionaries' brain trust. It writes the laws so legislators don't have to think at all. It is funded by major corporations (Exxon Mobil and UPS, for example) and billionaires like the Koch brothers.

ALEC also drafted the union-busting legislation against public workers in Wisconsin and other states. It works closely with rightwing groups that seek to reverse decades of precedents on basic rights.

There are no comparable groups on the liberal left playing the same role. Thus liberals have rolled over even on issues that they support such as gun control.

The Central Lesson: Organize

African Americans are hardest hit because their community depends heavily on the social safety net, unions and basic democratic rights. It took a Civil War for Blacks to be recognized as U.S. citizens and then another century to gain the right to vote and legal equality. African Americans have suffered as second class citizens for most of their history. They know that progress can be eroded if not reversed.

The significance of the movement to win justice for Trayvon Martin is not only to prosecute the vigi-

lante killer George Zimmerman, but to shine the light of truth on cops and others who shoot Black men, attack women and bust unions across the country.

The central lesson for those under attack is to organize mass action to pressure the powers to be. We do not live in the mythical post-racial, color blind society depicted in conservative propaganda. Expecting federal or state government officials to "do the right thing" without that organized force will never succeed.

<http://www.solidarity-us.org/node/3578>

From Frankfurt to Europe

NATASCIA CIRIMELE ·

The severe and blanket repression by the German police did not stop the mobilization. On the one hand, their aim of preventing possible blockades was not achieved, for on Friday the whole centre became a theatre of dozens of actions and sit-ins.

On the other hand, it was evident that their main aim was both symbolic – to defend the head-quarters of financial power from a possible siege; and political – to prevent a possible unification of the protest movements across Europe. It was a political message, delivered by the German police: protest is permitted only within the boundaries established by those who are in power; every other form of protest will be countered by whatever means necessary.

Blockupy Frankfurt has been seen by many organizations and networks in Europe as an important moment in the continental mobilization.

The mobilization was indeed important and has had results. But it certainly fell short of what was possible and what was needed. The German left (and even more the European left) had a strong presence only in the demo on Saturday, underestimating the action days of Thursday and Friday (when only the most militant sections took part in the actions, and the apart from the radical left there little sign of the trade union and political organizations). Their absence limited the impact of the actions and facilitated the police repression.

Blockupy was mainly composed by young people, students, precarious workers from different parts of Europe. As in the USA with Occupy, or in the Arab revolts, this phase of the crisis is characterized by a new generation in revolt. A generation whose present and future are more and more uncertain

and precarious. A generation that in the last few years has come to understand that the wealth and sense of comfort promised by globalization and by neoliberal ideology are mere illusions. Now the illusion has shattered and the young people are in rebellion – against a system that excludes them from decision making processes.

They do not identify with the parties who are too distant from their real needs and often accomplices of crisis and austerity politics. They do not feel represented by traditional trade unions that are still incapable of confronting the challenges imposed by the transformations of the labour market. But nevertheless, they don't keep quiet, they organize themselves and represent themselves, take to the streets and experiment with new forms of politics, of protest, of organization and of strikes.

Frankfurt has not only been a space for protest but also for relaunching European networks, trying to go beyond the model of the European Social Forums – largely in crisis – starting from the struggles and social movements, focussing on the critique of capitalism (sometimes in a fully conscious way, sometimes in the rather "instinctive" way of the "99%" that is protesting) and on the clear and firm refusal to pay the debt and the austerity policies – as also "Atenei in Rivolta" and the campaign "Rivolta il debito" are doing in Italy.

The slogans were certainly not those of "growth now" wanted by the European social democracy and its confused allies, but much more radical ones.

We want to start from here, to invest in the building of an European (but not only), anticapitalist space, to participate and contribute to the creation and consolidation of transnational networks capable of developing a common language, contents, aims and agenda – starting with Italy, to build both

a big, broad movement against crisis and debt, and at the same time a new anticapitalist space, capable	of developing international networks that focus on the need for a renewal of class struggle.
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NETHERLANDS

Dutch Socialist defenders of welfare state leading polls

ALEX DE JONG ·

After over a month of negotiating the three parties that made up the coalition were unable to reach an agreement. This coalition was an alliance of two governing parties, the free-market right-wing liberal VVD and the conservative CDA, supported by the xenophobic right-wing party PVV, lead by Geert Wilders, that stayed outside the government. The PVV combines a neo-liberal economic agenda with anti-immigrant and especially anti-Muslim ideas. However, the PVV also uses populist demagoguery, posing as the defender of certain social rights, to attract voters who feel threatened by the economic crisis and neo-liberal policies.

After supporting a coalition that has implemented 18 billion euros of cuts through such measures as raising the retirement age to 67 years, Wilders pulled out when negotiating over another 12 billion euros in cuts. This was a reaction to polls predicting heavy electoral losses for the PVV, pushing Wilders to again emphasize his populist image.

Only a few days after the fall of the coalition, a slightly modified version of the austerity package was accepted anyway by a majority in parliament. Except from the VVD and CDA the new cuts were supported by three other parties, including the Greens (GroenLinks). Although coming from a fusion of the Communist party and socialist and progressive parties in the early nineties, GroenLinks has evolved into a more and more liberal direction the last few years. The new austerity package includes raising the cost of parts of health care, an earlier introduction of the raised age of retirement, further liberalization of the labor market, making it

easier for employers to fire people, and an increase of the standard VAT rate.

Pressure on the government parties to introduce this new austerity package was high; without it, the Dutch budget deficit was going to grow bigger than three percent of the Gross Domestic Product. This was unacceptable for the CDA and VVD: in the European Union, the Dutch have consistently taken a hard line in favor of austerity. Together with the German government, the Dutch have insisted on drastic cuts in order to meet the standard that a country's deficit should never be more than three percent of its GDP. Most of the Dutch political parties insist that austerity is needed to lower the public debt (which was 66 percent of GDP last year) as an answer to the economic crisis and have supported the European Stability Mechanism.

Erosion of traditional parties

The collapse of the coalition was a new step in the years long process of erosion of support for the traditional government parties in the Netherlands, like the CDA and the social-democratic Labour Party, the PvdA. The CDA, once the most influential party in the country, is in a crisis caused by disintegrating electoral support and the lack of a clear perspective. Meanwhile, the PvdA has been unable to make itself visible as the largest opposition party and is divided between people who want to continue on its social liberal course, comparable to the British Labour Party or the German SPD, and those who want a 'return to its social democratic roots'. On the far right side of the political spectrum, Wilders' PVV has grown rapidly since its foundation in 2005 and is now the third largest party in parliament. The PVV is now using nationalist and

populist rhetoric against the EU in an, according to early polls, relatively successful attempt to recover ground it lost during its time as a supporter of the government.

The most remarkable development, and the most positive sign for the left, on the Dutch parliamentary scene is the growth of the Socialist Party (SP). Originally founded as a maoist party in the seventies, the SP has evolved into the major force of the Dutch left, which has attracted increasing support for its anti-neoliberal positions and defense of social security. Numerous polls predict that the SP could become the largest party and lead the next government. It is likely that the SP will surpass the traditional left party, the PvdA. It remains unsure what the SP will be prepared and able to do this unprecedented support. Its growth is not yet matched by a corresponding increase in social struggles or the social roots of a left wing current in Dutch society. The Dutch trade-unions are going through a process of reorganization that has affected their ability to resist the attacks and there are no other strong social movements challenging the right-wing course of the government.

Without doubt, it will be difficult for the SP to form an alliance with other parties without heavily compromising its positions. The most likely ally of the SP is the PvdA that, under pressure of the growth of the socialists, has made a cautious turn to the left but even together they will not have a majority in parliament.

The rise of parties on the left and right flanks of traditional parliamentary politics has put strong pressure on the usual practice of consensus-oriented Dutch politics, the so-called 'poldermodel'. This model has served to de-politicize fundamental social questions by bringing the mainstream right- and left together in discussions in which neoliberal principles were taken for granted and differences of opinion between them were often different opinions on how to best implement these principles. Over two decades of such unquestioned acceptance of neoliberal policies by shifting coalitions has alienated many people from the mainstream parties. It is especially the PvdA that has lost support because of this. Part of the votes of people who are dissatisfied with established politics go to the nationalist right but the growth of the SP proves many people, instead of blaming immigrants, wish for a social solutions to the economic crisis.

USA:

What Choice in 2012?

AGAINST THE CURRENT EDITORS ·

Heading up the Republican side with his trusty Etch-A-Sketch, presidential candidate Mitt Romney will be trying to simultaneously erase both his "moderate" past, and his ties to a party platform that will be crafted to appease the hardcore religious and don't-tax-the-rich right wing. Romney can run but he can't really hide, either from the influence of the extreme right — which may demand veto power over the vice-presidential choice — or from the well-known fact that his one and only core political principle is that he should be president.

Space doesn't permit us here to explore the politics of Romney's erstwhile rival Rick Santorum — the man who wants to get the government out of the corporate boardroom and put it back where it belongs, in your bedroom. But even after Santorum's withdrawal, the fact remains that the warring Republican factions, reactionary as they all are, really do despise each other. There's only one thing that can unite them: their hate-Obama campaign, which will escalate to new levels of racism and lying that we have barely even imagined yet.

The Biggest Lie already out there is that "Barack Obama wants America to be a European-style socialist country." One can only wish it were true (and that European nations one after another weren't driving their own economies into the ground by swallowing the austerity poison pill). The Romney-Republican model for "jobs and prosperity" amounts to pushing down as many working people to as close to minimum wage as possible.

President Barack Obama and the Democrats will be running on his signature accomplishments — saving Wall Street's butt, killing Osama bin Laden, and

the Affordable Health Care Act. When Republicans chant "Drill Baby Drill," the president responds that he's actually expanded fracking and offshore oil drilling while they just talk about it. He's also enlarged Bush's drone warfare, domestic surveillance and immigrant deportation programs — with 30,000 people now in detention centers pending deportation, often deprived of even basic medical care.

As for health care reform, whatever rulings the Supreme Court hands down in June will be driven by politics, thinly veiled by pretexts of Constitutional law. One way or the other, that decision will reignite the health care debate. (Over half of all union contract fights today involve cuts to employee and retiree health care.) But the option of a true national "single-payer" insurance program — the way to cut through all the crap of individual mandates, employer conscience exemptions from birth control, thousands of pages of incomprehensible rules and all the rest — was excluded from the beginning as "not realistic."

What an election year: Are we really ready for this?

Massive Attacks on Rights

There are fundamental issues at stake in 2012, but they're hardly what the capitalist parties' presidential and congressional campaigns will be about. It's the Occupy movement, since last fall, that's pushed them to the foreground and represents the hope of keeping them there. Then, the murder of Trayvon Martin sparked massive national and international outrage over the blatant targeting of Black youth. That mass pressure forced the state of Florida, belatedly, to arrest and indict George Zimmerman for second-degree murder.

The plain fact is that racial profiling, police and vigilante violence, the suppression of voting rights, and the destruction of working people's rights are all parts of a common pattern. The same rightwing legislative machinery producing "stand your ground" laws has also generated anti-worker legislation all over the United States. The exposure of the role of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) in writing the law that enabled Trayvon Martin's killer Zimmerman to claim "self-defense" is now forcing a number of major corporations to distance themselves from this vicious and shadowy organization.

The most critical questions facing our society can be briefly stated: (1) the domestic and global capitalist assault on working people's wages, living conditions and rights to basic social services; (2) an extreme attack on the most basic rights of women, African Americans and other people of color in the United States; and (3) the rising danger of new wars in the Middle East and Asia. (The electronic cutoff of Iranian banks from the international financial system could probably be interpreted as an act of war, should the Iranian regime feel pushed into a corner.)

By various means, the wishes of the majority of the U.S. population are effectively excluded from determining the outcome. Take, for example, the massive drive to block women's access to reproductive services, to disenfranchise huge sectors of people of color and the poor, and to block undocumented immigrants from employment, education, drivers' licenses and the necessities of life. These measures for the most part, certainly the most extreme ones, are in the hands of rightwing state legislatures that happily kowtow to the Koch Brothers, ALEC and the most bigoted elements of "Christian social conservatives."

The competing slogans of the capitalist parties – "restoring America's prosperity," "guaranteeing our future," "saving the middle class" and all the rest – are empty phrases deliberately crafted to hide their real programs. The living standards, job security and futures of the working class majority are under

severe pressure from the combined effects of the systemic crisis of capitalism and policy decisions driven by Wall Street at the expense of "the 99%." The parties don't advertise themselves as managers of social decline and austerity, but that's what they are – and that's why so much "political debate" is a series of mystifications and outright lies.

Politics of Austerity

The austerity drive is carried out on multiple levels, national, state and local, under the pretext of "fiscal necessity." The main political difference between the Republican and Democratic strategies – and it's a significant difference – amounts to whether the remnants of the once powerful organized labor movement should be utterly smashed, or rather enlisted as junior partners in the administration of austerity.

Thus Mitt Romney condemns the Obama administration's auto industry bailout on the basis that a "normal bankruptcy" could have produced a "healthier outcome" – by which he means, no doubt, an outcome with union contracts swept away and auto workers' wages at \$10 an hour or less. President Obama and his advisors can counter that there were no private investors to pick up GM and Chrysler's pieces, that government intervention was absolutely necessary and that the United Auto Workers leadership needed to be enlisted to cut the labor costs of new and future autoworkers in half.

Meanwhile, the plague of "right-to-work" laws and abolition of public workers' collective bargaining rights spreads through state legislatures, and (in the case of Michigan) municipal insolvencies bring down either a state-appointed "Emergency Manager" or, as the elites prefer, "consent agreements" where the local government participates in wiping out union contracts, slashing services and selling off public assets on the pretext of maintaining its "autonomy." (Dianne Feeley's article in this issue on the takeover of Detroit explores some of the details.)

How to Fight Back?

In all these cases, the obstacles to people using "the political process" to stop these atrocities are formidable — but the extreme nature of the assault on basic rights has provoked a most welcome response. In Wisconsin, Governor Walker faces a recall election. In Ohio, the bill stripping public workers' bargaining rights was defeated in a referendum last November, and repeal of a voter-suppression ID law is on the 2012 ballot (unless the legislature hastily repeals it first).

In Michigan, a series of petition drives have been launched to reverse the infamous "Emergency Manager" Public Act 4 and to preempt a bundle of anti-worker laws poised to be adopted by the Republican legislature.

The most promising of such efforts was the Millionaires Tax Initiative (MTI) in California, aimed at addressing the state's massive budget crisis and economic inequality. Sadly, it was sidelined by the refusal of the leadership of major unions, particularly the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), to back the campaign (see the report, in this issue, by Bill Balderston and Claudette Begin). Nonetheless, the MTI was a signal of "the 99 percent" becoming a potential force in politics, spearheaded by Occupy and the tens of millions of people the movement has inspired.

MTI illustrated the possibility and the necessity of Occupy's energy hooking up in the political arena with community, labor and insurgent social forces — not necessarily to elect candidates — and we anticipate that this kind of intervention will be part of the resurgence of Occupy.

We also know that there will be considerable tension between competing impulses — whether to take action around the critical issues of the moment, or to throw energy into working to save lesser-evil Democrats from another electoral debacle. In our view, the latter course is a dead-end strategy that only ensures choices more and more dismal with each succeeding electoral cycle. The question

for Occupy, for labor and for the civil rights and social movements remains, as it has for decades: how to forge a powerful independent force to break the logjam of the two corporate capitalist parties.

What Way Forward?

At best, democracy under capitalism allows people to exercise only very limited control over the conditions of our lives. Genuine democratic power requires replacing capitalism with workers' control of production, and a profound restructuring of the economy to meet human needs and to avert environmental catastrophe.

Within the existing system, the struggle to expand the limited democracy we have depends most crucially on independent politics, meaning parties and movements outside the parties and institutions that represent and answer to the capitalist ruling class (the "one percent.") To a greater extent than in most other capitalist states, the U.S. labor movement and its allies have remained trapped as pawns in the rulers' political structures.

In our view, the Occupy movement carries the seeds of the new mass independent political force that's desperately needed. There is no prospect that such a force will crystallize in the national electoral arena in 2012. If anything, the desperate urge that many activists feel to "defeat the right wing" will dilute Occupy's power, as they feel compelled to turn energy to reelecting the corporate centrist president Obama — not because he is still seen as a transformative political leader, but simply because the alternative looks so hideous.

So is there any choice? First and foremost, what matters most is activist struggle — fighting home foreclosures and blocking evictions, standing up for heroic immigrant youth defying the threat of deportation, working on ballot initiatives against the wave of laws attacking workers, the poor and the rights of women — much more than the decision for or against casting an individual "lesser-evil" vote.

At the same time, we do consider that a vote for progressive parties on the ballot — Green Party or socialist candidates in particular, or local independent candidates representing the struggles of the movements — represents an important symbolic call for the mass independent political force that will be needed to carry forward the struggle for democracy, against an increasingly brutal and repressive political order.

At this point, the campaigns of the Green Party and other potential alternatives to the capitalist parties haven't yet crystallized. We will follow these with interest as they develop. In any case, with all due recognition of the Occupy movement's uncertainties and difficulties as it emerges from the winter cold into the election blizzard of 2012, we proclaim with no hesitation: "Occupy Is Our Party."

SRI LANKA:

Speech in Jaffna at joint opposition protest on 1 May 2012

DHARMASIRI LANKAPELI ·

Firstly, at this historic rally I apologise to the people in the North for not being able to address them in the Tamil language, as well as for the inability to provide them my speech in Tamil translation.

I would like to mention that while this historic demonstration and rally of the joint opposition is taking place in Jaffna, leftist parties including the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and the Frontline Socialist Party (the breakaway wing of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) are celebrating May Day in a grand scale at the Price Park in Colombo under some common slogans:

- Equalise the minimum wage of the workers of the public and the private sectors at Rs12,500
- Provide a minimum cost-of-living allowance of Rs5000
- Gazette the value of the cost-of-living index at Rs280 per point
- Raise the minimum daily wage of the plantation worker to Rs500
- Provide an acceptable political solution to the national question
- Remove the military from civil administration in the North and East

I would also like to state that not only the government and the pro-government media, but some so-called members of the opposition strived to sabotage this rally. The success of this rally is a good lesson to all of them. For those who act like 'mini-Mahindas' while talking about Mr. Sajith Premadasa [1] as the opposition's alternative to Mahinda [Rajapakse], this is a slap across the face. This country does not need two 'Mahindas' [2].

I would like to tell you first that the joint opposition including the Tamil National Alliance is holding this historic protest rally today against the anti-democratic ways of Mahinda Rajapakse's government, particularly against the extreme suppression unleashed on the Tamil people in the North.

You can see that from Vavuniya to Jaffna there are more than 15 army brigades. There are also three or four security forces headquarters in the North alone. There is not space for the Tamil people even to breathe freely. It was not only that, thousands of people were buried in the land that they were born by the war; and now they face the horrible tragedy of losing all they own including home, property and other resources. People in the North have become inmates of an open air prison. This is a rally which demands an acceptable solution to the national question.

It is not only the people in the North who have become prisoners. Let me tell you an interesting story. Recently I had the chance to travel through the North to see the extent of destruction by the war. The vehicle we were travelling broke down and while waiting for it to be repaired, I walked a little further away from the vehicle. There were four or five youths further away. One of them came towards me and asked whether I was from the media. I thought that it was the end for me, because as an active street protestor against the government's suppression my name has been on top of their 'hit list'. At that moment I also remembered about the abductions by white vans.

"Sir, please write about us as well. We are called Ranaviru ('war heroes') but our status is lower than that of a wage-earner. A wage-earner has to work only 8 hours a day but we have to work 24 hours.

There is no way for us to take leave. We were given a tie. Rs450 was deducted from our salary for it. It is not even worth Rs200. What do we do with a tie? We were given a coin as a souvenir and Rs. 2500 was deducted from our salary as its worth. We were also told that any bank will accept the coin (if we needed to pawn it for quick cash). But no bank accepts it now. Sir, please write about these things," said that young man.

This is the reality. The soldiers thought of living harmoniously in that prosperous world which was to be created after the war, with their families. However, at present it is not only the people in the North who are prisoners – even these soldiers have become prisoners of the regime.

Today there is no freedom to raise dissenting political views; and no freedom of expression. This government has imposed oppression on all. When the workers protest, court procedures are used against them. Lalith Kumar Veeraraj and Kugan

Muruganandan [3] were abducted and still they are missing. The Uthayan [4] newspaper was set on fire. Media personnel are being assaulted and killed. Uthayan journalist, Kuganathan, was brutally assaulted near an army checkpoint.

Victory to the struggle of the joint opposition to attain a country with freedom and democracy for the people by removing this anti-people government which suppresses the workers and abducts those who hold opposing views!

On behalf of the Nava Sama Samaja Party, I salute all those who defied the conspiracies and the challenges to attend this rally in person. Jayawewa! [Victory for all!]

Jaffna – 1 May 2012

<http://transcurrents.com/news-views...>

Translated from Sinhala by Anasuya C. and edited by K. Govindan.

ITALY:

Transforming popular anger into political change

FLAVIA D'ANGELI ·

The "technocratic government", strengthened by bipartisan support from the two parliamentary fronts and in the absence of a real trade union opposition, has succeeded, in having a whole series of clearly anti-popular economic measures passed which even Berlusconi would not have been able to impose so clearly.

Thus, in a few months the government has imposed: a pensions reform which increases the age of retirement to 67 and cuts pensions?; a labour code reform which weakens the right to reinstatement for those who are unjustly dismissed (specified since 1969 by the labour code) and a cut in unemployment and social benefits; new reductions in public expenditure, notably on health and education; an increase in regressive taxes like VAT, the tax on fuel, electricity, water and gas, or housing tax, and so on.

This "miracle" has only been possible thanks to the climate of national unity built by the right and by the Democratic Party, and in particular by the president of the Republic, which has terrified the population with the "Greek?danger". This climate has led to the moderate left supporting the governmental recipes as the only way to avoid state default.

The Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL) has encountered many difficulties in hiding the tragic effects of government policies on the working and living conditions of workers, but it has neither the strength nor the will to free itself from the deadly embrace of "national responsibility", contenting itself with proposing amendments to the reforms.

However the convergent effects of the economic crisis, the policies of sacrifice imposed by the government, and the enormous discredit of a political system submerged by a series of corruption scandals (in a few weeks there have been accusations of theft of public funds against the Democratic Party, the Northern League and of course, Berlusconi's party) begin to weaken the popular confidence in the government.

This is shown by the spontaneous demonstrations by workers to defend article 18 of the Labour Code on conditions of dismissal, and by the success in the cantonal elections of the "citizen" lists like those promoted by the comedian Grillo, based on an anti-political sentiment. Thus, the polls begin to show the popularity of the government falling.

However all this has happened in the dramatic absence of a credible class based left, capable of responding to the popular discontent and above all transforming it into social struggle, and accompanying and promoting new forms of self-organisation and participation by the rank and file. The vertical crisis of the Italian radical left can only get worse as it remains without the real capacity to galvanise a broad social and political dynamic which can harvest the social anger, in particular that of youth, by abandoning the old political rituals and practices.

In such a complex situation the only chance of resistance and reconstruction of a new anti-capitalist left in the coming period is to build the whole social movement, helping every form of radicalisation and popular participation, starting from existing struggles.

ALGERIA:

Declaration on parliamentary elections

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT OF THE PST (SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY) ALGERIA ·

Faced with a dull campaign without real debates between the parties on different projects of society, after so many years of repression of political expression and repression of the social movement and in the absence of a concrete political alternative which takes up the demands of the workers and popular masses, the majority of Algerians have responded by abstention.

However, despite the contempt of the rulers, the police repression and the silence of the political parties, obsessed with the race for parliament, struggles and mobilisations for democratic, social and economic demands did not stop during this campaign, such as those of the teachers, the workers at Cevital or the Algiers metro, the clerks, the youth of Jijel and so on.

The official results, announced before even the completion of the operations of analysis and the drawing up of minutes and related items, which gave a crushing victory to the FLN, a long way ahead of its habitual allies the RND and MSP, are surreal and unacceptable. The mode of scrutiny, favouring the presidential alliance, as we wrote on April 1, 2012, imposes an "old majority" which is

one more in the minority and represents less than 15% of those registered to vote.

Beyond this fact, the violations recorded at a national scale, and noted by the CNSEL (the national commission for surveillance of the elections), such as preventing members of monitoring commissions and observers from political parties from entering many polling stations, the profusion of proxy votes par in astronomical proportions, the use of physical violence against candidates and observers, discredit these elections and the results proclaimed.

The PST participated in these elections without any illusions as we indicated throughout the campaign. These elections have constituted a tribune to publicise our political proposals and build our party. The echoes of the campaign of the PST and its call for a "rally of the left" were very positive and meetings with our political partners and the local committees of the social movement are being prepared.

For us the fight continues! We must prepare ourselves to wage new political battles, to federate the resistance and the struggles of the social movement to build the relationship of forces which will impose our democratic and social rights and a politics opposed to neo-liberalism and imperialism, a politics at the service of the workers and popular masses of our country.

GREECE

What next for Greece?

*The shadow of the Weimar Republic hangs over Greece:
The election results of May 6*

Andreas Kloké

The Greek parliamentary elections led to an earthquake-like change in the political landscape and to the end of the "two-party domination" by the conservative New Democracy (ND) and the social democratic PASOK. Compared to the 2009 elections, the ruling PASOK party fell from 43.9% to 13.2%, ND which is now the strongest party, won 18.9% (2009: 33.5%). On the other hand SYRIZA ("Coalition of the Radical Left") rose from 4.6 to 16.8% and has thus become the second largest party. The "Independent Greeks" led by P. Kammenos, a right-wing nationalist split from ND and founded in February 2012, a party that refuses to support the memoranda policies, are in the fourth place with 10.6%. The CPG (KKE), up to now the strongest left party, received 8.5% (2009: 7.5%). Chrysi Avgi ("Golden Dawn"), a gang of neo-Nazi Hitler nostalgia addicts gained 7.0% (441 000 votes, 2009: 0.3%), certainly the real "scoop" of these elections. The "Democratic Left" (DIMAR) is in the seventh place with 6.1%. DIMAR was founded in 2010 and is a right-wing split from SYN, the left-reformist party with origins in euro-communism and the main component of SYRIZA. The far-right LAOS failed with 2.9% (2009: 5.6%) due to the 3% threshold. The same happened to the "Green Ecologists" with 2.9% (2009: 2.5%) and three right-neoliberal formations, namely "Democratic Alliance" (DISI) with 2.6%, "Dimourgia xana" with 2.2% and "Action" (Drasi) with 1.8%. ANTARSYA ("Anti-Capitalist Left Alliance for the Overthrow"), essentially a coalition of some 10 anti-capitalist revolutionary organizations, received 1.2% (over 75,000 votes; 2009: 0.36%), the alliance of two ML organizations 0.3 %, EEK, an organization that

calls itself Trotskyite 0.1%. The percentage of valid votes cast was 62.7% (2009: 68.9% and 2007: 72.1%), again significantly lower than ever before, which also provides an indication of the falling acceptance of the parliamentary democracy, established in 1974 after the fall of the military junta, in the Greek population.

There is no question that the election results express the complete rejection of the memoranda policies by the clear majority of the electorate. On the one hand, the share of leftists in the broad sense has increased to 34% (if you count the ecologists, to 37%), on the other hand, the "anti-memorandum"-camp gained a total of around 60%. The very good result of the left must certainly be attributed to the general strikes of the last two years, and particularly to the large mobilizations and square occupations, particularly the Syntagma Square, from May 2010 to July last year, the great general strike of 12 and 13 October and the mass protests of well over half a million demonstrators on 12/02/12 at Athens alone, that is to the powerful movement directed against the memoranda policies, especially from May 2010 to February 2012.

The "ungovernableness" of the country

A crucial problem connected with the election result is known as the "ungovernableness" of the country, i.e. the great difficulties to continue the memoranda policies under the guise of "democratic" government coalitions. The leaders, but also the system-compliant media in Greece and Europe (as usual, especially in Germany) have launched a wild propaganda campaign to keep Greece on track and to secure the continuation of memoranda-slavery, the ruin and plunder of Greek society in favor of unbridled domination of domestic and foreign capital. The calls for the eviction of Greece from the euro-zone are getting louder.

Because of its good election result the SYRIZA leadership under A. Tsipras is playing a key role. The ideas of the left parties as a whole had been characterized during the election campaign as "unrealistic", "highly dangerous", "catastrophic", but after the elections the tables have been turned and SYRIZA was asked to "take its responsibility" and to participate in a "government of national unity" with ND, PASOK and DIMAR. The DIMAR leadership, which would like to serve in such a government, played a particularly bad role but finally it did not dare to do so without the consent of SYRIZA in the face of the election results. A day-long wrangling over the formation of a new government began, but ended without result. Therefore, the second round of the elections has been scheduled for June 17. According to current opinion polls SYRIZA has bright prospects to become the strongest party with well over 20%, and thus also to get hold of the "bonus" of 50 (of the total 300) seats in parliament. This totally undemocratic scheme was specifically included in the electoral law to allow a majority, at least of a coalition government of ND and PASOK. But it did not work since both parties together received only 149 seats.

There is no denying that it is not by chance that SYRIZA has become the first force of the left. Because SYRIZA spoke during the election campaign of a "left-wing government", for example to pressure KKE, but also because it does not favor a withdrawal from the euro-zone, despite the rejection of the memoranda policies, people voted for it massively. This reflects in part the stagnation or weakness of the resistance movement that has been seen since February and caused the rise of rather vague hopes that a fundamental shift in government policies could be achieved through a changing of parliamentary majorities. The SYRIZA leadership is coming under attack because of the ambiguities of its election promises from two sides: first, the forces of the establishment can harass SYRIZA to do everything to ensure that Greece remains in the euro-zone, or make SYRIZA also responsible for a possible failure of this intention and expose it; on

the other hand, there are critics on the left, pointing out quite rightly that the various promises of SYRIZA leadership are inconsistent and contradictory. It is virtually inconceivable that a Greek left-wing government, if it came about, could accomplish a revocation of the memoranda policies and thus of the credit agreements agreed with the Troika, that are leading to a strangulation of the Greek society, without Greece's exit or expulsion from the euro-zone.

SYRIZA, KKE and ANTARSYA

In other words, a consistent "reform polic" in favour of working people and all memoranda victims that does not come into direct conflict with the interests of finance capital and big business in Greece, the EU countries and the United States, is very unlikely to be practicable. The SYRIZA leadership is anything but prepared to conduct politically this inevitable clash between the disparate interests of the perpetrators and victims, the exploiters and the exploited. However, it will have to put its cards on the table in one way or another. SYRIZA is an alliance with some "semi-Stalinist" and "semi-Trotskyist" organizations of the milieu of the (as yet) non-parliamentary left, but is dominated by the Synaspismos leadership. This assumes that the problems of the global capitalist crisis, but also the crisis of Greek society, are to be solved with "Keynesian" means within the framework of the capitalist system of exploitation. "Socialism" is in this perspective, at best, a distant goal, and achievable only at an "all-European" level etc. Despite its "radical" name SYRIZA is an alliance oriented to limited reforms, although in some nuances more to the left than the German "Left Party", for instance. It is certainly not a good sign that Tsipras wants to discuss and perhaps to come to an agreement with the French president F. Hollande, regarding the memoranda policies. The explosiveness of the current social and political situation will make inevitable a clarification of the contradictions in the policies of the SYRIZA leadership. Too strong is the desire of the great majority, to finish the continued impover-

ishment and too weak the current will and the ability of the SYRIZA leadership, to implement this need into a real anti-capitalist (ultimately revolutionary) orientation.

The KKE leadership has decided to isolate itself even more from SYRIZA and the rest of the Left because its election result was not very favorable. The disadvantage of this attitude is that it is increasingly difficult to convince its own base that this strategy and tactics might be successful. The KKE leadership considers more or less openly that there will be no overthrow of the memoranda policies by mass mobilization from below and by the movement itself. Thus it points to a future "people's economy" and "people's democracy". But it is not able to explain how its objectives can be achieved if not by a sudden and massive increase of KKE votes, something that is obviously not in sight. It remains the mystery of the party leadership how all verbally proclaimed objectives, particularly the overcoming of capitalism and imperialism, may be imposed. It is foreseeable that the party itself can get into a crisis that may soon lead to greater friction losses.

ANTARSYA had not a sensationally good, but solid election result gaining 1.2%. It was the main force on the left that placed the importance of social resistance through strikes, occupations and mass protests, the self-organization of all victims of the memoranda policies, of the workers, young people, pensioners and of the partially "illegal" immigrants at the center of its election campaign. ANTARSYA has shown the way how social resistance may be victorious through the propagation of a program of actual transitional solutions that are geared to the real needs of the vast majority of the population and aimed at the self-organization of these people, and by adhering to the perspective of the anti-capitalist revolutionary overthrow of the existing political and social system.

ANTARSYA could have achieved a better result through a more consistent policy in the past two years, through greater unity, more and better activities of the local committees etc. But there was hardly a cure against the prevailing mood for a par-

liamentary change mainly in the last week before the elections. As the slogan of "left-wing government" before the election was nebulous and even now continues to remain so, it was essentially correct not to feed such hopes. However, ANTARSYA could come up with a statement supporting critically a left-wing government under certain conditions. That has not happened so far. The basic political and programmatic direction of ANTARSYA remains correct after all.

The ANTARSYA statement

The ANTARSYA declaration of May 14 states among other things:

"The left must have as its target the conquest of political power and government power by a subversive political and social movement. This can be achieved through the institutions of popular power and workers' control and the connection of the question of government power with a contemporary revolutionary strategy, by breaking with capital and imperialism through a workers' and popular movement capable of imposing its own power and government."

"The influence of ANTARSYA was finally limited by parliamentary illusions of a "left-wing government" that might lead to the immediate and conflict-free solution of the problems without an insurrection. Nevertheless, it will be necessary to continue the efforts to convince the broad popular layers that it will not be possible to confront the most pressing and immediate social problems with answers simply directed "against the memoranda", without leaving the euro-zone, the decoupling from the EU and without the complete break with the system that produces crises and memoranda. The collision course with the lenders and capital is not an easy path, not the easy victory that a "left government" may give us, but will be a difficult, uphill battle, the culmination of the political class struggle that requires the development of the struggle organs of the workers' rank and file. It will be necessary to continue the efforts to connect all militants who are in a radicalization process and their struggles on

the basis of the program of "anti-capitalist revolution" and contemporary forms of a socialist and communist perspective.

"It is necessary that broad layers of the population take the matter into their own hands in order to avoid setbacks and to proceed on the path of the great struggles and of the outcome of the May 6 result, to develop a political workers' and grassroots movement, to fight for the abolition of the memoranda, of the loan agreement and of all related laws, to increase the salaries and pensions to a decent level and to enforce the prohibition of dismissals. All further privatizations must be prevented and those already implemented must be reversed. We have to demand the nationalization of the banks and big companies of strategic importance under workers' control. Spending on education and health must be increased. The movement of civil disobedience "I will not pay" and for the final abolition of the poll taxes, the tolls etc. must be supported. The insubordination and resistance against the EU decisions directed against the workers must be strengthened, the cancellation of the law on fiscal package, the exit from the euro-zone and the EU by strengthening the organs of self-organization beyond the trade union bureaucracies have to be demanded and organized.

"ANTARSYA stands by its proposal to build at once a battle front for the break with the system and for the defense against the attack and to proceed immediately with the strengthening of the struggles. The workers' organs of struggle must be developed and supported. The call is addressed to all forces of the left, to be active into this direction as soon as possible.

"At the same time ANTARSYA promotes the creation of a broad united front of the left and the workers' movement against the fascist threat and the criminal activities of 'Chrysi Avgi' directed against immigrants and activists of the movement. It is necessary to develop initiatives aimed at exposing the deeply system-friendly and reactionary character of 'Chrysi Avgi', its fixation on EU and memoranda, its Nazi mentality and its pseudo-pop-

ulist rhetoric in order to subvert its social base. ANTARSYA will immediately establish an initiative for a common approach in dealing with the fascist threat on the part of all social and political organizations of the workers' movement and the left (including KKE and SYRIZA), both at central and local levels.

"We will continue on the necessary path of the front of the anti-capitalist left and call on all forces and the militants who choose to break with the system and support the overthrow, to discuss openly, to act jointly and to cooperate in the elections. At the same time we continue the struggle for the further strengthening of ANTARSYA primarily by the struggles in the movements, but also in the next elections." (Excerpts from the declaration)

Racist incitement and chauvinism in the mass media over decades and through the official policies of racism as well as the evil governmental racism are responsible for the spreading of the fascist plague in Greece, which is only one step away from being transformed into a mass movement along the lines of the German Nazi Party before 1933. But the apathy and indifference of the political parties and organizations of the Left and the workers' movement have also greatly contributed to the rise of Nazi gang, and this responsibility is very serious. It is urgently necessary to reverse this disastrous trend. It may be that the specter of a left-wing government has appeared in Greece, but more serious is the drift of the social and political conditions into the direction of Weimar Republic. Greek capitalism and its bourgeois democracy have evoked this witching hour.

16th of May 2012

Andreas Kloke is a member of the leadership of OKDE-Spartakos, Greek section of the Fourth International.

The example of Argentina in 2001

Eric Toussaint

Like Argentina in 2001, Greece must break with the Troika and suspend payment of the debt. It is an urgent necessity for the social movements in Europe to show active, practical solidarity with the Greek people and to constitute a common European platform of resistance to austerity in order to obtain cancellation of illegitimate debts.

A large part of the Greek population has demonstrated, since the first memorandum in May 2010, increasing opposition to the measures of austerity imposed by the Greek authorities and the Troika: general strikes, occupation of public squares, street demonstrations, a movement of resistance to the increases in the prices of services and transport, without forgetting the re-launching by those who work in them of certain services, such as the hospital of Kilis in Macedonia and the restarting on February 15, 2012 of publication of the *Eleftherotypia* daily newspaper under workers' control.

The submission and the collaboration of the Greek government with the troika only worsen the economic situation of the country and violate the economic and social rights of the population.

The latest plan, dishonestly labelled "rescue", represents one more stage in the abandonment of the sovereignty of Greece in relation to the European Union and to its creditors: all of the new credits will go to reimbursing a debt which is very largely illegitimate and the whole process will be managed directly by the creditors.

The people of the countries of the South were subjected for two decades (from 1982 to the beginning of the 2000s) to this kind of policy. It uses the pretext of the reimbursement of the debt as a weapon to destroy a series of social conquests which constitute fundamental economic and social rights.

Argentina is an emblematic case. After 25 years of neoliberal policies (1976-2001) and a succession of austerity plans conducted by the IMF, a popular rebellion broke out in December 2001 and led to the fall of the government. The new authorities unilaterally decreed the suspension of the reimbursement

of the national debt in the form of bonds sold on the financial markets to the sum of 90 billion dollars. That has remained until today the biggest suspension of payment in history. After three years of suspension of payment, during which the government implemented a policy of economic revival and refused to follow the recommendations of the IMF, Argentina imposed on its creditors a reduction of debt of 65 per cent. At the end of December 2001, Argentina also suspended the reimbursement of its bilateral debt (to the sum of 6.5 billion dollars) to countries such as Spain, France, Germany, Italy, Britain ... allied in the Club of Paris. This suspension of payment has lasted for ten years and Argentina is doing very well. Between 2003 and 2012, its average annual rate of growth was 8 per cent. If Argentina had not suspended the reimbursement of the debt and if it had not refused the diktats of the IMF and other creditors, it would have been unable to take advantage from 2004-2005 of the increase of prices of the products that it exports on the world market. All its revenues would have been swallowed up by the reimbursement of the debt. Under popular pressure, the Argentinean authorities have refused the increases in the price of electricity, water, telecommunications, etc. that foreign multinationals and the IMF wanted to impose. The living conditions of Argentineans have markedly improved and today European citizens are heading for the country in search of a decent job. The example of Argentina shows that by refusing to submit to the creditors and the IMF in order to pay a largely illegitimate debt you can hold your head high and improve the living conditions of the population.

As indicated at the beginning of this article, the struggle of the Greeks must not remain isolated. It is necessary to build a broad movement of solidarity and, along with all the peoples of Europe, build a front of resistance for the cancellation of illegitimate debt and the complete refounding of a Europe of the peoples, via a genuinely democratic constituent process.

This article was written for the Eleftherotypia workers' newspaper.

Éric Toussaint is a Professor of political science, President of CADTM Belgium, member of the International Council of the World Social Forum since it was created, and of the Scientific Committee of ATTAC France.

Unite behind Syriza's anti-austerity programme

Editorial statement by Socialist Resistance, Britain

Socialist Resistance strongly welcomes the stunning vote achieved by Syriza in the Greek elections which put it second in the poll on a solidly anti-austerity platform. It is a vote which has shaken the Greek and European ruling classes and has opened up the possibility of Syriza emerging as the biggest single party in the new elections next month.

We also strongly support Syriza's five demands [1] which are an action programme for a united fight against austerity. They include the rejection of austerity and the bailout conditions imposed in March by the Troika. They call for a moratorium on debt payments and an international commission to audit the Greek debt, together with vigorous debt write-offs. They also call for taxing the rich, a radical redistribution of income and wealth, nationalisation of the banks, and a new industrial policy to rejuvenate the manufacturing sector. These measures exclude any deals with pro-austerity parties and are what are needed to begin the fight-back against the ravages of austerity – though more stress on green solutions would make it stronger.

There is, however, a serious problem, in the face of another election, which cannot be avoided. That is the issue of the unity of the Greek left. Before the election Syriza was the only organisation to call for the most obvious thing – a united anti-austerity platform and for a united anti-austerity government if the left won. Now the situation is even worse. In the upcoming election both the KKE and Antarsya (though the KKE more stridently) have al-

ready said that they will not only stand their own candidates but will give no support to, or would 'not prop up' a Syriza-led government if it were elected! This, they say, is because Syriza's platform is not a full revolutionary programme. But a more extensive programme is something that must be discussed and developed as the struggle advances and should not to be counterposed to the immediate needs of the struggle as it unfolds today.

This is a very dangerous situation. We could see an anti-austerity government either denied office – and the austerity continue with all its consequences – or opposed once taking office by other sections of the left! We therefore make the strongest possible appeal to all sections of the Greek left to unite behind Syriza in the upcoming elections and to unite behind a Syriza-led anti-austerity government if it is elected. This is exactly the reason for building broad organisations like Syriza – in order to unite the working class in this kind of situation.

Despite Syriza's continued rise in the polls it should not be assumed that victory in the next election is certain for the left. The EU élites have already made it clear that they will not only make the next election a referendum on the euro but that a second anti-austerity vote would mean the expulsion of Greece from the euro. Massive pressure is going to be applied to reinforce this ultimatum between now and election day.

It is very important that this ultimatum is rejected and the austerity offensive opposed. Syriza has made it clear that whilst it is not calling for exit from the euro, if this is the consequence of defeating the austerity drive, because of the actions of the EU élites, then so be it. It is the same with the debt, for which the Greek workers should take no responsibility. In order to advocate debt repudiation effectively you have to be prepared for expulsion from the Eurozone as a probable consequence. This approach needs to be strongly up-front in the election campaign if the electorate is to be armed against the threats and ultimatums it will be facing.

The struggle of the Greek working class is a struggle for the workers' movement across Europe. [2]

Socialist Resistance is the British section of the Fourth International.

USA:

The war on women—and us all

AGAINST THE CURRENT ·

The war on women's rights begins in the reproductive arena, over abortion and even contraception. But the goal of the right wing is to roll back equality for women across the board — both in practice and in law. This ranges from the current fight in the U.S. Senate to block the extension of the Violence Against Women Act, first passed in 1994, to griping about the broad mandate to ban sex discrimination outlined in Title IX of the 1972 Education Act.

Banning Abortion

A wave of new state laws include banning abortion beyond the 20th week (although more than 90% of all abortions are performed within the first 12 weeks) and requiring a waiting period — usually 24 hours — between counseling and the procedure (difficult and more costly for women who live in counties where there are no abortion providers). Some of the counseling provides women inaccurate information: Seven states point to a risk of developing breast cancer when no such link exists, and eight require listing possible negative consequences from having an abortion, but do not mention the problems of pregnancy.

Over the past two years a new wave of health-related laws affecting women have been introduced in various states — a total of 950 in 2010, with 89 passed, and last year 1,100 introduced and 135 enacted.

The legislation ranges from limiting comprehensive sex education classes in schools and cutting funding for contraceptives to blocking women's right to abortion — mandating procedures that are costly, unnecessary and humiliating, such as waiting peri-

ods, ultrasounds and even physical invasion of the woman's body. In the case of Texas, the ultrasound requirement for all women seeking abortions means, for a first trimester procedure, that a probe is inserted into a woman's vagina. No wonder feminists have labeled it the state rape law!

Predictions for 2012 are that at least ten states will introduce amendments to their constitutions that fetuses are persons from the moment of fertilization. These aren't likely to pass this year, but they ramp up the rhetoric. It's widely suspected that the Supreme Court majority may be looking for the opportunity to reverse *Roe v. Wade* entirely. Clearly Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant has drawn a line in the sand, stating he wants to see his state "abortion free."

In April 2012, Arizona enacted three anti-abortion laws, including one that outlaws abortions beyond 18-20 weeks of pregnancy. While fewer than 5% of all pregnant women seek abortions at this stage, they usually do so because of a medical condition or previous lack of access.

Another Arizona law directs the state to create a website that outlines the supposed health risks of abortion, and featuring fetuses at various stages of development so that presumably women will be overwhelmed with guilt. School curricula are to promote that the most acceptable way of dealing with an unwanted pregnancy is for the woman to carry the pregnancy to term and arrange an adoption.

Thirty years ago there were approximately 3000 clinics providing abortion services; today there are fewer than 1800, and in a number of states, practically none. The farther a woman must travel for an abortion, the lower the rate. Travel is obviously an even greater obstacle for a less-advantaged woman.

Clinics where abortions are performed have been shut down by requirements that mandate hospital-like facilities and hallways irrelevant to their purpose. Legislation has been introduced in a number of states to cut women off from cervical cancer and HIV testing, birth control devices and annual exams — because their access to health care is through a Planned Parenthood clinic, and the legislators want to drive the organization into the ground.

In Texas, health clinics for poor women have been defunded and shut down as collateral damage of the right wing's war against Planned Parenthood, even though the clinics perform no abortions and aren't even connected with the organization.

Since the passage of the Hyde Amendment in 1976, poor women covered under Medicaid can only apply for abortion in case of rape, incest or medical condition. Only 17 states and the District of Columbia continue to fund their abortions. On the pretext that in a market-driven system poor women aren't "entitled" to coverage, the right then use the victory they won over the most vulnerable to extend their repressive legislation. Of the 70 million women living in the United States who are of reproductive age, more than half are in need of contraception; about 20 million need publicly funded services.

After making headway in restricting coverage for abortion under the federal health care bill, the radical right has moved their fight to the state level. Seven states now prohibit private health insurance providers from covering abortion and 15 prohibit insurance exchanges from doing so. Unless the federal government revisits this issue, more state legislatures will pass these restrictions and insurance companies will make their decision based on what they perceive as in their business interests.

Damaging Women's Health

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 requires all new private health plans to cover contraceptive counseling and services without out-

of-pocket cost, but existing plans are exempt as long as no significant negative changes such as cutting benefits are made. Currently 28 states require insurers that cover prescription drugs to cover contraceptive drugs and devices; 17 also require coverage of outpatient services.

The strategy of those opposed to reproductive justice is to separate the variety of health services women need over the course of their lives and focus on a narrow range. Then they portray women as selfish or naïve, needing to be properly counseled into making the right decision. Meanwhile they portray themselves as moral agents with the right to impose their vision.

Generally speaking the right focuses their anger on clinic providers and doctors and portray women as "victims." Yet there are state laws on the books ostensibly to protect fetuses, and a few women who have delivered babies while addicted to drugs or alcohol and unable to kick their habit have been charged with fetal abuse.

Most people recognize that this issue is a public health rather than criminal problem, and this legislation has languished. However in Indiana two years ago Bei Bil Shuai, a depressed and pregnant woman, attempted to kill herself. Rescued by friends, she did everything to ensure her baby survived, including undergoing Cesarean surgery, but her newborn died shortly afterward. She was arrested, charged and has been in jail for the past year, charged under the state's murder statute (with the death penalty or a sentence of 45 years to life) as well as an attempted feticide statute (with a sentence of up to 20 years).

Each year in our country three million women will have an unintended pregnancy; almost half will have an abortion. Others will have problems during their pregnancies, and all who deliver a baby will need a range of services. But the climate of right-wing hatred of women's rights in an era of cutbacks will have a devastating effect on health clinics, well baby centers and child care centers first on the chopping block.

Rush Limbaugh has performed a great public service by putting the brutal assault on women right on Front Street, out of the dark alleys of state legislative chambers where the worst crimes are committed. Women and all supporters of basic rights continue to fight back against these "bedroom police."

In their attempt to divide and control women, the right wing has miscalculated. Every major step toward winning women's legal equality — from the right to vote to outlawing sex discrimination and limiting the government's control over women's reproductive lives — have been won and maintained through popular struggle.

| QUEBEC

Defiant Quebec students reject shabby government offer

RICHARD FIDLER ·

After a 22-hour bargaining session involving ministers of the Charest government, university and college heads, and leaders of the major trade-union centrals, the student leaders agreed on May 6 to put the offer to a vote of their memberships without recommending acceptance.

If the offer [1] were accepted:

- The 75% hike in tuition fees (now spread over seven years, but indexed) would remain, albeit with slightly liberalized access to scholarships and loans, and provision for repayment of loans geared to future income.
- A provisional committee would examine university budgets and propose possible cuts. Each dollar cut would go to reducing incidental fees not related directly to tuition (admission, registration, sports services, technology, etc.).
- The committee would include four students, but also fourteen other members: 6 university rectors, 4 trade union representatives as well as 2 representatives of business, 1 from the ministry of education, and a chair with a tie-breaking vote — the latter four all designated by the minister of education.
- The committee would table its recommendations by December although if necessary its mandate could be extended by one more year. It might then be replaced by a permanent committee appointed by law, its composition undetermined at this point.
- Pending the provisional committee's conclusions, the students' incidental fees would be deferred. However, these fees would apply retroactively to the students in any amount the committee is unable to cut from current expenses.

There is no assurance that the proposed committee would agree on budget cuts sufficient to reduce or eliminate the hike in tuition fees. Furthermore, the committee would be composed largely of members with a vested interest in opposing cuts in expenditures, especially in research and funding of pro-business courses.

Market prerogatives, not social need

Most importantly, the offer, if accepted, would trivialize the key demands advanced by the students throughout the strike movement: for an immediate freeze on tuition fee levels, increased access to quality education and a public debate on the long-ignored goal of free and universal education from kindergarten to university. It would force the students into a market-driven accounting exercise, striving to justify cuts in spending on infrastructures, research, courses and teachers' salaries — just when students and professors have struck a responsive chord among many Québécois with their united campaign against the underfunding of public post-secondary education in the province.

Small wonder, then, that this miserable "offer" is being rejected overwhelmingly by students across Quebec. And thousands are continuing to march for hours each night through the streets of Montréal, in spontaneous demonstrations that began some two weeks ago in rejection of an earlier offer by the Liberal government.

In continuing their boycott of classes, which has shut down the majority of Quebec's major post-secondary educational institutions, the students are courageously risking loss of credit for an entire semester. They have led an exemplary struggle, conducted since the beginning with mass democratic

assemblies and decision-making. The three main student organizations — the CLASSE, FEUQ and FECQ [2] — have maintained a united front in the face of repeated government attempts to divide them and isolate the more radical CLASSE from the other two groups.

They have withstood vicious media attacks on them as a selfish elite, and the exploitation of a few, isolated acts of violence against property (often by Black Bloc anarchists) to portray the students as little more than publicity-seeking vandals.

They have successfully defied more than a dozen court injunctions ordering universities to reopen and professors to teach.

And they have resisted massive police repression that has resulted in the arrest of well over 1,000 students and serious injury to some as a result of the cops' use of rubber bullets, concussion grenades and tear gas.

Solidarity lacking

But by themselves — notwithstanding these heroic actions — the students have been unable to create a social relationship of forces sufficient to break through the unyielding opposition of the government and the business class it represents. They have won significant support from some community grass-roots groups, including a broad-based Coalition against privatization and user fees for public services [3]. The Coalition was a prime organizer of the massive demonstration at the Liberal party's general council meeting May 4-5, held in the town of Victoriaville in the futile hope of avoiding pro-student demonstrations in Montréal.

Notably missing, however, has been active solidarity from Quebec's trade unions, whose million-plus members represent the largest social force with the potential economic clout to defeat the government and business assault on the students. The major centrals and many local unions have issued statements in support of the students, and some have contributed funds to their organizations. But they have made no effort to organize economic action,

even a one-day general strike in support of the students' demands as requested by the CLASSE. And now their central leaders appear to have been accomplices in the government's latest manoeuvres with the students.

By the 12th week of the student strike, the government was coming under a lot of pressure not only from the students but from the university and college administrations, which feared they would be faced this fall with a double cohort of students in the wake of a cancelled semester — an enrolment overflow they are not equipped to accommodate. Furthermore, a mounting series of disclosures of scandals and corruption implicating government ministers in lucrative construction contracts, illegal party financing, and even possible connections with organized crime — as well as widespread criticism by First Nations and ecologists of Charest's showcase Plan Nord program to expand mining in Quebec's far north — have undermined the government's legitimacy and fed rumours that Charest is planning to call an early election before the Liberals are outflanked by the opposition Parti Québécois or ultra-neoliberal Coalition Avenir Québec. However, the student unrest jeopardizes this scenario.

Charest's manoeuvre

The government's response was to call a meeting on May 5-6 with the rectors and student representatives in an ultimate attempt to bludgeon the students into a deal that would, it hoped, rescue its credibility and restore order in the schools. And in a shrewd move, it invited the presidents of Quebec's three main union centrals, the FTQ, CSN and CSQ, [4] to attend this summit, held simultaneously with the Liberal party's general council meeting in Victoriaville.

The formula proposed by the education minister seems to draw in part on a proposal first advanced by the two relatively conservative student organizations. The FEUQ and FECQ had suggested that the tuition fee increase might be avoided through equivalent cuts in unnecessary expenditures by the universities.

The CLASSE, for its part, fought to maintain the focus on the fee hike and the broader perspective of free post-secondary education. However, its own proposal, adopted a few days later, noted that funds for higher education could be found through cuts in business-oriented research programs (not basic or theoretical research) and competitive advertising by universities; a moratorium on infrastructure expansion, including additional satellite campuses; and an immediate freeze on pay and hiring of senior university management personnel. The CLASSE also called for an "estates general" on the future of Quebec education, in which it said it would advance the demand for free education, which could be financed by a capital tax on financial institutions. And it drew attention to the huge profits being registered by the major banks, even amidst the economic crisis.

Although there were significant differences in the proposals of the respective student groups, there were clear parallels. The FEUQ and FECQ were retreating somewhat from the earlier focus on tuition fees. The CLASSE was clearly striving to maintain a united front while appealing to other forces in the community to engage in economic action in support of its overall demands.

A call for a social strike appeared on the CLASSE web site [5], although a discussion of this proposal, scheduled for debate at two successive meetings of its weekly congress, was postponed for lack of time. And, as mentioned, it received no response from the forces to which it was primarily addressed.

Students undefeated

Remarkably, Quebec's major trade union leaders — experienced negotiators in hard-fought bargaining with businesses and governments — apparently advised the student leaders to accept the shabby offer presented to them by the Charest government. Although to date little has been said publicly about their role, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that their intervention did nothing to aid the students' struggle and may in fact have undermined it.

Judging from this week's votes rejecting the offer, however, hundreds of thousands of students have not been taken in. Their anger, and renewed mobilization, may even be preparing the way for a new advance.

While speculation on the ultimate outcome of this massive uprising is premature, it is already clear that even if the strike ends without major gains, the students have not been defeated. They have fought impressively, to the best of their ability. And they have ignited a major debate in Quebec society, challenging neoliberal prerogatives and opening the prospect of "another Quebec" in which access to education will be a basic social need, available to all irrespective of income, and not a commodity for which access and content is a function of big business exigencies. The students have set the parameters for the continuation of this important debate, which has facets that reach far beyond public education as such.

MALVINAS

The Falklands oil rush and Thatcher's War

ALAN THORNETT ·

The situation is getting more tense and Argentina has responded by declaring the new drilling illegal, and is threatening action in the courts. It is already imposing travel sanctions against the islands with the support of other South America governments. British ships are being turned away from Argentinian ports if they have been involved with the Falklands. Last month two British cruise ships, the Adonia and the Star Princess, were turned away from Ushuaia, on the country's southern tip, because they had previously called at Port Stanley in the Falklands.

Argentina's transport workers' federation has threatened to obstruct the loading and unloading of British ships in Argentine ports in order to press London to open sovereignty talks with Argentina. "We're going to economically hurt British-flagged ships or British ships flying the flag of convenience," said union leader Omar Suarez.

Britain in turn has sharply increased its military capability in the region, including, according to Argentina, nuclear submarines. Cameron has made renewed declarations to defend the islands by the use of whatever force is necessary.

Oil reserves and other riches of the South Atlantic and Antarctica were clearly behind the war in 1982. Thatcher's government, however, vehemently denied it. Her only interest, she insisted, was to defend the self-determination of the 1800 Falkland Islanders who wanted to continue to be ruled by Britain.

Today's developments put Thatcher's war in 1982 in perspective. With peak oil and the price going up there is now a rush for exploration around the Island which have estimated reserves of around

8bn barrels—three times Britain's reserves in the North Sea.

Drilling has been expanding rapidly. In the Sea Lion field, in a basin off the Islands, it is being carried out by Rockhopper Exploration PLC (RKH)—they like to name their destructive projects after the wildlife they are threatening. Sea Lion is estimated to hold 448m barrels of recoverable oil. This alone could transform the economics of the Falkland Islands, but it is only the start.

Recently the Borders and Southern oil company (BOR) began drilling South of the islands in a field with a capacity of 4.7bn barrels, ten times the capacity of Sea Lion. If this goes to plan it could transform the Falklands into the South Atlantic equivalent of an oil rich Gulf state—and all under British sovereignty.

The history

Yet Britain's claim to sovereignty of the Falklands has always been spurious. The islands were originally taken by armed force by Britain from the Republic of Buenos Aires, as a part of Britain's colonial expansion, during South America's struggle for independence from Spain. The islands met the British Empire's need for a whaling station and a resupply base for shipping bound for the Pacific around the Cape. They also provided a naval base in a strategic location.

By the time Argentina won independence from Spain it was in no position to challenge British sea power.

With the opening of the Panama Canal, however, most shipping abandoned the route around the Cape and the role of the islands declined. In fact Britain was even considering negotiating a transfer of the Islands to Argentine sovereignty in the 1970s

until the potentiality of the region in terms of natural resources were realised and the policy sharply reversed.

Galtieri's motivation for the occupation was more for domestic advantage than for Argentina's historic claim to the Islands. He was facing his biggest economic and political crisis since he grabbed power six years earlier and saw invading the Falklands as a means of diverting attention from his despotic regime and gaining some popularity.

The political character of the Argentine regime, however, could not rightly determine our stand on this. The choice was between a rapacious British Imperialism defending one of its colonial possessions and the claim of a dependent, semi-colonial, country with a 130 year old injustice perpetrated in its own region of the world.

Thatcher was taken by surprise by the occupation but quickly responded and dispatched a task force, within a few days, with orders to use whatever force necessary to expel the Argentine forces. Labour leader Michael Foot fully supported the dispatch of the task force and the jingoism which went with it, effectively endorsing the war drive.

Her justification for the war was the need to support for the right of self-determination of the Falklanders. This was in sharp contrast to the treatment meted out to the people of Diego Garcia, a British colonial possession in the Indian Ocean with a similar size population (slightly bigger) as the Falklands. They had been removed from their island a few years earlier, and denied the right of self-determination, because self-determination at that time stood in the way of Britain's strategic interest—which was to lease the island to the USA for a cold war airbase.

Now because self-determination for the Falklanders suited British strategic interests as the justification for war Thatcher became a champion of it.

Natural resources

Thatcher's real motivation behind the war was very different. It was the defence of Britain's prestige as an imperialist power and its geo-political interests. It was the natural resources of the region, in particular oil, however, which was there from the start—as was the oil lobby. In fact oil reserves had been found between the Falklands and Argentina four years earlier and this was emerging as a potential game changer in the region.

It was no accident, therefore, that most of the Falklands was already owned by an energy company, Coalite Ltd of Bolsover. With an eye to the potential energy they had taken over the Falkland Islands Company in 1973 (at the time of the Middle East oil crisis) and the first oil was found by Shell, working with them, a few years later.

In fact the Falkland Islands were a company operation from top to bottom. Coalite owned 50% of all Falklands land outright and another 25% through interlinked directorships. They also owned all the shops, most of the houses, the bank, and the shipping line which linked the Islands with Britain. Most people on the Islands worked for them and lived in tied cottages supplied by them.

Thatcher also saw the huge potential of waging war over the Falklands in terms of domestic politics, where her popularity was at a low ebb. After the task force sailed for the South Atlantic the jingoism of the Tories was only matched by that of the Labour and SDP. Until now, the sovereignty, or even the whereabouts, of the Falklands had been a matter of indifference in Britain. Suddenly the islands became the jewel in the British crown to be defended to the last drop of British blood.

Thatcher won a messy victory after a 5-week conflict. It could have gone either way, given the logistics, despite Britain's economic and military superiority and their knowledge of Argentina's military capability, presumably, since it had been one of its principal arms suppliers.

There were 258 British service personnel killed in the conflict and 777 wounded. There were 649 Argentineans killed and 1,068 wounded. In what

was clearly a war crime the antiquated Argentine warship the General Belgrano, with 1,000 sailors on board, was torpedoed by a British nuclear submarine as it was steaming away from the war zone with a loss of 368 sailors. It produced the Sun's gut-wrenching 'Gotcha' headline.

Thatcher basked in the glory of victory as the task force returned home in triumph. It transformed the electoral fortunes of the Tories. Despite unemployment topping three million for the first time, the Tories rose dramatically in the opinion polls. What became the 'Falkland factor' carried them through the 1983 general election and give them a head start in the one after that. It became the basis for the attacks on the unions carried through at that time.

The left in Britain

Most of the left Internationally, including the Fourth International, supported Argentina despite the military dictatorship, and Galtieri's self-serving motives. They recognised the legitimacy of Argentina's historic claim to the islands and saw the war as a conflict between an imperialist power and a dependant, semi-colonial, country. This view was very strong amongst the South American left. In Argentina the left demonstrated under the banner: "Yes to the Malvinas, No to Galtieri".

In Britain the left was more divided. The main organisation to reject this view was the Militant (now the Socialist Party (SP)). They refused to call for the task force to withdraw, or for Britain to end hostilities. They refused to condemn Britain's war aims and they rejected the Argentine claim to the islands. They said that they were against both Thatcher and Galtieri, of course, as was everyone on the left. But when it came to taking a stance on the politics of the conflict they were essentially pro-British.

In fact they agreed with the main justification of the war advanced by the Thatcher government: that it was to defend the right of self-determination of the Falkland islanders.

The SP have claimed in recent years that their position was misrepresented or taken out of context in 1982. This is hard to accept, however. In fact five years ago at the time of the 25th anniversary of the war they re-published an article written at the time by Lynn Walsh called: Falklands war: what lessons for the labour movement? published in Militant International Review (Issue 22, June 1982).

Whist the SP claimed that this article demonstrated how much they had been misrepresented it does nothing of the sort. In fact it carries the disputed line with knobs on.

On their refusal to call for the withdraw of the task force and self determination for the Islanders it says the following: "Nor could the call to stop the war or withdraw the Fleet provide a basis even for a mass campaign of demonstrations, meetings, and agitation – because it leaves unanswered, in the eyes of workers, the vital question of the rights of the Falkland Islanders and the question of opposing a vicious military-police dictatorship in Argentina."

It goes on to make a bizarre appeal for the election of a Labour Government which could then, it says, keep hold of the Falklands by appealing to the Argentine working class and continue the war on socialist lines! It puts it this way: "A socialist government would make a class appeal to the Argentinean workers. A Labour government could not just abandon the Falklanders and let Galtieri get on with it. But it would continue the war on socialist lines."

The International Marxist Group (Socialist Resistance's predecessor organisation and its paper, Socialist Challenge, who were strongly on the pro-Argentine line, published a full-page appeal to Militant supporter to reject the Militant position characterising it as a "class betrayal". (Socialist Challenge number 245 May 13th 1982)

The other organisation to take a similar position to Militant was the International Communist League (ICL)—today's AWL. The ICL had recently fused with the WSL (the Workers Socialist League of

which I was a member) to form a new organisation, also called the WSL. We had come together as two organisations of the same size to form a new organisation of around 350.

When the war broke out the members of the two previous organisations took diametrically opposite positions on it. We (ex-WSL) took a pro-Argentine position and the ex-ICL members took a position of neutrality, or 'dual defeatist' as they termed it. Since we were a minority on the National Committee (NC) it voted for neutrality. We campaigned for a special full-membership conference to decide the issue. When this took place it reversed the NC position voting by a margin of 151 to 149 (after two recounts) in favour of our pro-Argentina position. It was effectively the end of the fusion. We were all expelled some months later by decision of the National Committee on which we were still a minority.

The ICL along with Militant (and the British Government of course) based their position heavily on the right of self-determination of the Falklanders and their rejection of Argentina's claim to sovereignty of the Islands. They also argued that Argentina was not an oppressed nation but an advanced, middle-ranking, capitalist country which was acting as a sub-imperialist power in the region.

For Britain the position was clear: support for the self-determination for the Falklanders was its passport to the riches of the region.

The 1,800 Falklanders, however, were not in any real sense a nation. They were a (rather down-trodden) settler population in a British colonial enclave and. They had no independence from Britain and even less from Coalite Ltd, as noted above. Whilst

numbers were not decisive 1,800 people is roughly the population of the average street London. In 1982 there were 20,000 British nationals living in Argentina, for example—though Argentineans were excluded from the Falklands. Moreover the size and makeup of the population was determined mainly by the commercial decisions and employment requirements of Coalite Ltd.

They had been an essential component of Britain's colonial occupation over many years. It was not acceptable that the 'rights' of these 1,800 inhabitants were raised above the rights of the Argentinian people—and the interests of a whole continent. It gave them a veto over the sovereignty of the Islands and made them into a mechanism for the presence of Britain in the South Atlantic. They were, moreover, seeking a status which could only be maintained in the long term with the support of British military force against the wishes of the South American masses.

They had every right to decent treatment, of course. They could have been given the right to return to Britain or move to New Zealand with full costs and compensation from the British government. Many of them already go to New Zealand or Britain when they face ill health and need hospital treatment or when they retire because they have to vacate the Coalite Ltd tied cottages in which they live.

Today, with the price of oil only likely to go up, whatever its short-term fluctuations, the current build up of tension is not going to go away. Britain will continue to strengthen its military commitment to the region and opposition will continue to mount against it across Latin America. From this point of view the debates around the conflict in 1983 are well worth some attention.

| ARGENTINA:

Falklands fever and anti-imperialism

GUILLERMO ALMEYRA ·

The military dictatorship had felt it necessary to use the case of the Falklands as a diversion to strengthen its declining power and prestige and embarked on an adventure, believing that it would not cause a war. I am afraid that if the current Argentine Government raises the legitimate claim for the return of the islands colonized by the United Kingdom, this is not because it has a sudden anti-imperialist itch, but because it does not want to talk about wage increases, the predatory nature of mining and soybean exploitation, the problems of the railways and of energy as well as the anti-terrorism act imposed at the request of Obama. In addition, I also think that on June 14, when the President attended the UN Commission on Decolonization, she reaffirmed the just demand for the return of the Islands and the denunciation of British colonialism, but she did not pursue at the same time the end of the colonization of Puerto Rico, occupied by the United States since 1898, or the end of the colonization of territories usurped by Israel from the Palestinians.

All this rhetoric and this exploitation of a subject, which all Latin Americans know by heart, has no other purpose than to hide a conservative policy. The worst part is that progressive sectors are participating in this scam, losing their heads to the sound of the fanfare of nationalism.

The nationalist "socialist" Jorge Abelardo Ramos, both mentioned and recommended by the President, was, let us recall, the last civilian who visited the Falkland Islands when the dictatorship's

adventure had already demonstrated its bankruptcy. Remember that a plane had been chartered by the exiled Montoneros, to fight under the command of a dictator who had killed tens of thousands of activists of all kinds and oppressed the people of Argentina. Also, note that the vast majority of the Argentine left, starting with several self-proclaimed Trotskyist groups, but also socialists and communists, had supported the military adventures of the dictatorship. The "theory" of this aberrant position was that Britain was an imperialist country while Argentina was regarded as a semi-colony, a dependent country.

There were then only a few of us in the country and a handful in exile opposed to the war. In my case, I immediately published in the Mexican "Uno más uno" newspaper an article explaining that the main enemy was the dictatorship, the Malvinas Islands were Argentine, but the dead and the missing were also, that a victory would strengthen the dictatorship of Galtieri and of other killers, that the war would impede the process of ongoing British disarmament (in effect it was halted) and strengthen the most colonialist sector, starting with the strengthening of Thatcher (immediately after the war she isolated and crushed the striking miners), and that nationalism fomented competing nationalisms. Alberto Di Franco, Adolfo Gilly and the great socialist and historian Sergio Bagú took the same position, which caused much controversy among Argentine exiles and the Mexican left.

What was the attitude of the global left? To support resistance to colonization or the rebellion against colonialism of oppressed peoples, as in the case of the North African tribal rebellion of Abd-el-Kader against French and Spanish colonialism in the 1920s or the wars of liberation in Algeria or in Indochina in the 1950s and 1960s. Even Trotsky

formulated the hypothesis that, facing a possible attack from "democratic" England against Brazil, ruled in the 1930s by the Vargas dictatorship, one should defend the semi-colonial country against the "democratic" imperialist aggressor.

But the Malvinas war was triggered by the Argentine dictatorship and not by England and was a diversionary manoeuvre by a government which was collaborating with the CIA, sending to torturers in Central America and whose international policy was anti-Communist, anti-Cuban and pro-imperialist, which was the savage oppressor of the workers and the people in the name of its alliance with the oligarchy and the multinationals. When, with many exiles (for example Juan Gelman), we sabotaged the soccer World Cup that the dictatorship used to acquire legitimacy and popular sup-

port, we had recourse to the same defeatism: the best thing for Argentine workers would be the defeat of the adventure, because it would shorten the survival of the dictatorship (as in fact happened) and because the war inoculated nationalism in Argentina and Britain instead of developing internationalist, pacifist, socialist ideas.

It is not surprising that there are people who have maintained a position of principle, based on the distinction between the exploited classes and the oppressed, who are the real country, and the ruling classes who are united, despite their differences and borders, for the defence of the operating system. Those who have not learned from past experience are dangerous for their people and for democracy.

GREECE

The effects of the crisis on daily life

ANDREAS SARTZEKIS ·

At first sight it might seem absurd, but for Greece's National Day on March 25, the objective of the PASOK/New Democracy government was for no demonstrations to take place, after those which had marked the day of October 28 (the 'no' to Mussolini was transformed into 'no' to the Troika') [1]. But in spite of the deployment of 7,000 police officers in the centre of Athens and of the almost empty processions – access was prohibited –, the celebration of the beginning of the War of Independence in 1821 took the form of independence from the government which takes its orders from the European bourgeoisie.

Teachers and parents confronted the police, high-school students in the procession refused to salute the authorities, and, in the provinces, town halls refused to install platforms for the "officials"!

These acts of civil disobedience are the sign that, even though the PASOK leadership of the GSEE trade-union confederation is of course doing less than nothing, resistance is being organized, in a phase where economic policy becomes harsher with each passing day. Thus, the ceiling for income tax will go down to 5,000 euros annual income, while the minimum wage is further reduced by 22 per cent, and by 32 per cent for those under 25, while pensions are being cut by between 12 and 20 per cent, while the organisation responsible for providing low-cost working-class housing is dissolved... all that while Christine Lagarde pontificates that wages are much too high in Greece. Faced with terrible daily problems, popular resistance is trying to organize in order to survive, with a decisive challenge before it: halting the rise of a racism that is giving the neo-Nazi vermin the chance to reappear,

encouraged by the government and supported by the press under its orders. It is important in this context that all local struggles really take into account the need for an anticapitalist policy at a national level, breaking with the logic of today's dire poverty. Although that partly involves the coming elections (feared by the Troika, which is exerting pressure to postpone them for as long as possible), the urgency of a prolonged national mobilization, backed by international solidarity, is on the agenda.

Struggles in the health sector

Leaving aside some quite considerable achievements in the past period, such as establishing medical centres in the most remote villages, with young doctors working there for the first few years after graduating, successive governments have increasingly favoured liberal medical care, allowing in hospitals practices of paying cash directly to surgeons before they operate, practices that the Right and PASOK pretend to have only recently discovered! Patients being left on mattresses in the corridors due to lack of space is a scandal which started well before the crisis. But with the crisis, the hospital sector is more than ever neglected:

- Shortages of drugs and products for basic maintenance. Thus, the Professional Union of Orthopaedic Material has just decided not to deliver to hospitals anymore because the state has not paid them since 2010.
- Shortages of personnel, and non-payment of overtime and days on standby.
- In parallel, a very big increase in patients using the hospitals, with huge queues at health centres.

Thus, one of the biggest hospitals in Athens, Sotiria, which specializes in lung diseases, has seen over the last two years an increase in the number of

patients of between 30 and 40 per cent, while the government is trying to amalgamate it with a neighbouring hospital, which will mean fewer beds and staff cuts in a hospital where already for a long time the lack of male nurses has obliged families to pay for private personnel to assist patients at night.

That is why a big mobilization has begun, whose demands are:

- not one bed to be closed;
- hiring of the necessary personnel;
- payment of standby days (which have not been paid since December) ;
- supplying of the drugs and the material necessary to care for patients.

For weeks, health workers have been organising work stoppages and occupying the offices of the management of the neighbouring hospital. For its part, the Federation of Hospital Workers has organized twenty days of action against the policy of evaluation of employees, the dismissal of staff and the many hospital amalgamations that are underway. This week there took place all over the country occupations and rallies in defence of a public health policy.

The brown plague tries to rise again

Although they had been relatively discreet since 1974, the year of the fall of the military dictatorship, the fascists had never completely disappeared, shamelessly exploiting nationalism and anti-Semitism and trying for several years now rebuild their forces on the basis of racist campaigns against the many immigrants arriving from Africa and Asia. This far Right has today a double visage:

- An institutional face with the LAOS party, a kind of equivalent of the French National Front, around its caudillo, Karatzaferis. It failed however in the gamble it took: to support the policy of Papandreou, from conviction but also so as to offer a presentable face and to enter the government of national union that it was advocating. In fact, it

paid quite dearly for it, pulled out its ministers (but two of them joined New Democracy!), so it relaunched its activity, rediscovering its habitual anti-immigrant discourse.

- Neo-Nazi activists, petty thugs organized in Chryssi Avgi ("Golden Dawn"), whose leader is a former terrorist who planted bombs. Openly protected by the MAT (Greek riot police) and used when necessary as auxiliaries of the police, they have had a certain success in a district in the centre of Athens by organizing part of the population against the immigrants who live there in dire poverty. Thefts, but also some murders committed by immigrants have provided the pretext for a wave of racism, with violent attacks and the formation of "vigilance" groups, and the intolerable election to Athens City Council of the leader of the group, who had no hesitation in giving the Nazi salute in the town hall. As of now, the group, as though it had been made respectable by the participation of its LAOS counterpart in the government, is trying to move to the next stage, in suburbs of Athens and in the provinces: on the one hand attempts to infiltrate assemblies of the Indignant, on the other enrolment of young people to attack immigrants and antiracists. They even try incursions into suburbs with a democratic tradition, such as this week in Nea Smyrni, where they injured two Syrian refugees right in the main square, which was full of people who did not react.

For its part, the Network for Monitoring Racist Attacks has recorded a very sharp increase in attacks, and is worried by the participation of minors.

Faced with this situation, the government is making the conscious choice of encouraging racism and thus fascist violence, with a policy and declarations that are illustrated by the minister "for the protection of citizens", Michalis Chryssochoïdis, a very reactionary cadre of PASOK. Justifying the opening of a veritable concentration camp for immigrants fleeing their conditions of war and poverty (1,000 places in a former barracks which will be guarded by a private militia), he declared (quoted by *Epochi*): "We must face resolutely the question of

immigration, which has now been transformed into a social and national problem". And speaking about the policy of camps: "It is the only way that will enable us to neutralize this bomb (sic). Otherwise, inevitably, we will be led to catastrophe. And so we can no longer as a society stand for this. Hundreds of thousands of poor and wretched men in the streets, without work, with nothing to do and starving, victims of the criminal gangs of the slave trade: it is absolutely vital that we take steps". Since then the government has announced the construction of 30 similar camps in the country, where 30,000 immigrants will be held. Parallel to this we have a big campaign by the government and the media about the danger that this population represents, including for public health.

The tone is set ... And so the antiracist and today antifascist tasks are extremely urgent. There are at least two such tasks:

- a central battle for the rights of immigrants, in particular for them to be welcomed in a way that is worthy of the rights of man. From this point of view, it is certainly necessary to put a stop to the policy which forces immigrants without resources to survive in terrifying and dangerous conditions in some districts of Athens. But to remove the public benches in the main squares, as the mayor of the capital has done, reinforces exclusion and justifies racism. However, the demands concern both the Greek and immigrant population: job creation, in particular in the building industry (a sector that has been very hard hit by the crisis), the right to quality health care, the right to an education (this year, there were no school books for months on end and schools were closed as economy measures) ...
- unity of the antiracist movement so as to give it the mass and effective character that is necessary. On March 17, a demonstration of 1,000 people marched (and was blocked by the police) towards Aghios Pandelimonas, the district where the neo-Nazis area active. This demonstration, called by an association linked, as is often the case in Greece, to a political organization, was an example of a fight-back that was necessary but very insufficient. At a

time when the neo-Nazis are credited in the opinion polls with scores sometimes higher than those of LAOS and could get into Parliament, united and prolonged mass campaigns are on the agenda, and we have seen some examples of this, with the massive participation of high-school students. Preventing the fascists from growing, and reconquering through mass mobilizations and anticapitalist perspectives the neighbourhoods that have fallen into their hands form part of our urgent tasks!

Crisis and struggles in the media

The struggles of workers in the Greek media have been many and hard since the beginning of the crisis. From the point of view of the working class, the primary reason is that the media have a regulated core (newspapers and television channels in Athens), with real collective agreements and trade-union organizations – something that is exceptional for the private sector. It is true that around this core, there is a plethora of enterprises (magazines, Internet, small radios and provincial newspapers, etc.) and very flexible workers, who were aiming up to now to obtain the "regulations" of the Athens newspapers. The logic of the crisis has reversed this movement, pushing everyone towards a levelling downwards!

Admittedly, the crisis has brutally affected the income of the media, which depends to a large extent on advertising, and therefore on the current economic conjuncture, in the context moreover of a worldwide reorganization of information because of the Internet. But this has been used rather as an opportunity for the big capital which controls information to take on the workers and dismantle the regulations. It should also be pointed out that the capital which controls the media does not do so just for the pleasure of the immediate profits that are derived from the sector, but rather to manipulate the media in favour of its other businesses: of the four big press groups in Athens, two are controlled by ship-owners and one belongs to a Greek multinational of the building industry. And even the way

in which the crisis has been managed shows this violent determination on the part of multinational capital. For example, the Greek subsidiary Leo Burnett, part of the French advertising multinational Publicis, whose declaration of "bankruptcy" (read, refusal to pay its debts) last year reinforced the spread of the crisis and the pressure on the media.

In a first phase, 2010-2011, attacks especially took the form of mass dismissals, closing-down of newspapers and reorganization of work. The big groups succeeded in brutally imposing a contraction of at least a third of their workforce, making a large number of workers unemployed. And especially, in order to do this, they systematically resorted to dividing the workers (journalists against administrative staff, radio technicians against printers - the watchword was "everyone for themselves" - and attacking the trade unions as "irresponsible". These attacks were organized most of the time by "spontaneous" movements within the workplaces to cries of "save the enterprise". The big press group DOL – emblematic for Greece, one of the traditional pillars of political power – was in the vanguard of all these attacks, of division, of dismissals, of the fight against the unions.

The wages struggle

The attacks against wages were the epicentre of the second phase, which moreover also began very early. Thus Sky TV, which belongs to the Greek ship-owner Alafouzou, imposed in December 2010 the first individual contracts: wages cuts of 10 per cent, with the breaking of collective agreements and dismissal for those who refused a procedure that aimed – over and above the question of wages – at breaking the presence of the trade unions in the enterprises and violating the bourgeois legality of the minima laid down by the law and by collective agreements (a European fiction which at the time was still judicially in force). This movement became generalized during 2011 in all the groups and repeatedly : the radio operator Pegasos, which belongs to a multinational of the building industry, in

the same way imposed three times wage cuts of 10 per cent, each time creating unheard-of violence in the enterprise. Similarly another ship-owner, Kyriakou, has just demanded a third cut in the wages (of between 10 and 20 per cent) of the workers of the Antenna channel, a week after its Serbian subsidiary had declared juicy profits! It should be pointed out that the drop in real wages (counting simply inflation and taxes on wages in the name of the crisis) over the last two years has been estimated at around 25 per cent. By adding on the reduction of nominal wages imposed in this second phase, we get a cumulated drop of 50 per cent, and it seems that the goal is to reach a reduction of wages by two-thirds.

But there is worse: because what has become generalized since last year is work that is not paid or paid with delays of several months. Very few enterprises in the sector continue to pay wages normally! The most striking and well-known cases (but the practice is general, especially in small companies) are Alter TV, which has stopped paying its 700 workers for a year and a half, and *Eleftherotypia* (one of the four big newspapers in Athens and the only one which was a little bit critical towards the policy of the Troika) which stopped paying its 800 workers last summer. In both cases, the workers, after a few months of illusions in a so-called "rescue of their enterprise" went on strike with occupation, and benefitted from solidarity from Greek society comparable to that received by the strike of the steelmakers of Halivourgia. There was even a beginning of resumption of activity under workers' control , with two issues of *Eleftherotypia* published, but with Alter TV, after a few months of broadcasts made by the workers, the media bosses and the state cut off the broadcasting antennae.

In the phase that is now opening up there are two important things at stake: first of all the dismantling of any public information structure (local public radios controlled by the town halls, the national news agency and public television and radio), and, especially, the dismantling of collective agreements and work regulations, because to the de facto viola-

tion of the labour legislation, the new memorandum worked out by the Troika adds the de jure suppression of collective agreements (employers are no longer obliged to respect them!), as well as the freedom of capital to pay labour as it sees fit (to lower wages it is no longer necessary for the worker to agree!).

In spite of continuous and repeated struggles on the level of workplaces and of the whole sector (with strikes and central mobilizations), workers have the feeling of going from defeat in defeat, of working in a capitalist propaganda machine, entirely directed against society and against labour. That poses more and more the need for a reorientation of the movement in order to link up with the rest of

Greek workers, in the struggle of course, but especially also in seeking a method of working which takes up again the professional deontology that is ridiculed systematically by the capitalists of the media in the service of the various troikas. This is an internal and external battle, in the sector and even beyond the country, because what is at stake is not only the wages and conditions of a few tens of thousands of workers, but the reproduction of a system which has no perspective other than barbarism, in Europe and in the world.

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FRANCE

Front national: Predictable progress, a danger to fight

YVAN LEMAÎTRE ·

Marine le Pen did not make it to the second round, but she won 6.4 million votes and 17.90 % of the poll. This has a significant impact on the relationship of political forces emerging from April 22 and May 6, and will weigh on the subsequent parliamentary elections.

In 2002, Le Pen and Megret scored 19.20 % or 5.48 million votes, while the CPNT (the "hunters and fishers party"), a part of whose electorate is close to the far right, scored 4.23%. Marine Le Pen thus lost 1.3% but with a higher rate of participation she gained 900,000 votes.

Behind the figures, there are notable developments. The FN vote fell sharply in the big cities and the working class suburbs, where it was often behind the Front de gauche. It fell by more than 5% in Lyon, Toulouse, Montpellier and Nice, and 4% in Lille, Paris and Marseille. In ten big cities out of fifteen, the FdG beat the FN. In five city suburbs in the most deprived neighbourhoods (Grigny, Vaulx-en-Velin, Saint-Denis, la Courneuve and Aubervilliers), the far right went from 20.63% in 2002 to 11.88 %. The FN did not really progress in its eastern bastions stretching from the Gard to the Moselle, on the contrary it went from 10 to 15% in the rural departments of the west (Dordogne, Cantal, Landes, Charente and so on).

Sarkozy lost 1.69 million votes in relation to 2007, while benefiting from some of the 3.5 million voters lost by Bayrou. Le Pen's gains came mainly from this electorate of the right. Her strategy, seeking to break the ostracism to which her party has been subjected, worked. And this at a time when the defeat of Sarkozy and his politics of flattering far right prejudices while playing footsy with Bayrou has left the right weakened and divided.

Left capitulation, right demagoguery

The political mechanisms which have led to this situation emerge from the capitulation and impotence of the left as well as the populist demagoguery of the right, amplified by the pressures of the crisis. These are the essential components of a latent political crisis, which rapidly wears out the ruling teams, sharpens the contradictions between deeds and words, and strips bare the lies of the politicians, resented as so many contemptuous aggressions by the workers and the popular classes.

This logic was established in the first presidential term of François Mitterrand, when the right and the left cohabited in the management of affairs. It continued before the crisis came to put left and right policies back to back, both subjecting, through Europe, the interests of the people to the defence of the interests of the financial and industrial groups. The demoralisation of the world of work, struck full on by flexibility, unemployment, the degradation of living and working conditions, generalised social insecurity, has created the terrain on which reactionary prejudices have blossomed. All the more so in that the right tries to maintain its influence over a part of its electorate by playing the same sinister demagogic music, thus aiding the FN.

The left has remained incapable of reacting or offering a perspective, because it is subject to the established order, to the will of the powerful. Its victory does not reverse this evolution because it results from the rejection of Sarkozy, not from a politics rallying the popular classes in a perspective of challenging the dictatorship of finance. It left the field free to Marine Le Pen and her politics which divert social discontent onto the terrain of nationalism, chauvinism and racism.

That said, given the evolution of the FN's results, the left dynamic expressed above all around the Front de gauche, but also witnessed in the campaigns of Philippe Poutou and Nathalie Arthaud, illustrates the instability of the situation and what is at stake in the coming social and political struggles. Nothing is settled. Certainly, the political developments these elections bear witness to are also taking place in numerous other European countries, with the emergence of far right populist parties or even genuinely fascist formations, using physical violence against the workers' movement. But there is nothing automatic about this. What happens depends on the capacity of the workers' movement, both trade union and political wings, to retake the initiative by affirming itself as a force of opposition to austerity policies, including those of the left.

"La chef de l'opposition, c'est moi"

Marine Le Pen wants to create a new party of which she will be the axis, a party of the far right, nationalist and chauvinist, anti-immigrant, hostile to Europe and relying on its collapse, bringing together the FN and a part of the UMP. On May 1 she evoked the beginning of a "historic combat" for "the great party of national coming together". The next stage will be the parliamentary elections in June, during which she wants to see "a massive entry into the national assembly of the 'Rassemblement bleu marine'."

On April 22 the FN scored more than 12.5% of those registered to vote – the threshold for going through to the second round of the parliamentary

elections – in 353 circumscriptions out of 577. Even if its vote falls, it has a great nuisance capacity for the UMP. Obtaining deputies is another affair. However, the situation created after the presidential election constitutes a serious warning. It is clear that the influence of the far right, its ability to find a place in the institutional game and in the life of the country, represents a terrible danger for workers. It reflects a degradation of the relationship of forces in favour of the dominant classes.

A necessary counter-offensive

These elections constitute a warning; The left in power will bend to the needs of the markets, and the banks. François Hollande has undertaken to honour the illegitimate and unjust debt. His "humanist" speeches, like those on equality and justice, will in no way prevent him from defending national identity and counter-posing it to immigration.

In this social and political battle which is opening, what matters is not to abandon the terrain to the far right, but to build against it, but also against the neoliberal government, a left opposition force; a force which fights for the world of labour and of youth, to defend their rights, to fight for solidarity among all the exploited whatever their origin in the daily life of the neighbourhoods and workplaces, to combat racism; a force which situates its combat at the level of all Europe, against all nationalist and chauvinist reflexes. The task is to unite the world of labour and its organisations against any policy of austerity, to put an end to the dictatorship of the financial and industrial groups

SPANISH STATE

M15: A look toward the future

ESTHER VIVAS ·

In the countries of Europe's periphery, emulating the popular uprisings in the Arab world, drawing warmth from Tunis's Qasbah and Cairo's Tahrir Square, people took back and took over the public space. The Arab Spring gave us confidence in "ourselves" and our collective ability to change the existing order. And looking also at Iceland and Greece, the 15M movement broke with the prevailing skepticism, resignation and climate of apathy. But a year after popping up, what remains of it? What has been achieved? What challenges and prospects lie ahead?

The movement of collective outrage heated up fast. Beyond the thousands who occupied the squares, attended meetings, marched in the streets... many others, from their homes, identified with this angry tide that "represented" them. And with 23% unemployment, 175 evictions per day and one in five households living below the poverty line in the Spanish State, how could anyone resist growing indignant, rebelling and disobeying?

The M15 has been able to go beyond the activist core of protesters, awakening a new militant generation and lifting many people out of their easy chairs. These are young people, environmentalists, women, seniors ..., who made up the "people of the Plaza del Sol" in Madrid and "Plaza de Catalunya" in Barcelona. A year after M15 we see how the movement has charged both those holding economic power and those holding political power with social responsibility for the current crisis, highlighting the close links and collusion between them. M15 has unmasked a low-intensity democracy, held hostage by financial power; those who govern serve the 1% not the 99%. It has succeeded in altering the collective imaginary and the political

atmosphere to its roots. The crisis has provoked a social, political and economic earthquake, but the emergence of 15M has also, conversely, generated a process of re-politicization of society.

The deepening crisis and the emergence of the movement has allowed people to "think big" and "act big." Today, there are not only calls demanding reform of the banking system but promoting the expropriation and nationalization of banks and for "nonpayment" of unjust, illegitimate and illegal debts. The action agenda has expanded and radicalized; it is no longer enough to simply demonstrate and take to the streets, now we occupy plazas, block traffic, stop evictions... The crisis exposes how often what is "illegal" is legitimate and what is illegitimate is precisely what is "legal." To occupy houses or banks can be punished, while evicting families or swindling with "preferentes" (complex bonds of ownership) by the banks is perfectly legal. Facing a reality so unfair, why not disobey the law or support those who do? This is one of the great victories of 15M: to make these forms of struggle normal and socially acceptable.

And what challenges and prospects do we face? Changing the world from bottom up is neither easy nor quick, and for this, as the philosopher Daniel Bensaid pointed out, you must arm themselves with "a slow impatience". We must rebuild another correlation of forces between those in power and the vast majority of society, and this requires a long march, which does not always follow a predictable or straight path. And M15 is just the prologue of this cycle of struggles that has begun. At the same time, to win concrete victories beyond some defensive ones is extremely difficult. Despite the anger and social unrest, the cutback policies are intensifying.

To combat slander, criminalization and repression is another key task in the coming period. The erosion of the rule of law is accompanied by the emergence of the state of emergency. This we have already seen. The more the welfare state withers, the more the police state grows. It begins by slandering those who are mobilized by dubbing them "perroflautas" (street musicians), then goes on to criminalize them by calling them "anti-system thugs," and steps up repression using preventive detention, websites that insult, etc. What's involved is creating "an enemy," to justify repressing it.

The politics of fear and intimidation is the other face of the policy of cutbacks. But the best antidote to such measures is the massive size of the protest. How can you slander the seniors of a town who defend a clinic from being closed down? How can you smash down those who defend themselves with their books in their hands? It can be done, and has been done, but not without paying a high price in public opinion. So far, repression has boomeranged, striking back against the power.

It has often been said that with M15 "fear has disappeared", but "fear" continues to be very present in the workplace, where capital dominates with hardly any bumps. That the leadership of the major trade unions submitted to the government and the employers, weighs heavily on all social movements. We need a militant trade unionism, which has its center of gravity not in negotiations from above but the struggle from below and that defends a culture of mobilization and solidarity.

And if the movement plans a radical shift in the paradigm, we cannot forget other key aspects of the crisis, beyond the economic ones and the fight against cutbacks, debt and privatization. The ecological and climatic aspect of the crisis is a central

element. It is impossible to believe in "another world" without fighting the logic of a system of that prioritizes production but ignores the limits of the earth. Economic and ecological crises are intimately intertwined. Nor is an alternative possible unless it also seeks to end a patriarchal system that refuses to recognize women's work, making it invisible. We can say the current economic crisis clearly has a feminine face.

International coordination is another major challenge we must resolve. Although the movement has had successful days of global mobilization, like that of last October 15th, 2011, and now the M12 and M15, its international coordination is still weak. Capitalism is global and, consequently, resistance to it must be equally global, internationalist and built on solidarity. From the public squares to global outrage there is a road of comings and goings we will have to travel more each time.

Looking backwards a year, few would have foreseen the magnitude of the cuts in the Spanish State (which reached making Constitutional Amendments to put a ceiling on public deficits) or repression (threatening changes to the Penal Code to severely punish non-violent direct action), but neither would anyone have imagined this angry tidal wave that has smashed on the political and social panorama. In troubled times, certainties tend to be false and we have but one that isn't: those in power will not give up their privileges without a fight. We do not know the outcome of this "battle" between "those at the top" and "those on the bottom," but if we do not struggle, the game is already lost.

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Translated by John Catalinotto*

More info.

USA:

The Gender of Occupy Wall Street

CINZIA ARRUIZZA ·

This is always a possible outcome of any economic crisis, and especially now because of the disappointment of the great hopes raised by Obama's election. OWS also allowed for a reconnection between fragmented struggles to emerge again and give visibility to a plurality of experiences of resistance and protest which, in their isolation of the last decade, were drowned out by the noise of mainstream politics.

The 99% discourse has certainly represented one of the major elements of the symbolic and communicative efficacy of the movement: it evoked the force of the numbers, made immediately apparent the deep injustice of neoliberal capitalism, and stimulated a sense of belonging, and of immediate solidarity among the members of the 99%. However, in order to avoid being re-signified in populist terms, the 99% discourse required and still requires articulation. Not only is capitalist society composed by more than just two classes, but even the field of exploited and oppressed people is marked by divisions, disparity of conditions, different experiences and partially divergent short-term interests.

That this basic datum was initially not self-evident within the movement is shown, for example, by the episode recounted by Manissa Maharawal concerning the discussion on the Declaration of the Occupation of Wall Street, in September [1]. The first line of the document stated: "As one people, formerly divided by the color of our skin, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or lack thereof, political party and cultural background, we acknowledge the reality: that there is only one race, the human race . . ." [2] Only after Manissa and her friends stood up and "blocked" the discussion, offering to the people gathered in the assembly an accelerated

course on white privilege, structural racism and oppression, was the line finally erased.

The "formerly divided" of the initial draft revealed indeed some difficulties in, or resistance to, understanding that racial, sexual, gender divisions, are not just a matter of false consciousness, or of fake ideological assumptions, which can be immediately or almost magically overcome within the struggle through just an appeal to the unity of the "human race". On the contrary, they have a very material basis, play a decisive role in the reproduction of capitalist relations, produce sets of sedimented habits and behaviors, and rely on the appeal of short-term interests. This is why what is required for them to be addressed is not alchemy, but rather a political strategy.

Between the pulverization into hundreds of different identities, all characterized by diverse forms of oppression and exploitation, and the longing for unity and homogenization in the name of the "human race", or of the immediate magic negation of all instances of the capital-relation, it might seem that little or no space is left for an alternative view. However, there is something interesting in the story told by Manissa. In the face of the infamous first line of the Declaration, of the resistance opposed to her "block", of the initial lack of understanding for her reasons, she did not leave. She stayed and insisted "that in order for this movement to be inclusive it needed to acknowledge these realities and find creative ways to work through them instead of ignoring them" [3]. In other words she implicitly raised the question of strategy, of the necessary temporal framework which both separates and joins the current situation and the goal of the abolition of hierarchizing differences, and of the necessary practices to put in place in order to work through these lines of division within the move-

ment. She and her friends won, the Declaration was changed.

I'm recounting this episode not in order to underline the frequent resistance of social movements to adequately recognize the complexity of class, gender and race relations, a difficulty which often compels the birth of forms of non mixed organization in order to cope with these issues and avoid the ruse of only apparent universalisms. On the contrary, what I find particularly interesting in this episode is rather the emergence of a new space created by the OWS movement, a space which could help overcome the divorce of class politics and gender, and of sexual and race politics.

The ambiguous slogan of the 99% against the 1%, although using a new language and new discursive forms, managed to put again the question of class relations at the center of the American political discourse. If this was still only implicit and not perfectly transparent in the first weeks of the movement, particularly in NYC, it became clearer through the call for the general strike in Oakland, on November 2nd. By this I don't mean that the OWS movement managed to massively mobilize the working class across the country. On the contrary, the mobilization of the working class, in all the various forms in which this can take place, is exactly what is at stake in the next months, if the movement wants to survive, expand, and possibly gain more than simply a shift in political discourse. But the 99% slogan, the catalyzing power of the movement, the re-emergence of a public space in which alliances among fragmented and dispersed struggles can be built, has opened at least the possibility for a new wave of class struggle. This is because it has given back to class struggle its political legitimacy, after decades of political and cultural delegitimization, dismissal, removal and oblivion.

It is precisely this re-emergence of class politics that raises a crucial question for feminist thought today. In her article "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History" Nancy Fraser, referring to the last decades of feminist thought and to the increas-

ing divorce of class politics and gender politics, notices that

"With the fragmentation of the feminist critique came the selective incorporation and partial recuperation of some of its strands. Split off from one another and from the societal critique that had integrated them, second-wave hopes were conscripted in the service of a project that was deeply at odds with our larger, holistic vision of a just society. In a fine instance of the cunning of history, utopian desires found a second life as feeling currents that legitimated the transition to a new form of capitalist: post-Fordist, transnational, neoliberal" [N. Fraser, "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History", *New Left Review*, 56 (2009), p. 99. One can find similar arguments in H. Eisenstein, *Feminism Seduced. How Global Elites Use Women's Labor and Ideas to Exploit the World*, Paradigm Publishers, London 2009 and in N. Power, *One Dimensional Woman*, Zero Books, Hampshire 2009. [4].

Indeed, the use of feminist discourse to justify the attacks to Iraq and Afghanistan or the racist laws against Muslim people in France; the aggressive rightwing feminism à la Sarah Palin; the commodification of sexual identities, including homosexual, transsexual, intersexual and queer identities with the birth of new kinds of consumers and market sectors: all of this should really invite us to carefully rethink the divorce between gender politics and class politics and the subsequent dismissal in academia of class discourse altogether, as the event which made feminist and then queer discourse available for institutional and capitalist cooptation.

Fraser concludes her article by suggesting that this is a moment in which feminists should think big, i.e. they should reconnect feminist critique to the critique of capitalism, repositioning in this way "feminism squarely on the Left". The article was published in 2009, just at the beginning of a worldwide financial and economic crisis with few precedents, in the middle of the failure of the neoliberal model, and two years before the sudden, unexpected, refreshing event which goes under the name of

the OWS movement. If Fraser is right in her diagnosis of the impasse of feminist thought today, one may hope that the shock provoked by this state of "normal exception" which characterizes the period we are living in, can help us find a way to get out of this impasse. In particular, my suggestion is that the OWS movement could give us a concrete opportunity to accept the invitation by Fraser to "think big", and to confront our feminist critique to a concrete experience, that of the new forms of subjectivation and political and social struggle of the last months.

This would imply at least two things. The first, on a theoretical level, is a new availability to seriously analyze the relationships between gender oppression, sexual identities and late capitalism. Recent Marxist theory has offered a much more sophisticated, non-reductionist understanding of concrete social formations, and of the interplay between forms of oppression on the one hand, and the process of extortion of surplus-value and the realization of value on the other. In other words, a large part of Marxist literature has deeply problematized the relationship between, to use a formulation by Rosemary Hennessy, "the discourses by which we make the world intelligible and the structures of accumulation and labor" [5]. By doing this it has largely overcome the trite base-superstructure model, offering in this way powerful tools we can use in order to understand the relationships between gender, sexuality, and capitalist accumulation.

The second necessary move is to think the way in which a feminist critique can help give impulse to the movement, contributing to a new understanding of what class and social struggle is and should be, while at the same time being a constitutive part of the movement. To be clearer, I think that the practical experience of the OWS movement challenges the often separatist and isolationist choices of identity politics, and also the tendency of the last decades toward an increasing de-politicization in particular of gender discourse. Firstly, because, as noted earlier, it made apparent the appeal and the

evocative power of the unity of struggles, especially in a situation of the vertical crisis of neoliberal policies and the end of the illusions of wellbeing promised by late capitalism. Secondly, because within its horizontal organizational form, a plurality of forms of activation, action, and subjectivation have been made possible. In spite of some difficulties and some episodes of clear sexism, the OWS movement has been characterized by a fundamental attempt to be as inclusive as possible. This experience has therefore clearly been a good first step in direction of a re-politicization of gender discourse and of a possible strategic alliance among different social struggles with various protagonists and agents.

However, the risk is that in its strive to be inclusive the movement might just operate a simple addition of separate and almost entirely independent activities, actions, and events. In other words, the risk is to give birth to a sort of potpourri: very nice ambience, but also quite ineffective. One can notice this kind of trend, for example, in the extreme multiplication of working groups and affinity groups within the OWS movement in NYC: the website of the NYC General Assembly lists today 103 groups. Among meditation, wellness, Tea and herbal medicine, Occupy Yoga, and a "warrior group" with 6 members, one can find also WOW (the Women Occupying Wall Street), a LGBTIQA2Z Caucus, a People of Color Working Group, a Strong Women Rules Working Group, and so on.

While this explosion of creativity and vitality is clearly a positive sign, and indicates a legitimate desire to live alternative social relations, the risk is to cultivate the illusion that the simple addition and coexistence in a same political and social space of groups, identities, actions, and struggles will be sufficient. The risk implicit in the logic of the arithmetic addition of the different identities and of their struggles, moreover, is to go in the direction of a crystallization of identities, and therefore in the direction once again of a depoliticization of the question of identity altogether. On the contrary, I suggest that what is urgent today is the strategic

reciprocal articulation both of identities and of a plurality of different struggles. This implies, on the one hand, the identification of common goals and actions, while taking into account the diversity of conditions and needs determined by the various and interrelated forms of oppression, and on the other, the identification of inclusive practices and of internal forms of empowerment for disadvantaged groups among the 99%. Since often some answers come from the movement itself, in order to be more concrete, I will give an example that might go in this direction.

The Occupy Oakland call for a general strike on May 1st reads:

"In 2011, the number of unionized workers in the US stood at 11.8%, or approximately 14.8 million people. What these figures leave out are the growing millions of people in this country who are unemployed and underemployed. The numbers leave out the undocumented, and domestic and manual workers drawn largely from immigrant communities. The numbers leave out workers whose workplace is the home and a whole invisible economy of unwaged reproductive labor. The numbers leave out students who have taken on nearly \$1 trillion dollars in debt, and typically work multiple jobs, in order to afford skyrocketing college tuition. The numbers leave out the huge percentage of black Americans that are locked up in prisons or locked out of stable or secure employment because of our racist society." [6]

This text of course might raise the problem of an opposition between unionized workers, on the one hand, and the non-unionized workers and unemployed people, on the other. Such an opposition would be detrimental and should be avoided at all costs. At the same time, the Oakland statement raises a crucial question. What is at stake is to re-

think what a strike means in a situation in which the class composition and the organization of labor has radically changed, in which the rate of unemployment is raising, in which underemployed people, women, people of color and immigrants represent an increasing large part of the employed working class, and in which the processes of subjectivation of the working class are not the same as we have known in the past. This demands reimagining different ways in which the production and the circulation of commodities can be blocked, including the possibility of variable forms of participation in the strike, involving also the sphere of reproduction, and rethinking the sites of the democratic empowerment of the different sectors constituting the working class. Beyond the discussion about the feasibility or utility of calling for a general strike on May 1st, what I think is really at stake in this practical experience is the possibility of rethinking what class struggle means, reopening a space in which the particular needs, conditions, and processes of the subjectivation of different social sectors and of different identities can articulate each other.

So, we have here a practical challenge as feminist thinkers and feminist activists: if we want to avoid our critique being systematically co-opted by a capitalist discourse, and one form of oppression being simply replaced by another, in what way can we contribute to this strategic and reciprocal articulation of different struggles? For example, what would our participation in a new form of general strike or in a day without the 99% mean? And, ultimately, what kind of subjects of this common struggle do we want to be?

This article was first published in Rebel Rabble May Day bulletin.

It is also available on the Solidarity site.

PAKISTAN

The symbolic sentence on Prime Minister Gilani: what does it mean? – Pakistani capitalist state is in a mess

FAROOQ TARIQ ·

It is not a victory of either side and this will not solve anything. The decision will further deepen the present capitalist state crisis where its institutions are in logger-head with each other. It is an economic crisis that has now resulted in conflicts of the different state institutions.

The decision is apparently not against the present democratic set up and it is more to restore the 'authority of the Supreme Court'. However, it will be presented by PPP as an attack on their government and as an effort to send them home. The decision will help this process in the end. The PPP leadership will try to give an image that they have been single out.

There is a problem. The PPP leadership has done their best not to face the question that who owns the money in the Swiss Banks? There has been tremendous corruption during the second PPP power period in 1994-1996, as is the case with the present one. The deal between PPP and Musharaf resulted in the shape of NRO, a deal that was not even supported by any political party after Musharaf was gone. During the first few months of PPP government, it was able to send a letter to Swiss government to withdraw the cases against president Zardari and company. Supreme Court wanted the cases to be reopened. PPP did not want. Then whole jungle of judicial manoeuvring started. Both sides has used their best talent, PPP finally brought one of the most close lawyer with the judges. Aitezaz Ahsan was able to drag on the case for some months and finally forced the judges to go for a win win situation. Every side can say things as they want.

What are the real issues in Pakistan? It is poverty unemployment, a decent living wage, peace and security for every citizen. PPP government has failed in providing these. The programme of Mian Nawaz Sharif is even more right wing than the present government. If he comes to power, there will be a whole sale privatisation, repayment of the foreign debts on more emergency bases, an increased defence budget and more pro imperialist economic and political policies. Imran Khan Tehreek Insaaf programme is also to continue with the present capitalist system. It can not go very far on this road.

The masses will not gain anything by siding any of them. There has to be an independent working class politics and movement based to develop an independent position. The present court decision will solve nothing nor the PPP reaction. It will further the support of the right wing parties including the religious one. It will sharpen the present contradictions among the different forces of the ruling class.

An ordinary worker will ask from the court, what is the decision? It will also ask PPP activists why they are making noise when there is no clear decision against the prime minister. The decision was to confuse the masses further and their apathy about the institution will further increase. "They are all the same" notion will further take rout among the consciousness of the working masses.

Pakistani capitalist state is in a mess. It has not solved any of the basic problems of the masses. The last four years of PPP government has not changed much in the lives of the masses, it has aggravated the economic and social problems. The role of the state has to be understood in the light of its background. A religiously dominated state will be an au-

thoritarian state in its nature. The military domination of the whole state institutions including the parliament has further driven the course of history in authoritarian directions.

The present court decision can not be understood in isolation from the other processes that are going on within the state and among its actors. The crisis of Pakistani state is a crisis of its ruling elite. The present decision will be interpreted by each party

according to their own interests. It is a classical example of the judicial failiour of solving a political issue. The masses has to do themselves if they want a liberation from hunger and poverty, as long as they have illusion in one or another, they can not go very far

May Day 2012 is a day for the working class, they can bring forward the real issues facing the working class.

FRANCE:

Don't let Le Pen represent the opposition

CHRISTINE POUPIN ·

Throughout Europe the incumbents have been beaten. The Greek, Spanish and Portuguese social democrats have been swept aside. Here, the authoritarian right has been beaten. The crisis is destabilising political representation as a whole. The implementation of brutal austerity policies is destroying the people's support and confidence for the parties in power, whether of the right, like the UMP in France, or the left like the social democrats in Spain, Portugal or Greece.

At this election the left recorded some slight progress, but the left-right relationship of forces from the first round of the presidential election remains broadly favourable to the right (56% against 44%). Hollande's victory is due to the failure of Sarkozy more than to his own dynamic. Also, the Front National of Marine Le Pen had an unprecedented success. Political life is over-determined by the weight of the far right. The UMP risks implosion, torn between one sector, polarised by the FN, and other sectors of the traditional right, who reject the populist or fascist drift.

Unlike the elections of 1981 or 1988, this president of the left has been elected without a massive shift of votes to the left. He has come to power as a result of the division of the right. A division that was strengthened by François Bayrou's call for a vote for Hollande.

Immediately after these elections, it is the world, and specifically the European, crisis that will dominate the economic, social and political situation. The ratings agencies have made it clear: it will be necessary to cut social budgets still further, and dismantle public services. The European Union demands the application of the "golden rule" by inte-

grating a ban on any public deficit into the Constitution. We already know the results of this policy: Europe is sinking further into recession, with more unemployment, less purchasing power and still fewer public services.

Through all these policies, we propose to put at the heart of public debate a plan of emergency anti-crisis measures. This social shield for the popular classes would include a wage increase for all of 300 euros net, a minimum wage of 1,700 euros, the creation of hundreds of thousands of public jobs, a ban on layoffs, and the reduction of weekly working time to 32 hours to combat unemployment.

François Hollande during his campaign denounced a faceless enemy: finance. How will he resist the pressure of the financial markets without attacking the banks and the bankers? How will the pressure of the debt and speculation be reduced by allowing the banking sector to function according to neoliberal rules? Without expropriation of the banks, and without their nationalisation under social control, no government will have the resources to finance policies responding to social needs. To give priority to public services it is necessary to attack the debt: to organise a public audit for the cancellation of the illegitimate debt and its interest. A new fiscal policy suppressing the gifts to the wealthy and taxing the wealthiest and the capitalist profits will be at the centre of our proposals. But the depth of the crisis, its global character demands not only resistance to austerity, but to reorient the economy according to the social and ecological needs, to end reliance on nuclear power, reorganise the energy and transport sectors, the habitat, in vast public sectors which escape the logic of capitalist profit.

Far from taking radical decisions against the crisis, Hollande is faithful to the broad orientations of the European Union, wishing to "give meaning to

rigour" that is developing his own austerity policy. This illustrates the risk of an evolution of a Greek style situation. And the support Hollande received from Bayrou, a heated partisan of the "golden rule" to deploy a policy of national unity is not a good sign. Faced with the diktats of the European Union, a first task emerges: to reject the new European pact, and for that, to call a referendum where once again the sovereign people will say "no" to this neo-liberal Europe.

Right austerity or left austerity? Our leaders do not envisage any other alternative. And it is all the more disconcerting that the Front national is looking on. Marine Le Pen has already said that she wants to be the right opposition. What is at stake for her party? Creating the conditions in 2017, or even before, for a confrontation between the right-far right and the left, in which Le Pen's party will be victorious. Indeed, there is no guarantee that a Hollande government can deal with an acceleration of the crisis. It is in this context that the polarisation between the Front national and the radical and anti-capitalist left will develop. This polarisation was summed up by the Greek elections with the good results for the radical left, Syryza in particular, being balanced by the bad news of the entry of neo-Nazis into parliament. We cannot allow Marine Le Pen to represent the opposition. We propose the construction of a broad unitary movement of the social and political left against the Front national.

During the campaign we advanced the perspective of a unitary left opposition to a government which would apply a policy of left austerity. Not through impatience but by analysis of social liberal policies in France and in Europe, and the need to defend the interests of the majority of the population.

We propose organising, in the workplaces and neighbourhoods, workers, youths and their organisations to demand "change, now", to create the conditions of a mobilisation to demand wage increases, block dismissals, obtain full status for precarious workers in the public sector, and impose retirement at 60. There is no doubt that the satisfaction of these demands will lead to confrontation

with the financial markets and the big banking groups.

These initial proposals are opposed to any austerity policy and rigour "Hollande style". That is why we cannot at the same time defend these emergency measures and support from near or far a Hollande government. The leaders of the Front de gauche will decide on their participation in the government after the parliamentary elections. At this stage, it seems that they are ruling out direct participation and envisage a "support without participation", an old formula from the past already used by the PCF. At the coming parliamentary elections, it will be necessary once again to beat back the right and the far right, but the only clear policy is to reject any austerity whether from the right or the left. We need a left opposition to the government. The NPA is ready for it. And the leaders of the Front de gauche?

We are at a crossroads. The crisis of the system is global, economic certainly but also ecological and political. In these conditions, the political tool to construct cannot ignore the question of productivity, or that of internationalism, or those of real democracy and self-organisation.

To face the crisis, appeals to the "republic", denunciations of "finance", institutional combinations with social liberalism have no weight. In an electoral conjuncture marked by social defeats, the discourse of the Front de gauche has been able to convince millions of voters. However, we think that neither the leadership of the PCF nor the rhetoric of Mélenchon will be up to the challenges of the crisis. Reformist projects, even left ones, can initially rally the first resistance to the crisis. It is now about preparing for confrontation with the capitalists and rejecting the left austerity of the government. The objective, which we do not hid, is to prepare a new May 1968 or a new June 1936 which will impose a radical transformation of society. We are ready to march together with the Front de gauche and all those who oppose austerity policies, to discuss the terms of an anti-austerity, anti Front National bloc,

a bloc which is the left opposition to the Hollande government.

But the social and political choices to come demand, more than ever, the independence of the anti-capitalists. Faced with the uncertainties of the politics of the Front de gauche and its orientation "one foot in, one foot out", in relation to the new majority, we propose a federation on the basis of total independence from the PS of all the anti-capitalist currents and forces, the forces which have en-

sure the continuity and the historic thread of the revolutionary current, the libertarians, the radical ecologists, the activists of the social and trade union movement and so on.

That supposes the construction of a genuinely independent tool. That is the dual challenge for the NPA: establishing a regrouping of anti-capitalists and a unitary anti-crisis polity, in particular with the Front de gauche but, well beyond that, with all those who oppose austerity policies.

ARAB REVOLUTIONS

Egypt's year of revolution

CARL FINAMORE ·

Against the Current: Most of us have never witnessed the kind of revolutionary people's mobilization you saw up-close in Tahrir Square. Now that you've had some chance to absorb and think about that experience, what did being there mean to you?

Carl Finamore: The revolutionary events in Egypt are extraordinary by any standards. First, it is the largest country in the Arab world with the largest population and largest army. It had the only metro line in the Arab world until Tunisia built theirs in 2011. It is the premier center of cinema in the Arab world. It has substantial cement, steel and aluminum production with the largest textile plant in Africa, employing 20,000 workers at the Mahalla textile factory.

Egypt's relatively advanced development makes it easier to more clearly identify social and political forces and trends on both sides of the struggle — the military, youth, women, workers, middle and upper classes and the informal impoverished vendor-sales sector. In many ways, therefore, Egypt has many of the textbook features of classical revolutionary situations. The events are therefore much easier to understand than other countries of the Arab Spring. This certainly was true for me.

I arrived in Cairo just hours after Hosni Mubarak was himself driven from office. Driving past the Presidential Palace, car horns were blasting away. As I travelled further along the streets of one of the world's largest cities, I could hear cheers and shouts of joy from spontaneous street celebrations.

On one memorable incident, two days later in Tahrir Square, it was clear that the celebrations were not over. I was distracted from an interview

by loud shouting coming from a city bus making its rounds.

Hanging out the window with fists pumping upwards, several dozen youth were shouting "The thief is gone! The thief is gone!" The people around me began laughing. Everyone knew what they meant. The deposed dictator did not even deserve to be called by his proper name.

Later in the week, on the traditional Friday day off, hundreds of thousands again filled Tahrir, continuing their demands for bread, justice and freedom.

Now, it is one year later. I arrived a few days before the January 25 anniversary of the 18-day struggle that started it all. Much has happened. There have been 12,000 arrested and subjected to impromptu military courts, more than during the entire 29-year rule of Mubarak.

Hundreds more have been killed in street confrontations with the military and secret police, more than during last year's January 25-February 11 Freedom Days.

In this one year, I saw the transition from delirious celebration to much more serious deliberation. During my brief two visits, I was privileged to witness the evolving, riveting dramas and provocative conflicts of revolution. It was everything you would expect, both inspiring and captivating. It stirred one's spirit.

ATC: We know that the anti-Mubarak struggle included Islamists, secular radicals and liberals, women, working class forces and others all fighting for the same immediate goal. What did you see of Egyptian workers' involvement in Tahrir, and even more important in strikes and labor organizing?

CF: The youth and middle classes originally called for a protest against corruption on Mubarak's declared national holiday of Police Day, January 25, 2011. Shocking everyone, reportedly 90,000 showed up in cities across Egypt with an unexpectedly large presence in Tahrir Square as well. The police attacked, just as they had always responded to protests. But, as the bloody assaults grew, so did the courageous determination of the protestors. Assemblies attracted larger and broader social forces all across the country.

But the real untold story of those days is the absolutely decisive role played by the working class. Workers participated as individuals in Tahrir Square from the first days, but around February 6, they entered the fray for the first time acting as a class.

For the next several days, Egypt experienced the greatest strike wave in its history. Dozens of cities were affected, production was shut down, commerce shut down and government offices closed.

This is when the dreaded and despised secret police murderers took off their uniforms and disappeared. This is also when the generals abandoned their mentor and sponsor. The high command simply could not depend upon the ranks of the army to carry out the Tiananmen Square massacre that journalist Robert Fisk reported Mubarak demanded.

Mubarak was gone on February 11. As Khaled Ali, Egypt's best known labor attorney and current presidential candidate told me in a 2011 interview, "You cannot understand the revolution without properly understanding the decisive role of the working class before, during and after the events in Tahrir Square."

ATC: There's a political working class and socialist left in Egypt , which doesn't get nearly the attention it deserves — whether because it can't be highly visible, difficulties of language and communication, etc. What's your perception of the Egyptian left after the Tahrir uprisings?

CF: While I did meet leftists and socialists and asked about them all the time in my interviews, I did not learn enough to make an informed judgment. My impression is that they are growing and playing an important role in suggesting the movement focus on building a mass movement that links the democratic and social demands of the youth together with the economic demands of the emerging independent workers' movement. Of course, they are also on the front lines of demonstrations. As I observed on both trips, these protests are often accompanied by the familiar rhythmic chant in Arabic of "the people united will never be defeated."

There is also no question that activists, broadly describing themselves as revolutionaries, have been targeted by the police. This occurred particularly in the November 11, 2011, protests on Mahmoud Street in front of the Ministry of Interior, where youth were targeted by the police for beatings. Around 150 were killed. Again, in December 2011, women protestors were attacked by the police. Women were killed, beaten, raped and submitted to humiliating and abusive "virginity tests." Because of the uproar, these are now outlawed.

These two months of murder and mayhem are known throughout Egypt as the Mahmoud Street massacres.

For example, I interviewed a revolutionist this January whom I first met last year. Today, he is blind in one eye, purposefully shot in the eye with a rubber bullet. He is among 35 young people blinded in one eye, and seven blinded in both eyes, by the secret police and army during those bloody confrontations in front of the Ministry of Interior, located just off Tahrir Square.

This brave activist still is determined to "fight those with power, those with guns and those with religion." He frankly tells me, however, "It has not been a good year. We have suffered many losses from our front line and the second line of youth leaders is not as experienced."

I would add that the problem of the Left is the same problem shared by the independent unions and the democratic freedom movement as a whole — poor organization. During the dictatorship, militant workers for example were unable to acquire the skills and experience of a steward, union officer or organizer.

Thus, even though the two independent union confederations each claim membership of over one million, their level of organization, structure, collection of dues, functioning committees and national coordination are "embryonic" as one leading supporter openly stated to me.

Thus, the best organized section of the population remains the military and the Islamists — not the reform movement and not the independent unions. The Islamist majority in both houses of Parliament is just one reflection of this dominant and dangerous imbalance of resources and organization. It heavily influences all political life in Egypt.

ATC: Can you describe the role of women?

CF: Repression always takes its toll on the struggle. For example, there was a noticeably reduced number of women among the hundreds of thousands in Tahrir Square for the January 25 one-year anniversary celebrations. By my unofficial, personal estimate perhaps only 15% were women.

Protective families, I believe, are keeping young women home more now. Last year, I estimated women were 35% of the mass gatherings in Tahrir.

While they did not throw rocks or stones in defense against the numerous police attacks, women played an active and visible role in the 18 days of the 2011 revolution, often standing between the police and front line of protestors. They also served leading roles in the organization of the occupation of Tahrir Square, in communications and by establishing a commissary and triage center.

But there is no tradition of an independent women's movement in Egypt calling for the right to control one's own body. The small March 8, 2012 women's demonstration of several hundred on the

steps of parliament, however, did project basic democratic demands for equality in jobs and education and to be considered equal participants in forming the new Egypt. It is a start, and a good one in the traditional discriminatory climate of religious intolerance.

ATC: What can you tell us about the major Islamist groupings?

CF: First of all, everything changed in the 1970s after President Anwar Sadat took over from Abdel Gamal Nasser who died in 1970. Wanting to introduce neoliberal Milton Friedman policies of privatization, Sadat began a campaign to undermine and reduce the nationalized portions of the economy which had reached 51% at the end of Nasser's reign.

To shift the economy more towards private hands, Sadat also had to move away from policies of Arab nationalism. He famously gave a speech declaring that "I am a Muslim president in a Muslim country." This changed everything. The country and the people went from an Arab identity to a Muslim identity. The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and Salafists were enlisted in this effort to root out leftist, academic and intellectual supporters of nationalism.

It was a bloody affair. Of course, the Islamist orthodox wing also felt empowered to attack people of other faiths. This is the source and beginning, for the first time in Egyptian history, of attacks on Coptic Christians and brings us to the present.

It should be noted that the two major Islamist groupings, the MB and the Salafists, are not entrenched bourgeois institutions of power like the police and army. Both have genuine mass support, with the Salafists being more an ideological grouping, espousing the most extreme form of Islam orthodoxy. The Salafists are more immune to public pressure.

While they were forced by law to have a 25% quota of women on their recent parliamentary slate, the Salafists refused to post standard election photos of the woman and placed them all on the bottom of

their lists. They do not believe women should play any role in politics or anywhere else outside the constraints of their interpretation of the Koran.

The MB is different. While it is staunchly Islamic, its political wing claims more of a secular bent and is, therefore, more subject to mass pressure. The Brotherhood has been around for 84 years. It has often been repressed by the state but it always continued providing religious instruction and a variety of charity work, thus earning the respect and allegiance of millions of impoverished Egyptians. This is the traditional social wing of MB with older, veteran, more conservative religious leaders who have served time in jail for their beliefs.

Apparently, there has always been a debate and some conflict over whether the MB should express itself politically. Today, a large and sophisticated MB political wing does exist. In fact, it won almost 50% of parliamentary seats in the upper chamber of Parliament. This wing is composed of younger, more secular-oriented, more middle-class and upper-class people with a social and political agenda.

As an example of how MB's political wing is influenced less by religious ideology and more by political pressure, there have been several splits. Several resulted in forming other parties. There is even a small but very vocal minority of the MB political wing that voices support to continuing the revolution. But the majority still clearly supports the military, opposing strikes and refusing to support the minimum wage increases.

The MB political leadership even held a counter-demonstration against women this March 8, International Women's Day, when several hundred assembled on the steps of parliament to demand more rights. The MB political wing held a similar counter-demonstration on the opening day of Parliament, while I was in Cairo, against protestors demanding more democratic reforms and economic justice. This was the first time the MB actually took these openly aggressive public steps to defend the status quo.

One very informed leading activist commented to me that he was happy the MB was now center stage and holding key positions of power. "Good, now let them be exposed for their conservative political positions in front of the whole nation. They will lose the sympathy earned from their years of repression. Now, they are collaborating with these same forces — the military, the U.S. and Israel."

ATC: Both during and after the election period, there has been sharp repression under the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), with thousands of arrests and, as you described, particularly nasty assaults on women activists. Were you able to have discussions about this problem, particularly the jailing of worker militants? At present, do you know how many political prisoners are being held — and what we can do to exert pressure for their release?

CF: In my interviews with leading supporters of the two existing independent union confederations, both reported that union organizers were harassed at work. They could be transferred to another job or another location or be fired. In some cases they are imprisoned and tortured. It is also important to note that independent unions are still not recognized in the current constitution and could be declared illegal by the military at any point.

On the day before the January 25 massive gathering in Tahrir Square, the military very strategically announced the release of 2000 of the estimated 12,000 political prisoners jailed in the last year. SCAF also announced abrogation of the Emergency Degree under which Mubarak had ruled since the assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981.

SCAF has proven to be very cunning, alternating brutal repression with concessions. We should stay tuned to the AFL-CIO-supported Solidarity Center for any defense campaigns that might be launched.

ATC: Tahrir was part of the inspiration for the Occupy movement in the United States and internationally. What did activists in Egypt know about what's going on here, and

do they connect what they hear about Occupy with their own experiences?

CF: There was not as much knowledge about the Occupy movement as I assumed. Although there was much curiosity about U.S. politics, I did not observe much recognition that, in fact, Egyptian protests inspired the Occupy movement. But remember, I made an extra effort to speak to lots of ordinary working people and not just the politically active. I wanted to capture the mood of the absolutely essential middle layer of the population, caught between the main contenders.

The most interesting response was from a woman activist who immediately recognized that the Occupy movement in the United States showed that "the struggle was all across the world, corporations control everything and the people, nothing." And she added gleefully, "we can share ideas on how to protect against tear gas!" Another activist noted that SCAF publicized police attacks against tU.S. Occupy encampments to justify their own aggression.

ATC: How would you describe the current mood of the people?

CF: This is, in my opinion, the most important and yet most difficult aspect to appreciate about today's political situation. The majority is exhausted. As several leading activists described to me — "the majority is tired of Tahrir and tired of the fights with the police. The economy is killing us. Forty percent live on \$2 a day. They want stability, believing the illusion that it will bring economic prosperity."

Actually, while hard to accept, this is typical in situations where the struggle goes on and on. It is widely recognized in the American labor movement that workers on strike, for example, start to weaken after a few weeks. Egyptian activists recognize the reality that demoralization has set in, particularly in the very impoverished informal sector of the economy dominated by street vendors who suffer enormously from the 30% drop in tourism.

Working alone and already quite destitute, this large section of the population is subject to isolation and demoralization. Many others, not just the middle and upper classes, are influenced by the constant drumbeat of the military, the government-influenced press and the Muslim Brotherhood for everyone to get back to work.

But there is an opposing political factor to this otherwise seemingly dreary picture I am painting. Neither the youth reform movement nor the independent workers movement have been defeated. Neither are they demoralized. Both have seen the power of their actions topple a dictator in a matter of days. Both have seen their power produce real reforms of democracy.

For example, locally, there have been important economic gains at work sites where strikes and protests have been staged. Nationally, there has been the recent doubling of the minimum wage to \$115 a month.

But both workers and youth, in my opinion, must realize that continued confrontations with the military and police, though absolutely courageous, must take a back seat to building a mass movement around democratic, social and economic demands that challenge the Islamists and military in power to address the desperate needs of the population.

Protests must move beyond confrontations by the brave vanguard to broad-based mass protests involving hundreds of thousands of workers, students, woman, and families that I saw mobilized in February of 2011. This is a shift recognized by some I interviewed. "It is now a long struggle and we are prepared for it" as one told me. "We are not just fighting a dictator now; we are fighting a whole system."

ATC: After all the fantastic struggle that's happened in Egypt, the fact is that the military is in control, it's backed by the United States even though there are frictions in the relationship, it hasn't lifted the blockade of Gaza, and a partnership is being formed between SCAF and the Muslim Brotherhood

even though they don't necessarily like each other. What's happened, so far, can be seen as a limited and partial political revolution, certainly not a social revolution despite the amazing mobilizations and heroic battles that have occurred. So how do you see things moving now and the potential of the struggle going forward from here?

CF: It might be a surprise that Egypt's military controls, according to academic, diplomatic and media sources, as little as \$15 billion and as much as \$60 billion of the \$180 billion annual GNP. It is very hard to learn about these state secrets but eyebrows were certainly raised when the military, in its own name, recently donated one billion dollars to the faltering budget.

In any case, U.S. military aid of more than one billion dollars annually is really peanuts in comparison to the military's real secret stash. This explains the slight measure of "nationalistic" independence from U.S. dictates sometimes staged by the generals to gain domestic support.

While it is clear that the military is in a rush to elect a parliament, craft a constitution and elect a president that would allow it to recede again into the background, it is also clear that it will always be the power backstage. It remains the most powerful institution after Mubarak's fall; as everything else collapsed, the regime was exposed as a thin layer of corruptible and detestable cronies.

After Mubarak left, the military was forced by the lingering massive protests to suspend the constitution, dissolve the Parliament and all local councils and dismiss the cabinet. Mubarak's ruling party, the National Democratic Party, was outlawed and its huge headquarters building adjacent to Tahrir Square scorched. Mubarak's bureaucratic invention, the Egyptian Federation of Trade Unions (ETUF) was in shambles.

The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces was the only post-Mubarak institution left standing with any credibility — and it has taken less than one year to expose them. True, they maintain the power, but minus their credibility. I consider the situation to be a stalemate favoring the military and their Islamist partners, who do still enjoy considerable mass support and far superior levels of organization.

But while the reform and labor movements have suffered, they have definitely not been defeated. They can regain the initiative, even against the terrible repression they will likely face. Improving their level of organization and national coordination, along with projecting immediate, democratic and economic demands that identify with the needs of millions, will be the best chance of reviving and maintaining mass participation capable of changing Egypt fundamentally.

Against the Current 158, May/June 2012.

FRANCE:

Front de gauche: and now?

FRANÇOIS SABADO ·

Certainly the Front de gauche leaders had hoped for a result of more than 15% and above all third place ahead of Front national leader Marine Le Pen. But going from the 5% which had been predicted for them in the polls at the beginning of the campaign to 11%, they have succeed in dominating the space of the "radical left" and marginalising the revolutionary left.

A real dynamic

During this campaign a left reformist political force of mass influence has been reconstructed. This is the result of several factors:

- A situation, marked by social defeats, which favours the aspiration and the illusion that "what is blocked by struggle can be unblocked by the election".
- The remobilisation of the forces of the Communist parties (also seen in Portugal, Spain and Greece), resting on the fact that they have not been in government for some years and that they have preserved positions in the apparatuses of the institutions or trade union organisations.
- A good campaign by Mélenchon. Defending radical objectives, such as a minimum wage of 1,700 euros or the defence of public services, his speeches invoked the revolutionary imagination of the texts of Victor Hugo and the most glorious moments of the workers' movement. This alchemy unleashed a political dynamic beyond the parties of the Front de gauche. A campaign which was all the more noteworthy in that it came as a counterpoint to that of François Hollande which was especially dull (to put it mildly).

Ambiguities and contradictions

Mélenchon's impressive campaign was however heavy with ambiguities and contradictions which justified the NPA's independent campaign. The NPA and the Front de gauche shared common positions on such themes as social issues (wages, employment, defence of public services) or democratic demands (proportional representation or defence of the rights of immigrants). The two organisations are united in their opposition to the Front national. On the other hand, other issues divide them sharply: on nuclear energy, there is a major disagreement between the NPA and the PCF leadership, attached by numerous links to the French nuclear industry.

We share then overall common objectives, and the dynamic around the Front de gauche campaign opens new political possibilities, for their realisation. However, in terms of engaging in a serious struggle and obtaining the implementation of our demands, the PCF and Jean -Luc Mélenchon reject confrontation with the power of the capitalists. They denounce finance, not capitalist ownership. They demand a public banking sector but reject the expropriation of the banks and their nationalisation under social control, preferring to see the private and public banking sectors compete. They denounce the scandal of the debt but reject its cancellation. Mélenchon proposes a repayment of the debt over several years, balancing off the sacrifices between the capitalists and the masses. Here again, it is necessary to be consistent. If we participate in a campaign for a citizen's audit, it is to prepare the ground for the cancellation of the debt, and not its progressive repayment. The leader of the Front de gauche evokes "ecological planning" without indicating the strategic resources necessary to this planning, in particular, the socialisation of the key sectors of the economy, transport, and energy.

On the political and historic level, the reformist orientation of the leadership of the Front de gauche goes hand in hand with the "republican" positions of Mélenchon. Not those of the Communards, who opposed the social republic to the bourgeois classes, but those of republicans who in their defence of the republic merge the terms "nation", "republic" and "state". This conception subordinates the "citizen's revolution" or "revolution by the ballot box" to respect for the institutions of the state of the dominant classes. Mélenchon freely evokes US imperialism, but not French imperialism. During the presidential campaign he reaffirmed "that in the current situation, the nuclear deterrent remains the key element of our strategy of protection".

Far from being questions of detail, these conceptions are key elements in Mélenchon's politics – he will do all he can to channel, subordinate, and render compatible the mass movements and the institutions of the republic. These questions also become decisive in discussing strategy and party or political movement.

What policy towards the Front de gauche?

In relating politically to the Front de gauche, we need to take into account these elements: the dynamic, but also the project; the mobilisation, but also the overall political programme; the renewal of activism but also the policies of the leadership.

Tens of thousands of activists and hundreds of thousands of voters have given a radical, social, democratic content to their vote or participation in the initiatives of the Front de gauche. For them, it is about rejecting the austerity of the right but also the austerity of the left by mobilising together around vital demands like the 1,700 euros, a ban on layoffs, the defence of public services, a regular status for precarious workers in the public sector, the defence of undocumented persons. For our part, we believe it is necessary to go much further than punctual unity of action. Faced with the austerity that a Hollande government prepares for us, we offer the Front de gauche, as well as the others (LO or the alternatives) the construction of a unitary oppo-

sition to the government. The NPA is ready for it. And the Front de gauche? This battle is decisive so as not to allow the Front national to take up the banner of the opposition. It is this which must lead us to dialogue, in common action, with the activists and sympathisers of the Front de gauche.

At the same time it should not be forgotten that the Front de gauche is a political construction, led by the PCF and Mélenchon and not a simple united front. This is not a party, is already a political movement. That means all is not decided, questions remain open. It seems at this stage that the leaders of the Front de gauche do not wish to participate in the government. Targeting "the taking of power, all power, within ten years", Mélenchon rules out participation in a government that he does not lead. The constraints of the crisis are such that the PCF seem to choose a formula of "support without participation", already used in the past. Tensions could surge between the leadership of the PCF and Mélenchon. Pierre Laurent, national secretary of the PCF, sets as the objective at the parliamentary elections "the election of a left majority in the National Assembly, with the maximum of Front de gauche deputies". A left majority with the PS? What would the FDG deputies do when the budget of the Hollande government was voted on? What the regional counsellors of the FDG have already done in nearly all regions, aligning with the PS? These questions remain open. To allow common action, an appropriate tactical policy is needed on our part.

None of the hypotheses envisaged by the Front de gauche at this stage challenge its reformist project. Thus, at a time when calls are made to join the FDG, including from inside the NPA, we think on the contrary that the organisation of anti-capitalists cannot depend on the tactical evolution of the FDG. To join the Front de gauche is to accept the leadership of the PCF and Mélenchon. To have weight on the political scene, stimulate unitary action and keep all the possibilities of criticism demands an NPA independent of the Front de gauche. The independent organisation of anti-capitalists is not a tac-

tical choice. It is a strategic option which maintains the historic continuity of the revolutionary current. A dual challenge is now posed to the NPA: to re-

sume its construction and set out a unitary policy, in particular in relation to the Front de gauche.

ARGENTINA

In defence of Argentina's right to recover its energy wealth.

Buffeted by the energy crisis and faced with Repsol's failure to respect its obligations, the Argentine government – which has for some years allowed the pillage of its biggest national enterprise - has finally realised a partial expropriation of YPF (51% of its shares) from the hands of the multinational Repsol. This has led to criticism and the threat of sanctions from Spain and the European Union. We consider that the attacks against Argentina from the Spanish government, other imperialist countries and some Latin American governments are an attempt to continue the super-exploitation and blackmail exerted over the Latin American countries by the Spanish, European or US multinationals,

The struggle for the full recuperation of natural and energy resources traverses the whole of Latin America. That is why we call upon the working class and the peoples of Latin America, Spain and Europe to unite their voices and reject all attacks and economic aggression against Argentina, to defend the rights of each sovereign people to take control of its resources and expropriate the multinationals; to fight so that the wealth of each country like oil, gas, minerals or water are under the social control of the workers and citizens. It is thus that we can ensure a use that respects nature and that profits are reinvested for the majority of the population rather than a privileged minority.

We also believe that in the context of the legitimate right of each people to dispose of its natural resources, the decision of the Argentine government is a step still fairly distant from the objective because it maintains YPF as a public limited company

whereas outside of YPF the multinationals continue in Argentina to administer most oil production and export. That is a situation which must change so as to win full energy sovereignty.

To take up the rich history of Argentina and the struggle of several generations of its oil workers, we rely on the Argentine social and political organisations which can develop a campaign to obtain a YPF which is 100% owned by the state and the Argentine people in the context of the full nationalisation of oil production under social control.

Gauche Anticapitaliste Courant Unitaire pour l'Ecosocialisme - FRANCE

Esquerra Unida i Alternativa, CATALONIA

Movimiento por la Democracia Participativa, EL SALVADOR

Movimiento de la Juventud Popular Revolucionaria MPJR, PANAMÀ

Partit dels i les Comunistes de Catalunya PCC, CATALONIA

Movimiento de Bases Torrijistas, PANAMÀ

Partido del Pueblo, PANAMÀ

Gauche Anticapitaliste-Sinistra Anticapitalista-Antikapitalistische Linke, SWITZERLAND

Movimiento Popular Unificado MPU, PANAMÀ

Partido Nacionalista, PUERTO RICO

IAC-CAI Filadelfia, USA

Marea Socialista, VENEZUELA

Partido Socialismo e Libertad PSOL, BRAZIL

Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores MST, ARGENTINA

La Aurora-Partido Obrero Revolucionario POR,
SOA

Izquierda Anticapitalista, SPAIN

La Lucha Continúa, PERU

Partido Igualdad, CHILE

Movimiento Libres del Sur, CHILE

Fundación Sur, VENEZUELA

Fourth International

GREECE

Seismic election results

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

1. Results

At the May 6 polls, the radical left-wing coalition Syriza becomes the second "party" in numbers of voters as it moves from 4.5% at the previous elections (2009) to 16.8% (52 MPs instead of 13). It is the first party in the major agglomerations and among people aged 18-35.

The Socialist Party (PASOK) lost 2/3 of the votes it had received in 2009 (from 44% to 13.2%, a loss of 119 MPs, from 160 to 41!). PASOK pays 'cash on the nail' their rigorous austerity programme and subjection to the 'Troika' and big private business interests.

New Democracy, the main right-wing party that entered the government in December 2011, still comes first but with an enormously reduced score down from 33.5% to 18.9%. However, it gains seats because of an iniquitous disposition that grants 50 seats as a bonus to the party that pooled most votes. So while it lost 40% in votes New Democracy wins 17 MPs (from 91 to 108). On the eve of the elections on May 6, New Democracy only had 71 MPs because of many defecting representatives (PASOK had lost 31 MPs from 2010 to 2012 as a protest against its antipopular stance). While New Democracy only has 2.1% more than Syriza, it has twice as many seats (108 for New Democracy against 52 for Syriza).

Golden Dawn, a neonazi group with paramilitary leanings gets into parliament. From marginal votes it gets close to 7% and 21 MPs. It will thus receive public funding to develop.

The Communist Party KKE records a slight progression (from 7.5 to 8.5%, it wins five seats from 21 to 26).

Democratic Left (DIMAR - that split off from Syriza in 2010-2011) gets 6% votes and 19 MPs.

The Greens don't reach the 3% threshold to have an MP, as is the case for the far right party LAOS that pays for its participation in the government (it had 17 MPs after the former elections).

Antarsya (far left coalition) stays at around 1.1%

Left of PASOK: Syriza + PC (KKE) + Dimar + Antarsya = 97 seats (as for now) instead of 34 seats in 2009. It might be the highest results of left-wing parties since 1958.

On the far right Golden Dawn got 21 seats against 17 for LAOS in 2009.

2. Partial comment

The score of the neonazi party is most worrying (see the analysis of a fast evolving context by Yorgos Mitralias in French.]]

The principal point to be retained from this election is the highly positive result of the Syriza coalition that ran its campaign on the issue of immediate and unconditional suspension of Greek debt repayments for a period of three to five years, the cancellation of austerity measures enforced since 2010, the non-fulfilment of agreements with the Troika, the nationalization of a significant part of the banking sector, the need to set up a left-wing government to implement these measures. Several Syriza MPs actively support a citizens' audit of the Greek debt and the need to cancel illegitimate debts, among them Sofia Sakorafa, who broke up with Pasok in 2010 as a protest against austerity. We will see whether Syriza will keep this orientation after its electoral success. It is encouraging to know that so many voters supported these radical proposals. The future will tell whether Syriza can meet

the challenge of this remarkable popular support. "On his upcoming talks to explore whether he will be able to form a majority coalition with parties of the left and parties representing environmental concerns, the head of Syriza laid out the five points that will be the focus of discussions:

1. The immediate cancellation of all impending measures that will impoverish Greeks further, such as cuts to pensions and salaries.
2. The immediate cancellation of all impending measures that undermine fundamental workers' rights, such as the abolition of collective labor agreements.
3. The immediate abolition of a law granting MPs immunity from prosecution, reform of the electoral law and a general overhaul of the political system.
4. An investigation into Greek banks, and the immediate publication of the audit performed on the

Greek banking sector by BlackRock.

5. The setting up of an international auditing committee to investigate the causes of Greece's public deficit, with a moratorium on all debt servicing until the findings of the audit are published." [1]

The task will not be easy as so far the communist party KKE, with which it would be necessary to enter into an alliance, categorically declines, claiming that Syriza is a pseudo revolutionary party and re-treating into some haughty isolation.

See the final results at The Guardian.

The map of votes by constituencies is also most useful. Click on constituencies to see results.

See 2009 and 2012 results.

Translated by Mike Krolikovsky and Christine Pagnouille

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SPANISH STATE

A strike with 100 per cent participation in the Basque Country

JOSU EGIREUN ·



From the earliest hours of the morning, strike pickets could see the success of the strike in the different sectors and in the four capitals (of the Basque provinces): you have to go back to 1988 (the historic strike against the Youth Employment Plan) to remember such a level of participation. Very significant, because they are important points of reference, was the total closure of Volkswagen in Navarre, Mercedes Benz in Vitoria, CIF in Beasain, Naval in Bizkaia and the Mondragón Co-operative Group.

This strike, moreover, was marked by a very high participation of retail outlets (bars, groceries, department stores, etc). A significant fact is that the Corte Inglés shopping mall in Bilbao — an emblematic bastion against strikes — could not even open because the personnel was mainly on strike. Another remarkable fact: the strike pickets did not have much to do, as they found the majority of shops and enterprises closed.

The demonstrations were the crowning glory of the day, very massive both at midday and in the evening. Not only was the participation very high (never before had a general strike produced such a great human flood traversing the four capitals of Euskal Herria) but the demonstrations were largely made up of young people, who from dawn had made the pickets lines massive. That is significant and bodes well for the future.

Undoubtedly one of the elements which made it possible to attain this degree of mobilization (over and above the enormous social crisis in which we are plunged and the successive waves of attacks) was the convergence of calls for the strike from the

whole trade-union spectrum, even though the calls were separate. It should be remembered that the Basque trade-union majority — the ELA, LAB, ESK, STEE-EILAS (teaching), EHNE (farming community) and HIRU (transport) unions — which since 2009 had already organized three general strikes, responded on February 17 to the counter-reform of the Rajoy government by calling a general strike for March 29. This call was also made by a vast range of social movements, including those who contributed to the success on February 25 of a national mobilization against the social cuts of the governments of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (CAPV) and the government of Navarre.

The CCOO and the UGT, which four days before Rajoy's decree had just signed a framework pact for collective agreements (which in addition to the freezing of wages, accepted the discourse according to which in order to get out of the crisis it was necessary to increase the competitiveness of companies and for this reason to develop, among other things, geographical, functional and wage flexibility) and were still enmeshed in a useless social dialogue, only decided to mobilize against this reform on March 9.

These two elements — the participation of the social movements in the trade-union united front and the calling of a strike by the CCOO and the UGT the same day — created the broad social consensus which made such a massive strike possible. The fact that all the political forces which make up the Amaiur coalition (Batasuna, Aralar, EA, Alternativa) called on people to take an active part in the strike also played a very positive role in the mobilization, as too did the decision of the majority

of the Parliament of Navarre to go on strike that day, and the support of the Socialist party (PSE-EE in the Basque Country).

Beyond this success of the strike, we cannot hide the heavy baggage that we have to drag behind us after years of defeats, nor the difficulties we face to raise our heads high again. The dynamic on the level of the workplaces is not yet up to the challenges we face, general meetings of the workforce were still rare and, contrary to 1988, the general strike was not preceded by a dynamic of mobilization at the local or regional level, with public assemblies followed by mobilizations.

After the day of mobilization, this strike also raises the question of how to follow it up. It seems clear that the CCOO and the UGT do not have any other objective than to take up again the social dialogue with the government. This is a perspective rather distant from that of the Basque trade-union majority, for which this reform is not negotiable: the only demand is its withdrawal. That means building a social wall against this decree and the austerity policies of the government and the employers and against agreements like those signed by the CCOO

and the UGT (the pact on pensions, the one concerning collective agreements ...).

It remains to define how this dynamic of confrontation, expressed on March 29, will be concretized and how we will be able to respond to the vacuum which appears between the different days of general strike, because that is where the relationships of forces are built and that is where we must confront the enormous difficulties of putting a brake on the employers' attacks.

Finally, for the Basque trade-union majority, the mobilization today was also the moment to demand, with more force, a Basque framework of labour relations. "We live here, we work here, we must decide here". A demand which, considering the configuration of the trade-union and political movement of this country, becomes more important with each passing day.

Bilbao, March 29, 2012

Josu Egireun, a Basque trade unionist, is a member of the editorial board of the review *Viento Sur*, from which this article comes: <http://www.viento-sur.info/articulos...>

PAKISTAN

Urgent Appeal : Death threat to activists imprisoned in Pakistan

DANIELLE SABAI ·

In the morning of 28th of April, these five political prisoners were violently beaten and tortured by the police and the agents of the security services. They were left for at least a week without any treatment for their injuries, without seeing a doctor, in violation of a court injunction demanding that they be examined with only dry bread to eat. They were forcibly transferred to a prison reserved for hardened criminals and we can fear that the goal of this transfer was to have them murdered by other prisoners (in a fight among prisoners...) so that the authorities would not be held directly responsible.

The five prisoners concerned are members of the Labour Party Pakistan, (LPP) and of the Progressive Youth Front (PYF). The best-known among them, Baba Jan, has just been re-elected to the federal committee of the LPP during its recent congress in March.

The prisoners have been kept in secret since the 28th of April attacks (even their lawyers have not been able to see them); it has therefore been difficult to gather information. The latest news is that Baba Jan, Iftikhar Hussain and Amir Ali have been severely injured. Baba Jan has apparently two broken fingers (possible a broken hand?), wounds to his face and his head shaved in order to humiliate him. Two others, Ameer Khan and Rashid Minhas, are less severely injured.

They have been transferred to the high level prison of Zulfiqarabad, in the city of Gilgit.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) published a communiqué on the 4th of

May in which it considers "exceedingly worrying" the information received (according to which at least five activists have been tortured) [1]. It notes with concern that the five activists "who have been in prison for several months continue to face very harsh treatment for protesting against the poor quality of food and delay in hearing of cases of prisoners at the jail". La commission "strongly protests maltreatment of the activists". It "demands that the basic rights and due process must not be denied to the five political activists". "Those accused of torturing them must be suspended pending investigation and those found guilty punished under the law." Finally, the Commission concludes "the government must desist from making a terrible situation in Gilgit even worse by stubbornly sticking to its strong-arm tactics."

On the 7th of May, la HRCP launched an "urgent appeal" that letters should be sent to the federal authorities and those of Gilgit-Baltistan. [2]

Reminder of past circumstances. As the HRCP states, the five "have been incarcerated for protesting on behalf of the victims of forced displacement on account of the Attabad landslide in January 2010". This devastating landslide, caused by flooding occurred in the Hunza valley. In August 2011, the police fired on demonstrators demanding that all the families concerned should receive the aid promised killing one boy, and then his father who came to protect him. These murders provoked a veritable local uprising. Baba Jan, the LPP and the PYF played a very active role in making these facts known nationally and this is why they were actively sought by the security services. Baba Jan gave himself up in September 2011 fearing that he

would be secretly and summarily executed if he were discovered while in hiding. [3]

The current context. Gilgit is not the only place where progressive trade-union activists have been tortured. This was also the case very recently for seven workers from the weaving industry in Karachi, whose crime was to want to form a union in a workplace subject to the boss's terror — these facts provoked an international outcry from trade unions, EU representatives and anti-torture campaigns. [4]

In Pakistan there is a policy of criminalisation of the social movements that we find in many other countries, including in Western ones. But this policy is implemented here in a situation of extreme social, religious sectarian and state violence. Activists are dragged in front of redoubtable anti-terrorist jurisdictions or accused of foul crimes (rackets, murders...). The existing authorities and the repressive forces have an (unfortunately well-founded) feeling of impunity.

All of the progressive movement is under threat. Leaders of peasant associations and trade-union leaders close to the LPP are currently repressed not only in Gilgit but also in the Punjab or Sind. Repression is spreading and goes so far as to threaten the lives of activists, a certain number of whom have been killed in the last few years, such as the peasant activists from the military farm of Okara [5] or the activists of the weavers' unions in Faisalabad [6].

Urgency. We have to respond to this terror policy against the workers', peasants', popular and political progressive movement. Pakistani activists need our solidarity. The most urgent today is to protect the lives of the five detained in Gilgit and demand their immediate unconditional release as well as an end to all trials before the anti-terrorist jurisdiction. There must be no further violence against them, and those responsible must be tried.

Many protest actions have been called by the LPP and the PYF in Pakistan itself. It is very important that solidarity is also shown very rapidly on the in-

ternational level so that the Pakistan and Gilgit-Baltistan authorities know that they will be held responsible for what happens to Baba Jan and his comrades.

Different solidarity initiatives have already taken place: in Australia, in the USA (with the participation of radical ecology networks), in Sri Lanka, etc. The first actions are being prepared in Europe at the parliamentary level notable. We will report on these initiatives.

We are making an urgent appeal for solidarity to spread and more initiatives to be taken: letters, delegations and pickets to Pakistani embassies; information to be spread through international media, alert warnings sent to the solidarity networks, statement from human rights' organisations, etc.

We will report on the situation again very soon and we also call for the financial solidarity that the LPP needs in order to organise the defence of its militants and to support their families.

For more information on this question, click here:
JAN Baba

Financial solidarity

Donations can be sent through ESSF account. Specify "Pakistan" on the back of your cheques or transfer orders.

Cheques

cheques to ESSF in euros which can cashed in France only to be sent to:

ESSF
2, rue Richard-Lenoir
93100 Montreuil
France

Transfers

Bank Account:

Crédit lyonnais
Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)
10 boulevard Chanzy
93100 Montreuil

France

ESSF, account number 445757C

International bank account details :

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP

Account holder : ESSF

For a recent update on the financial campaign, see on ESSF Financial update of the 2011 Pakistan Solidarity Campaign

ALGERIA

The PST in the legislative campaign

M. KEBICI

The PST recognizes that "citizens are not interested in the electoral campaign"

The general secretary of the Socialist Workers' Party (PST), Mahmoud Rachidi slated the economic programme of Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia, leader of the Party for Democratic National Rally (RND). Invited on Channel 3 on Wednesday April 25, Ahmed Ouyahia spoke about "cleaning up Algerian companies through the Stock Exchange". The PST retorts: "the programme of Ahmed Ouyahia aims at massive privatization of national enterprises, pocketing public money along the way".

The PST, which is taking part in the legislative elections of May 10 with six lists, considers that "liberalism is more than ever threatening Algeria. Its advance since the 1990s has led the country to an economic disaster".

Moreover, in his assessment of the campaign, the general secretary of the socialist party considered that "if Algerians have deserted electoral campaigns it is because the political field is very closed, and as a result people lose interest in elections and in political life, and we have seen this in meetings".

The PST, as its general secretary explained, is in favour of measures to sanction "foreign companies which have been able to acquire phenomenal interests in our country".

Mahmoud Rachidi declared at a press conference in Algiers: "We demand the immediate closing down of the Algiers Stock Exchange, we are against importing a workforce which does not benefit Algeria, and we are against importing luxury items".

Every sector is affected by the capitalist offensive: water, airports ... "This is a danger for the sovereignty of the country", he considered.

"They are engaging in a war of words with respect to France. When he spoke to the media Abdelaziz Belkhadem [1] declared that France had to present its excuses for its colonial crimes in Algeria. These declarations are completely incoherent with reality. If we examine closely what the present government is doing with the economy, we will see that this nationalist rhetoric is really out of place".

"We are against the banks and the private insurance companies...", continued Mahmoud Rachidi. What is certain for him is that "with its present economic strategy, Algeria is saving the economies of the countries who invest in the various economic sectors and bringing the country to its knees".

The mayor of Barbacha (in Bejaia wilaya, or province) Mohand Sadek Akrou, who heads the PST list in the same wilaya, and who was also present at the PST press conference, considered that the crisis in Algeria is making itself felt on all levels: "a tangled-up crisis whose principal cause is economic interests".

"Up to now the present government has not adopted any policy and is satisfied on every occasion with buying social peace" added the mayor of Barbacha.

"Agriculture has not been spared, nothing is done to encourage the fellah (peasant)" says the leading candidate of the PST in Bejaia. "Algeria has billions of dollars, intended for a well-defined class, to the detriment the people.

The general secretary of the PST concluded by expressing the party's support for the demands of the workers of Cevital in Bejaia. He also took up the defence of the workers of the Draa Ben Khedda dairy who are opposing privatization.

"We want the renationalization of national enterprises such as Asmidal, we are for the withdrawal of

the licence from Orascom"

Hamida Mechai

El Watan, 26 April, 2012:
<http://www.elwatan.com/actualite/le>

Declaring its opposition to the liberal policies of the government, the PST demands the nationalization of big enterprises

The general secretary of the Socialist Workers' Party (PST), Mahmoud Rachidi, firmly denounced the statements made on the radio by the general secretary of the RND, Ahmed Ouyahia, who declared that his programme envisages spending billions to make state enterprises profitable in order subsequently to privatise them.

At a press conference yesterday, Mr. Rachidi explained why this declaration meant "we take money from the Treasury in order subsequently to distribute it to a caste of private individuals who have backers in the government", and that "the profitability operation aims at making it possible for them to get their hands on these enterprises". He made it clear, on the other hand, that his party is favourable to cleaning up the balance sheets of state enterprises in order to build a strong national economy. Furthermore, the general secretary of the PST expressed his solidarity with the sixteen workers of Cevital who were sacked, he said, "for having demanded an improvement of their working conditions and the application of the industrial legislation, in particular regarding the creation of a union branch".

Intervening halfway through the campaign for the legislative elections in which his party is standing in six wilayas, the principal spokesperson of the PST, before presenting the party's economic programme, declared that "the liberal policies imposed by the government in the 1990s were responsible for the catastrophe that the country is going through on the economic and social level", before pointing out that hydrocarbons account for 98 per cent of the country's revenues, whereas its imports amount to 50 billion dollars annually. The country

needs everything, roads, dams, industries, and so on, he affirmed, adding that "Algeria has monetary reserves of almost 200 billion dollars and is the least indebted country in the Middle East and North Africa region, but its people are the poorest". Warning against the external dangers which threaten the country, he underlined the need to constitute a "solid internal front" to face up to them.

After having called on the top of the party list in Béjaïa, Mohand-Sadek Akrou, currently president of the APC, who teaches economics at the university and who analysed the multidimensional nature of the crisis and denounced the "rentier and clientelist policy of the state", Mahmoud Rachidi demanded, in the name of his party, a plan for the nationalization of big enterprises, citing the El Hadjar and Asmidal complexes and the El Ouenza and Boukhadra mines. He furthermore demanded a stop to privatizations and the taking back into public ownership of hundreds of enterprises, including the Draâ Ben Khedda dairy, and also demanded that retaliatory measures be taken against foreign companies who have made colossal profits at the expense of Algeria, in particular the withdrawal of the licence from Orascom and the taking back by the state of the Lafarge cement factories.

In addition to demanding the imposition of the sovereignty of the state over financial institutions in order to protect them from the negative effects of capitalism, the PST demands the closing down of the Algiers Stock Exchange and a stop to the importing of luxury items, as well as products that compete with national production, in addition to the urgent taking back into state management of public services, water, ports and airports.

It demands, moreover, the cancellation of the agreement on association with the EU and of the project of joining the WTO and the Arab Free Trade Zone (ZALE). In another chapter of its programme, the PST argues for the development of a productive agricultural sector, noting the absence of planning and calling for action against the informal circuits of distribution of agricultural produce.

Amar Rafa

La Tribune, 26 April, 2012: <http://www.latribune-online.com/eve...>

For full-scale renationalization

Socialist Workers' Party

For Mahmoud Rachidi, the general secretary of the party, which yesterday organized a press conference, it is the fundamentally liberal character of this economic strategy which is at issue since, according to him, it is the source of the present catastrophe, with its fatal consequences on the social level.

It is based on a rentier policy based on clientelism which has led to selling off public property at bargain prices, associated with the not very solvent course of action of buying social peace through temporary measures without any major impact in the long term.

Mahmoud Rachidi adduces as tangible proofs of this situation, the import bill for last year, estimated at 50 billion dollars, which is a first since the country became independent, underlining that 98 per cent of the country's revenues coming from hydrocarbons.

This is just one more paradox, according to the PST leader, for whom it is not an acceptable state of affairs for a country such as ours, whose leaders take pride in having enormous reserves, almost 200 billion dollars' worth. He regretted that nearly a third of these reserves are held in US banks at a ridiculous rate of interest of one per cent, and raised the question of the non-revaluation of the national currency which is, according to him, the second element of national sovereignty after the national emblem.

A sovereignty that Mahmoud Rachidi said is being seriously abused by the fact, he argued, that many sectors of the economy that are related to national sovereignty, or are at the very least of strategic importance, are in the hands of foreign companies, particularly French ones.

"How can we speak about sovereignty when the distribution of water in our main cities, our ports, and

our airports are run by foreign companies? What remains of this sovereignty that they never stop telling us about in their speeches?" he asked.

Having said this, the general secretary of the PST did not remain at the level of describing the situation, he went on to propose an alternative.

Such an alternative could not be implemented, according to him, without the state taking back control over the strategic sectors of the national economy by, he suggested, the renationalization of all the privatised enterprises, in both industry and services, the recovery of as much agricultural land as possible and the abandonment of the agreements on association with the WTO and the EU, agreements which, according to him, by no means benefit our economy, weakened by large-scale privatizations. Mr. Rachidi denounced, very relevantly, Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia who, yesterday morning on Channel 2 of National Radio affirmed that the state would in the near future begin the reorganization of economic entities before ceding them to potential private investors through the Stock Exchange. This is another aberration, said the main leader of the PST, for whom it is senseless for a government to justify the recurrent state of disorder in the distribution circuit by the "argument" of the invisible hand of the market imposing its laws.

A timid electoral campaign

On the purely political level, the general secretary of the PST admitted that the campaign for the May 10 legislative elections was raising little enthusiasm among ordinary citizens.

For Mahmoud Rachidi, this disinterest is due to the closing of the political field and the media blackout in recent years. "After that, we shouldn't expect the public to be enthusiastic about politics", he said.

The PST leader does not have too many illusions about the result his party will get in these elections, where it is presenting six lists.

"We are taking advantage of these elections to make ourselves better known and to popularise our ideas", he said, affirming that his party is far from

being electoralist, which is why, he pointed out, "we centred our campaign on local meetings with the people".

The PST intends to pay homage to the recently deceased party activist and nevertheless emblematic figure of trade-union action, Redouan Osman, on May 1.

This homage will be followed by a meeting with trade-union organizations, following which a platform will be produced and made public. The same day, a popular march will take place in Béjaïa.

M. Kebci

Algiers, *Le Soir*, 26 April, 2012:[->
<http://www.lesoirdalgerie.com/artic>

MEXICO

Work begins on building a new focus for Mexican workers

JOSÉ LUIS HERNÁNDEZ AYALA ·

Represented were the Mexican Electricians' Union (SME); the Union of Mineworkers, Metalworkers and Similar of the Mexican Republic, (STMMSRM); the democratic sections of the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE) of the states of Michoacán (18th), Oaxaca (XXII) and the capital (IX) as well as currents from other parts of the Republic; the Mexico Tram Drivers' Alliance (ATM); the Transport Workers' Union of the Federal District (STTPDF); the Academic Workers' Union of the Autonomous University of Chapingo (STAUACH); the Independent Workers' Union of the Autonomous Metropolitan University (SITUAM); the Single Union of Workers of the Institute of Middle and Higher Education (SUTIEMS); the National Council of Workers (CNT); section 33 of the Trade Union of the Secretariat of Social Development; also various democratic currents bureaucratized unions, democratic lawyers and labour organizations participated. All together, these unions represent a workforce of close to half a million members.

The session began with a brief statement of the reasons for the creation of a new workers' federation by comrade José Humberto Montes de Oca Luna, external secretary of the SME, who said that faced with the violent offensive of capital and its government, isolated and defensive responses were not enough, it was necessary to present a political and strategic response. The formation of a new Confederation of Workers, which could overcome

the dispersal of democratic trade unionism and start the task of organizing the millions of unorganized workers, is the first step in this direction.

The secretary general of the eighteenth section of the SNTE, Jorge Cazares Torres, reported the readiness of nearly eighty thousand workers he represented to support this proposal together with the trade union organizations that form part of the Alliance of Workers of the State of Michoacán (ATEM). He explained that one of the most important challenges is to promote organising new sectors, especially in services, because there are enormous obstacles to this, created both by enterprises and the labour authorities.

Comrades Pedro Hernández Morales and Santiago Ramírez Ortiz, from sections IX and XXII of the democratic teachers respectively, pointed out that their committees are studying the proposal and then will submit it to their rank and file to define a position. They also pointed out that this initiative should have as its spinal column unions which are genuinely representative and independent of political parties.

Comrade Isidro Méndez Martínez, on behalf of Napoleón Gómez Urrutia (exiled in Canada), General Secretary of the Mining Union, highlighted his interest in supporting this initiative to unify the Mexican working class, which is the spirit behind the Miner-Electrician Pact. It was reported that the mining union participates in several States, Coahuila and Sonora among others, on various fronts that bring together local union and social organizations, which also would be able to join the new federation. He stressed that this unitary process must have international scope, because it is time that the workers of the world unite against an

offensive that has no borders and that everywhere it is the workers who pay the burden of a crisis caused by the greed of capitalists.

Comrade Hector de la Cueva, from the Centre of Labour information and Trade Union Consultancy Association (CILAS), stressed that this meeting is just a first step in the construction of the new federation, which is a process that can take months to carry out and the doors of the Junta should be open to the incorporation of many other trade union sectors who were not present, but who sympathize with the proposal.

Comrade Martin Esparza Flores, Secretary-General of the SME, called on unions to leave aside all kinds of arrogance and pettiness, which are the greatest obstacle to unity, and join together to strengthen the power of the workers. He contrasted other parts of the world where workers have major trade union confederations and advance processes of unity and resistance with the situation in Mexico where workers are so disorganized and divided. To emphasize the sincerity of the SME in this initiative, he offered the full integration of the Mexican Trade Union Front (FSM) in the new federation.

Finally comrade Humberto Montes de Oca emphasized the historical importance for the working class and the people of Mexico of this initiative being realized. He called on all the union representative present to take this initiative to their bases and promote the construction of the new federation

from the bottom upwards and with total democracy and political independence. He proposed to establish immediately the "Provisional Junta for a New Confederation of Worker" from those trade union organizations present and agreeing to participate. This Junta will be the central column of the new federation and will encourage proposals to integrate all organizations and trade union currents, the unemployed, cooperatives, students and individuals wishing to adhere to it. The aim is to launch an aggressive campaign to organize all the social sectors exploited and oppressed by capitalism.

Also participating in the meeting as observers, were leaders of the trade unions of telephonists (STRM) and workers at the Autonomous National University of Mexico (STUNAM). Both organizations are members of the National Union of Workers (UNT), which as a whole represents a force close to 100,000 members. The comrades noted that they have not yet had an internal consultation to define their participation in the promotion of the new federation. Meanwhile they will maintain communication with the Junta and agree on common actions.

Finally the union organizations attending, with the exception of the members of the UNT, agreed to set up the above-mentioned Junta, and will meet shortly to create the committees responsible for drafting the basic documents and making a tour to promote this effort at the national level.

PHILIPPINES

Philippines in times of disasters: The State - In the Eye of the Storm

HARRISON MARIANO ·

In the aftermath, there were massive displacement of survivors and communities, dead bodies in the river banks, streets and coastal areas retrieved to even to nearby towns and regions. It was a regrettable year ender for 2011 among the population of Cagayan de Oro, Iligan and Dumaguete cities.

The disaster was even worst because of the revelation of the incapability of the government in responding to the said situation. The burden of responding to the needs of the survivors was passed on to the civil society organizations, the churches, peoples' organizations and volunteers. Up to the third month after the disaster, no plan was offered to and made with the survivors. And in the process of defining the rehabilitation and rebuilding lives for the survivors, no consultation for the survivors happened except those done by the non government organizations. Among those worst attitude of the government personnel was the grand standing and manipulating the goods for the survivors by claiming the goods as their efforts and used as best political preparation for the coming 2013 local elections. Here is a case of the elite politicians victimizing the survivors for the second time.

Disasters again and again

Prior to the disastrous Sendong, majority of those poor victims were urban poor and minimum wage earners suffering the economic disaster by the high rising prices of commodities and low social services from the government and more and more of these families were even threatened by the massive unemployment and contractualization of labor sector.

Right after typhoon Sendong, government did not even think of responding to a minimum action to convince investors for instance to lower the prices on petroleum products, localized suspension of the 12% value added tax to commodities and moratorium to lower down the rates of energy and power. But not a single action aside from the political grand standing and self-serving speeches of these politicians on the cancelation of logging permits only to be recalled later. Investigations for the incident were made only to safeguard those responsible for the massive tree cutting and divert the attention from the government's policies of disregarding the environment for logging and mining industries.

Sad to note also are questions among responders. Fly by night private organizations also used the survivors' situation to make money. NGOs of family dynasty built consortiums and joined networks then reported to their funding partner the network's efforts and saving the funding for their organization and family interests. International funding organizations and response groups have literally robbed local potentials from local responding organizations, offering high fees and incentives in the name of capacitating the local organizations but in the end, it turned out staffs were pirated and hired with high paying jobs to do the dirty works and profits go to the NGO executive who parachuted in the affected areas. More so, these international organizations felt like they owned these local personnel and their employees – a master and a slave relation or the capitalist and the worker to contextualize it today.

More and worst disasters will happen when people and the masses will be used and fooled by these vultures. The more the collective response must the

people have the less these opportunists can take advantage of the victims.

The State and its Vibrant Contradictions in Actions

Policy combating the effects of climate change was passed and to give teeth to the law, a disaster risk reduction and management law again was passed with penalties and sanctions for the violators while on contrary the government encouraged open pit mining and massive "selective" and "responsible" logging. Preservation of environment has been also in the primary program of the government that is why organic farming and sustainable agriculture laws were passed and put budgetary allocations for the implementation of such laws, but again, line agencies and even policy makers are promoting chemical fertilizers and manipulating agricultural industry in favor of the investors and not the masses. Thus, conversion of lands for business is only one of such manifestations how the government takes care with its people and the economy.

These were the only few contradicting pronouncements, actions and initiatives of the government in the past and more so in the present.

Such posted real challenge for real response from the peoples and movements. Revolutionary movements and disaster response groups must always bear in mind that the government is always an in-

stitution to subjugate and put the interest and welfare of the masses in its last priority. It is an institution to oppress and implement the interest of the capitalist and oppressive system. These glaring realities can always be seen during the times of the disasters like in Sendong.

In principles and in practice, the well being of the masses and environment shall always be a non-negotiable matter. This means that environment must be saved from the capitalist dominance or else, there's nothing left to the people especially the masses. Then, it is an obligation of all marginalized and struggling for the liberation of humanity to liberate ecology from the greediness of capitalists.

The real constant disaster that the world's masses are experiencing is the capitalist neo-liberal assaults killing every human and the environment, and our response shall always be revolutionary which is not neglecting the important role of the masses themselves. The gains of these revolutionary struggles shall be with and for the masses and the direction will be the elimination of all kinds of exploitation including that of the environment.

The need to expose and eliminate those money-making and opportunist organizations and individuals is a duty of all survivors and responders like building the society free from oppression and deprivation.

PHILIPPINES

Revolutionary Mass Movements: Who shall Build and Strengthen?

HARRISON MARIANO ·

In the Philippine society, more and more sufferings have been felt by the masses. Massive poverty has been partner of the majority population for so long and most of these numbers are in intense hunger. Such extreme situations of the people attract different agents for social change including the extremists and the rightists.

We cannot expect answers to these situations from the ruling system and government bureaucracies. Expectedly, they represent the monopoly capitalists, multinational companies and exploiter business owners since these leaders were put by these economic oligarchs in the positions for their vested interests. Change of leaders in the government from local to national brought more disasters to peoples' lives because it is a change from one set of the ruling class to the other.

Clearly, since the victorious EDSA People Power 1 not counting the pre-Dictatorial period, poverty keeps on increasing and no real peoples' government have been in placed in the Philippines. In the urban and rural areas (centers or peripheries) the condition of injustices and poverty are glaring and very visible. Even with the pronounced economic boost and the high remittances from the overseas migrant workers, much less are extended to alleviate the situation of the poor.

But, we cannot see the massive movements of the discontented and victims of these social, political and economic injustices. There are pragmatic movements but are becoming little by little irrelevant in numbers and influence. This has been a situation to reflect among revolutionary forces. Are the masses tired of being part of these ideals and actions for their liberation? What factors why? Or

have these movements impact on the lives of the masses? Do the revolutionary movements really with and for the poor people or for the leadership only of these movements?

History of Revolutionary splits and the Left Dynamics

Left organizations since the history of split from the CPP brought by the closed-minded framework PPW, while other organs and individuals have breathed polluted air of opportunism and individualism, others also remained true to their ideals and orientations – they are competing to who can mobilize numbers and expand territories to the extent of destroying one to be the good one.

Extreme vanguardism and exclusivist framework continued to dominate among revolutionary forces and the feeling that the correct revolutionary and political line is owned only by one or two and the rest are pseudo and counter-revolutionaries.

The debate that resulted to split in the middle of 90's made the mass organizations confused to where and to whom to go with and until today, it is sad to understand why revolutionary forces keep on claiming mass movements as party properties and even revolution as they own.

Electoralist groups need to play with the mainstream reactionary electoral system to win posts and or influence inside the dominant system.

Economic Survivalist Tendency to Apathy

Confusions and the tendency to survive, many people tend to work on their own to live and tired of evacuating now and then, and being implicated to revolutionary forces, then the reactionary military

and police will be harassing them, it is better for them to keep silent.

The economic survival has been the element of inactive participation of the masses today in mass movements. And this set-up is a contribution of the elitist and monopolist economic system. First thing for the day is to think and work for the daily meals.

The Challenge: Who shall build and strengthen the mass movement?

Revolutionary movements are grounded on the sufferings of the masses and without the masses revolutionary ideals are the results of the concrete revolutionary movements raised on the level of theory than in effect will provide guidance to higher level of revolutionary movements.

In the Philippines, it has always been a show of force and competition of numbers by organizations which are usually moderate or extreme positions.

It is always the duty of revolutionary cadres to build conscious mass movements and strengthen such movements but must not claim to be owners,

since it is owned by the masses. Only, revolutionary movements' role is crucial for the guidance and linking their revolutionary orientation from the masses' aspirations and real conditions.

And who are these revolutionary movements? They are individuals embraced with aspirations to radically change the current social, political and economic system and have believed the important role of the masses in all forms and methods in launching the revolution.

So, the duty to build and strengthen mass movements is by the collective of individuals who are also part of the masses and not someone from other planets who owned all ideological and political correctness. Revolution totally based on the subjective and objective readiness of the masses and not of the party alone.

The ebb of the revolutionary flow in the Philippines put some cadres in their comforts and never grows old, some if not all have been absorbed by the dominant system and are frustrations to the revolutionary movement.

JAPAN

Rise of "Hashism" – From Osaka to the National Political Arena

Y KITAHATA ·

Hashimoto, a former lawyer and TV personality, was elected Governor of Osaka Prefecture in 2008 with his popularity and aggressive campaign against administration and public sector workers. He challenged the "ineffective" administration and "wasteful" public services and resorted to predatory practices, drastically cutting the wages of public employees and reducing or abolishing subsidies to a series of cultural and social facilities. In addition to his tough policy on national anthem issues [2], his anti-China remarks and aggressive attitude toward Korean National Schools pleased reactionary forces.

One of his main agenda had been unifying the governments of Osaka City and Osaka Prefecture in order to allow an extensive local authority, "Osaka Metropolitan Government", to attract more investment and compete effectively with other big cities in Asia. As this type of rearrangement requires not only negotiation with the city government but also revision of national laws, which he knows would inevitably contradict the interest of some part of central bureaucracy as well as national political parties, Hashimoto formed his own political party, "Osaka Ishin-no-kai" or "Osaka Restoration Association", as a catalyst for a political change in the whole country.

Although his "achievement" as governor was quite dubious, his confrontational way of pushing through his rough ideas gave a kind of catharsis to the constituency and tamed the majority of the local assemblies. After gaining the majority of the prefectural assembly and a good number of seats of

the city assembly at the election in April, 2011, he opened a battle against Mayor of Osaka City, Kunio Hiramatsu, on the method to solve the "duplication" of the roles of the city and the prefecture.

At the same time, he tightened his control over public employees. In June, 2011, he introduced an ordinance to force teachers to stand at "Kimigayo", national anthem, at school ceremonies. He also announced a plan to introduce ordinance on education and ordinance on public employees which include provisions for punishment against disobedience to administrative orders. [3]

When the four-year term for Mayor Hiramatsu expired in November, 2011, Hashimoto resigned as governor in order to run for mayor. His colleague, Ichiro Matsui, ran for governor to succeed him.

Sweeping Victory in November Elections

The elections for Mayor of Osaka City and Governor of Osaka Prefecture were fought between "Osaka Ishin-no-kai" led by Hashimoto on one hand and ruling Democratic Party (DP) plus the main opposition party, Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) on the other hand. Even the Communist Party joined the camp of Kunio Hiramatsu in order to call for a united resistance against the autocratic rule of Hashimoto.

The result was a sweeping victory for Hashimoto and his Ishin party. [4] "Apparently the helplessness felt by many Osaka people amid economic stagnation and the sense that power is concentrated in Tokyo, boosted Mr. Hashimoto. More than 150,000 Osaka city residents are on welfare – about one of every 18 citizens, the highest rate in Japan. Mr. Hashimoto captured the hearts of Osaka voters with such bites as 'Strong power, al-

most dictatorial, is needed to change today's politics' ...The established parties failed to present plans that would give hope to Osaka people. Neither the DP nor the LDP could overcome the populist rhetoric used by Mr. Hashimoto." (The Japan Times Online, Dec. 1, 2011)[<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/ed...>]]

After elected as Mayor, Hashimoto lost no time promoting his agenda. For him, the appearance of decisiveness and the speed with which to upset the adversaries are the keys to success. With his favoured argument, "an elected officer can make any decisions and force these decisions because it is 'the will of voters'", he intimidated the officers into obeying him and launched a blistering attack on the trade unions of municipal employees. Every day, his controversial policies attract media coverage, contributing to the maintenance of his high popularity.

Decisiveness and Speed

Here are some of the major changes since Hashimoto took control of the city administration:

- More than forty advisors and counsellors were recruited to work out plans for concretising "Osaka Metropolitan Government", drastically cutting budgets for public services, tightening the discipline, re-developing the central part of the city, recruiting administrators (including school principals and heads of a wards) from private sectors and so on. Most of these advisors were handpicked by Hashimoto.

- Frontal assault on trade unions of municipal employees. In February, the city government ordered all municipal employees to answer the questionnaire on their involvement in trade union activities in order to dissuade them from active commitment. After fierce criticism from lawyers and other people as well as protests from trade unions, they suspended and disposed the questionnaire. However, they are still continuing unfair labour practices of ordering the evacuation of union offices in the city

hall and threatening to abandon the check-off of union dues.

- Hashimoto announced a plan to reduce the wage of transportation workers (mainly bus drivers) by 40%! A city councillor of Ishin used fabricated data on their union's involvement in the Mayor election in the city assembly. Even after the councillor admitted the fabrication, Hashimoto rejected to apologise and justified his deed as having stimulated the discussion about issues of political activities of trade unions.

- Hashimoto is rushing to rearrange public schools so that competition among schools and teachers are stimulated. He wants to abolish school districts for high schools to allow "free choice", which means increasing motivation for selected elites and closing schools with poor records.

So far, the "changes" he has brought about are welcomed by broad layers of citizens and both DP and LDP are shifting to appeasement policy or active cooperation with Ishin. However criticism and resistance is increasing day by day as people become aware of the serious implications of his policies.

Rising to the National Political Arena

From the start, Hashimoto has been talking about challenging the inductility of the centralist bureaucrats and changing politics from local governments. After the victory in November elections, he has renewed his ambition for gaining the political power of the central government.

Ishin is planning to endorse more than 200 candidates in the coming election of lower house and actively cooperate with other like-minded candidates. They released a rough draft of its election platform in February, which includes "reforming the nation's administrative bodies and revising the Constitution", the abolishment of the upper house and electing future prime ministers by popular vote. "It largely reflects Hashimoto's unconventional politics, but some proposals seem infeasible due to a lack of supporting details" ("The Daily Yomiuri", Feb. 16, 2012). [5]

The extraordinary high popularity and expectation toward this new political force is threatening both DP and LDP. The Komei Party and the "Minna-no-tou" ("Your party") are supposed to cooperate with Ishin. Shintaro Ishihara, Governor of Tokyo Metropolitan Government and Takashi Kawamura, Mayor of Nagoya City, will also closely cooperate with Ishin. [6]

As the impasse of the DP government become more and more obvious, Ishin is taking tougher position against the DP. They chose the nuclear power plant issue as a focus of campaign because Prime Minister, Yoshihiko Noda discredited himself by pushing ahead with the restart of the Oi nuclear power plant located within 100 kilometres of Osaka. Hashimoto has expressed his opposition against resuming the operation.

Resistance of Workers and Citizens

The popularity of Hashimoto reflects the dysfunction of parliamentary democracy and impasse of the established political parties. Expectation for changes, which was pervasive at the time of the power shift in 2009 (from LDP to DP), has been swiftly turned into disillusion and impatience among people. Hashimoto's energetic and catching agitation, empowered by excessive appearance in mass media, has been quite effective to activate hostility among people and divert their fury toward public employees, elders, beneficiary of social welfare and progressive intellectuals.

To this extent, "a supposed similarity between some of his tactics and those of fascism" does exist, for sure. A very striking fact is that so many people chose Hashimoto after the heated election campaign of last year despite the widespread criticism and concern about his openly authoritarian idea and practices.

However, the real issue is the failure of the trade unions and political parties to organize actions against this "petit-fascism" and elicit the oppressed desire for more humane society.

Hashimoto's attacks on public employees and reduction of social services are nothing new. They are only the continuation of the neo-liberalists' "reform" under Koizumi government (2001 to 2006) and basically the same as what is going on in most of the advanced capitalist countries in the world. The striking difference is the lack of massive resistance from trade unions in the case of Osaka and Japan as a whole.

For the moment, it is hard to expect an effective counter offensive from major trade unions because they seem to be feeling isolation. Instead of daring to organise resistance, they seem to prefer to avoid or minimize the confrontation in order to secure the organization. Division among trade unions and progressive political forces, with somewhat hostile attitude to one another, is making unified resistance more difficult.

Therefore, the actions so far are quite humble or limited in size. Some of the minor trade unions are quite active in organizing a broad campaign to defend the rights of workers and trade unions, democratic and creative education, affordable public services and humane community from "Hashism". Major municipal employees have launched lawsuits against a series of unfair labour practices by the mayor and administration. Various forms of struggles against forcing to sing Kimigayo (the anthem) and raise Hinomaru (the "national flag") have been continuing despite concerted intimidation against teachers involved. Young people began to organize themselves and raise their voices. In town meetings arranged to explain the city's plan of education reform, storms of criticism from parents and people in the community often prevail. There have been meetings of hundreds of people repeatedly at the city hall to express their objection to "Hashism". Efforts are taken to overcome the division of the progressive forces and cooperate each other in order to broaden the scope of the struggle.

In late February, two leaders of education workers from Wisconsin visited Osaka at the invitation of Osaka Social Forum 2012 [7] and shared their story about the courageous struggle against Governor,

Walker in February to march last year. They attended 5 meetings in Osaka and Kyoto, where they impressed and encouraged hundreds of workers including teachers and retired workers.

These are only the first stage of the resistance. But the historic uprising of workers, students, farmers and citizens in Wisconsin proved that people are ready to fight back in order to defend their rights.

Bold and continuous actions and dissemination of our alternative of participatory democracy would change the people's mind-set gradually. Although this fight is being fought in Osaka, the outcome of the fight will determine whether Hashism grows to be a real danger of fascism or workers and citizens derail it. The stake is very high and the battle has only begun.

| QUEBEC

Students call for a social strike in solidarity with their struggle

RICHARD FIDLER ·

Toward a social strike

It's a student strike, a people's struggle

Hike in tuition fees is part of "the cultural revolution"

For several weeks now a student revolt has shaken the neoliberal consensus imposed for many years by the Quebec and Canadian governments. It was sparked by the announcement of a new, 75% increase in university tuition fees. Since its announcement in the 2010 Quebec budget, the media lackeys of the Liberal government have attempted to present this measure as inevitable. But behind this claimed inevitability we find an eminently political decision expressed in what the finance minister terms a "cultural revolution," and the international economic authorities refer to as an "austerity budget." Whatever the name given to it by governments, it clearly and definitively involves the dismantling of public services aimed at privatizing what remains of the commons.

The student movement has focused on the issue of tuition fees and the commoditization of the universities. However, it is not unaware that this measure is integrally linked to a larger project affecting elementary and secondary education, the healthcare sector and the unfettered development of natural resources. Our resistance to the Quebec government's neoliberal measures has to take into account all of these sectors, establishing a social link that enables us to speak of a community. The government is trying to compartmentalize our strike by saying its tuition hike is designed to get the students to pay their "fair share." However, the students have attempted from the outset of the strike to say that their policy goals went beyond the

framework of a strict accounting and corporatist exercise with the government. Of course we want to see the government cancel this tuition fee increase, but at the same time we want to challenge the economic imperative that informs the policies of our governments.

If it is to do this, the student movement cannot remain alone, and must be joined by all of the forces that make up our society and make it live — whether it is the workers in healthcare, education and social services; the workers locked out by Rio Tinto and laid off by Aveos, victims of unfettered capitalism; the casual employees of the Couche-Tard convenience stores, denied the right of association; the women faced with Conservative threats to their rights; the elderly forced to work longer; or the Indigenous peoples seeing a new colonization that pillages the territory remaining to them.

From the student strike to the social strike

The striking students are aware of their inability by themselves to force the government to retreat from these various measures. Hence the necessity for the student movement to be joined by all social forces in our fight against Finance Minister Bachand's cultural revolution. We not appealing here for some superficial support, with a few union full-timers writing a news release repeating for the umpteenth time their support for the student struggle. On the contrary, we are calling for a convergence of the Quebec people as a whole in opposition to the cut-backs and the commoditization of social services and our collective rights. Only a generalization of the student strike to the workplaces can make this convergence effective. It is therefore a call for a so-

cial strike that we are issuing to the population as a whole!

The government's response to the students is to muzzle them through the courts and police truncheons. The education minister is making daily efforts to break the strike that the students voted for democratically. Our best response to the hardening of the state's management of the strike is to widen it, to render impossible any isolated repression. Let us stop fearing the laws that fetter our discontent, let us collectively disobey and go together into the streets of Quebec. Alone, this disobedience will be marginalized and repressed by the government. But if all sectors of Quebec society act together the government will be unable to rely on the courts.

We must build this social strike from the bottom up, by initiating a discussion in the workplaces on

how to desert our day-to-day occupations. Let us call for general meetings in our local unions to discuss the possibility of instituting such a strike. Let us contact the community groups in our neighborhoods, to hold citizens' assemblies on the social strike. These assemblies are the expression of our capacity to deliberate together and to build a movement that goes beyond the limits established by the elite. May the streets, occupied for two months now, become the expression of our collective refusal.

The government is now scared, it is ready to yield. Let us seize the moment to insert a key into the gears of the cultural revolution and defend a society that puts people before profit.

<http://lifeonleft.blogspot.ca/2012/...>

FEATURES

In-depth analysis from International Viewpoint's Features section



USA

Gerry Foley: A Life Dedicated to Socialist Revolution

JEFF MACKLER · 2 May 2012

Gerry spent 50 years fighting—at near poverty wages—to free humanity from every form of capitalist barbarity, oppression, and exploitation. He did it with a twinkle in his eye and with an engaging passion for all things human—and thoroughly enjoyed every moment.

Gerry was 73. He died less than a week after moving from his semi-retirement residence in Mérida, Mexico, to San Cristóbal, perhaps from the exertion of moving his enormous collection of books into his newly rented home. His friend Pete, on the scene at the time, told us that Gerry had just left a social event in the large communal area of his apartment complex, where he was chatting with some young people. He returned to his apartment extremely short of breath, immediately collapsed to the ground, and died a few minutes later, likely of a heart attack.

Gerry was among Socialist Action's most dedicated and talented comrades. Those who knew him will immediately recall his generous spirit, depth of knowledge and analysis, brilliance of exposition, love of life in all its diversity, and enduring friendship.

Gerry not only read in about 90 languages; he was fluent in more than a dozen, often serving as translator whenever his skills were required. His uncommon language facility was matched by a deep understanding of the history and culture of each nationality whose language he had mastered. Books were Gerry's sole prized possessions. He had a collection of perhaps 10,000 scattered from California to Alabama to Mexico.

Gerry, fluent in Gaelic, was likely among the most informed revolutionaries on Irish history and politics. The Irish struggle for liberation, no matter the

setbacks, was never far from his consciousness. Perhaps the socialist cause of the renowned Irish Marxist and Republican, James Connolly—among his heroes—appropriately expressed Gerry's credo almost 100 years later. Connolly observed that "a real socialist movement can only be born of struggle, of uncompromising affirmation of the faith that is in us. Such a movement infallibly gathers to it every element of rebellion and progress, and in the midst of the storm and stress of struggle solidifies into a real revolutionary force." In his own talks, Gerry expressed similar sentiments many times.

Gerry spent over a year in Ireland working with the Irish comrades, including Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, Northern Ireland's fiery socialist leader and the youngest woman elected to the British parliament. As a professional journalist writing articles for the world Trotskyist press, Gerry's insights into Irish politics served to inform the revolutionary politics of a generation of political activists.

Decades later, in 1997, Gerry headed the San Francisco-based Committee to Free Roisin McAliskey, Bernadette's daughter, who was imprisoned and tortured by British authorities as she and her supporters worldwide defeated a German government-initiated deportation effort based on trumped-up charges of involvement in terrorist activities. Then pregnant, Roisin finally won her freedom but not before being forced to have her baby, while in chains, in a filthy British prison facility. Bernadette, who had won the broad respect of U.S. Black liberation activists decades earlier when she gave to the Black Panther Party the "Keys to San Francisco" (awarded to her by San Francisco's Board of Supervisors out of respect for her membership in the British parliament), joined Gerry at mass rallies in defense of her daughter.

During his speeches, and on virtually any subject, tears often came to Gerry's eyes as he inserted an Irish reference into his discourse. The Irish struggle for self-determination, the longest in world history, lasting more than 700 years and still uncompleted, was ingrained in Gerry's consciousness. And if you gave him the opportunity, Gerry would happily recount every major event of those 700 years.

No comrade could match Gerry's deep understanding of the national question—the struggle of oppressed people and nations for self-determination, dignity, and freedom. He was a champion of all oppressed peoples and despised their oppressors with great passion.

Gerry's articles have appeared in socialist periodicals around the world. We will soon be publishing a list of many of them. His spirit and dedication to socialist revolution and to building the Leninist party, the prerequisite instrument for bringing it into being, lives in our party and in its comrades. In his semi-retirement, Gerry remained an honorary member of Socialist Action's Political Committee, often finding time to join its deliberations via Skype and taking an occasional assignment. He hoped to attend the Socialist Action National Convention in August.

How Gerry became a Trotskyist

In autumn 1960, after graduating from American University in Washington, D.C., Gerry began graduate school at Indiana University (IU), in its Russian and East European Institute. There he met a fellow graduate student in Russian literature, George Shriver, who discussed political issues with him from a Trotskyist position. That same autumn 1960, fate had brought George and Ellen Shriver to IU from the Boston area, where they had been founding members of the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) earlier in the year. The YSA was the fraternal youth group of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), the main Trotskyist organization in the United States at the time. As a result of joint work with George, Ellen, and other Trotskyists in defense of

the Cuban Revolution, Gerry joined the Trotskyist movement.

After George, Ellen, and Gerry had left IU, a strong YSA chapter remained behind them. When in 1963 the chapter invited YSA National Organization Secretary LeRoy McCrae to speak on the Black liberation struggle, an Indiana McCarthyite witch-hunting prosecutor, Thomas Hoadley, saw an opportunity to implement an obscure and reactionary anti-communist law. Three YSA members on campus were indicted on charges of "conspiracy to overthrow the state of Indiana by force and violence." Gerry actively participated in this important defense effort, soon to become a national and successful campaign for "The Bloomington Three," Ralph Levitt, Tom Morgan, and Jim Bingham.

After years of effort by the YSA and SWP the law was declared unconstitutional, an important civil liberties victory for the entire socialist movement and for all others who understood the importance of organizing broad defense campaigns for victims of capitalist persecution.

Gerry defended political prisoners in the U.S. and around the world. He was always among the first to sign up to defend capitalism's victims everywhere and was often involved in their defense committees. In San Francisco, he was a leader in defense of Iranian political prisoners and a participant in the defense of Mumia Abu-Jamal.

In autumn 1962, Gerry moved on to further graduate study at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, where he was an activist in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, also initiated by the SWP and YSA. Soon afterwards, the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis brought the threat of worldwide nuclear war, when the Kennedy administration mobilized the U.S. Navy to confront Soviet ships headed for Cuba with nuclear missiles. The Cubans, who in April 1961 had defeated a U.S.-sponsored invasion at the Bay of Pigs, sought Russian missiles to ensure against another such U.S.-backed invasion.

Gerry was active in Cuba's defense, selling the SWP's newspaper, *The Militant*, and supporting

Cuba's right to defend itself from imperialist attack. And he helped to found a YSA chapter at Madison. Soon, Gerry moved to New York City, where he joined the SWP and did a short stint as a social worker while becoming a member of the newly formed and militant social workers' union. "I didn't do too well by city standards," Gerry told me at that time," because as I saw it, it was my job to get around all the bureaucratic restrictive provisions of the law and make sure that all my clients got on welfare and received the maximum funding possible."

A few years later, Gerry applied for a job as translator with the United Nations. He filled out an application requiring that he list the names and number of languages that he could translate. He listed 25. Later, his disbelieving interviewer asked Gerry what he meant by 2.5 languages. Gerry replied that the figure was 25, whereupon the interviewer immediately sent for a bevy of language specialists from several UN departments to verify Gerry's claim. Gerry passed with ease and was surprised that he was offered the job on the spot, but with one condition. The UN had a rule that each member nation had the right to challenge its own nationals before their applications could be approved.

Gerry was eventually notified that the U.S. government had vetoed his application. But the outraged staffer who so informed Gerry surreptitiously included Gerry's uncensored FBI file with the UN's letter of rejection. Gerry told me that it had recorded virtually every YSA and SWP meeting he ever attended, every party position he held, every public meeting he attended, and his every landlord's name and address. Thus, in those pre-Freedom of Information Act days, still in the McCarthy era, Gerry inadvertently became perhaps the first American to see his unexpurgated FBI file. He took some pride in that.

Revolutionary journalist

Gerry soon became a full-time staffer for the SWP, working under the direction of Joseph Hansen in the production of what was then one of the finest

weekly revolutionary news magazines in the world, *Intercontinental Press* (IP). It was Hansen, Leon Trotsky's secretary during Trotsky's exile in Mexico, who mentored Gerry in the critical necessity of accuracy in reporting, depth of research, source checking, and clear and careful formulations to explain the SWP's then revolutionary politics. At that time, IP was the official periodical of the Fourth International (FI), the world revolutionary socialist organization with which the SWP maintained fraternal relations. Reactionary U.S. legislation prevented the party's formal affiliation, as it does with *Socialist Action* today.

Gerry remained on the SWP staff for some 17 years, writing for all its publications, with his articles often reprinted by FI sections. His journalistic assignments took him to Portugal, where he covered the 1974-75 revolution, which overthrew the fascist Salazar dictatorship. He also traveled as a reporter to Iran, when in 1979 a revolutionary wave swept from power the U.S.-backed and installed Shah of Iran and opened the door wider than ever to a socialist transformation. In both cases and in all other instances where Gerry's knowledge, reporting, and language skills took him to far-off places to cover revolutionary developments, Gerry collaborated with the FI groups in those countries, which were active in the mass mobilizations.

Gerry left the SWP in 1980 to take a staff position on the FI's new publication, *International Viewpoint* (IV). He remained in Paris on this assignment for more than a decade. His departure from the SWP, which expelled Gerry retroactively, stemmed from his opposition to the bureaucratic and cult-like practices of SWP National Secretary Jack Barnes, who, along with a compliant new "leadership team," engineered the SWP's rejection of its Trotskyist heritage. This was accompanied by the expulsion of hundreds of its most dedicated comrades, including many of the SWP's founding members from 1938. Many of these comrades soon after formed *Socialist Action*.

Relocated in Paris, Gerry was a staff writer, translator, and often a speaker for IV at conferences and

conventions of FI sections. He authored hundreds of articles covering critical events in world politics and joined the French section of the FI, the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR).

Beginning in the late 1980s, Gerry's mastery of Slavic and other Eastern European languages, and his keen interest in the mass movements in the USSR and Eastern Europe that challenged Stalinist rule, allowed him to author scores of articles that provided great insight into the revolutionary developments in these countries—especially the critical struggle of the USSR's oppressed nationalities.

Gerry's assessment of the importance of these developments coincided with Socialist Action's. For the first time in decades the possibility of building Trotskyist parties in Eastern Europe and the disintegrating USSR had real and immediate potential. He supported Socialist Action's efforts to send Trotskyist delegations to Eastern Europe and the USSR as well as our contributions to the building of a Trotskyist party in Poland, including the translation into Polish of some important works by Trotsky.

In the early 1990s, Gerry returned to the U.S. to work full time for Socialist Action as the International Editor of our newspaper. Typical of Gerry, however, before leaving IV, he insisted that we underwrite his proposal that he visit Hungary for three weeks so he could "learn the language" and more effectively follow events in that country.

Back in the U.S., Gerry was immediately co-opted to Socialist Action's Political Committee, where his knowledge of Eastern Europe and the recent events in the USSR contributed greatly to the depth of coverage in our press. Socialist Action newspaper's coverage of revolutionary developments in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Ireland were remarkable in their detail and analysis, often from first-hand sources or direct participation in the unfolding events.

Gerry eagerly took on assignments around the world. Following the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico,

he visited San Cristóbal, Ocosingo, and other cities that the Zapatistas had temporarily occupied, to learn first hand of their impact and to meet with their representatives.

An incident related to the Zapatista rebellion comes to mind that highlights Gerry's desire to directly connect with the people whose struggles he embraced. I visited San Cristóbal to try to meet with the Zapatistas and to observe their negotiations with the Mexican government, which temporarily ended their first uprising in 1994. Before I left for Mexico, Gerry asked me to bring him back a dictionary of the language of the indigenous people. At the time, such an effort was the last thing on my mind. But by coincidence, during a press conference following the negotiations, a fellow walking through the aisles was hawking just such a dictionary, and I thought that I would bring it back to San Francisco to surprise Gerry with my ability to make good on his essentially eccentric request.

I gleefully handed Gerry the dictionary upon my return, and he quickly opened it. In a moment, with perhaps a tiny hint of disdain, Gerry said, "This dictionary is Tzotzil. I need to begin with the major indigenous root language, Nahuatl. It won't do me much good." Vintage Gerry! I am sure that comrades who knew him have thousands of similar anecdotes highlighting Gerry's magnificent eccentricities.

Gerry Foley touched the lives of revolutionaries around the world, including comrades from other socialist currents that do not share our politics, program, and traditions. Socialist Action has received condolences from many comrades outside our movement, comrades who might have differences with us on important political questions but who respected Gerry's diligence in presenting our ideas and who benefited from the material that only his skills and experience could provide.

Gerry was one of a kind. To know him was to be enriched in myriad ways. He lives on in our deeds and dedication to the revolutionary cause and program that he championed for a lifetime.