

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV455 December 2012

PHILIPPINES

A critique of the Framework Agreement on Bangsamoro (FAB) between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Front (MILF)

PORTUGAL

"We are not living in a period of resignation"

DOSSIER

Denmark

Algeria

Poland

Iceland

Bangladesh

Climate Change

Congo

Syria

Venezuela

Russia

Tunisia

Portugal

Egypt

Pakistan:

Italy:

Climate Change:

Philippines

France

Spanish State:

Russia solidarity

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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The 2013 budget: austerity without significant changes

SAP (DENMARK) ·

Concerning the vote on the 2013 budget, the Red Green Alliance - Enhedslisten has signed an agreement with the government. We have chosen this commentary to present a critical review of this agreement. We conclude that the Finance Law does not meet the prerequisites for voting for it, as adopted by Enhedslisten at its 2010 Congress. An assessment of the political effects of this agreement and the tasks arising from it will be made next week - our national conference next weekend will decide on it. In the immediate future we call for people to transform anger and disappointment into an increased effort in the ongoing struggle against the degradation of unemployment benefits.

First of all, this is a budget without solutions for the unemployed, for whom the period when they receive benefits is reduced to two years as from January 1, 2013, and there is no solution proposed for those who will no longer receive benefits. Enhedslisten has only obtained that the present level of cash benefits will be provisionally maintained. This means that those whose unemployment benefits will stop during the first six months of the year 2013 will receive an allowance "of education of dependants" which will be 60 per cent or 80 per cent of the maximum allowance, respectively for people without children and for those who are raising children. This allowance will be paid for 26 weeks regardless of the moment when unemployment benefit ceased during the period mentioned and without taking into account the income of a partner. But to qualify for this benefit the un-

employed will have to be prepared to agree to receive training for at least 3 of the 26 weeks.

Furthermore, the budget provides for financing a wide range of initiatives in the field of employment, vocational training and the environment:

- A "youth plan", which should enable young people and new graduates to learn a skill and to facilitate job rotation;
- a provision for the training of unskilled workers;
- a point concerning flexible jobs, with more funding for learning skills and for job rotation;
- social initiatives such as help with payment for dental care for the beneficiaries of social benefits, subsidies for companies who practice social responsibility and aid for single parents;
- Elimination of taxes on products containing fat and sugar, which will be financed by an increase in the tax base and by the lowering of the personal allowance for income tax (a tax increase of 0.2 per cent). Thus the income tax ceiling will be increased by 0.2 per cent, which according to the calculations of the government will lead to greater equality of income, according to the Gini index.
- A "green plan", which includes one billion kroner (134 million euros) for the plan of house-building using green technology and guaranteeing savings on energy, negotiated by Enhedslisten last year, as well as the electrification of the Køge-Næstved railway line;
- Initiatives concerning refugees, such as the reduction of the waiting time to be accorded refugee status, efforts for the victims of trafficking in human beings and the granting of family allowances to refugees.

We should furthermore add a number of choices of budget funding, which were decided by the government alone or negotiated with the right-wing parties.

Did the principles of Enhedslisten make it possible to support such a budget?

The national congress of 2010 adopted the following formulation: "We will in no circumstances vote for a Finance Law that:

- contains a deterioration of the previous situation;
- does not provide significant improvements;
- is the recapitulation of a year of austerity conducted along with right-wing parties."

First of all we have the issue of deterioration. Enhedslisten defined it as "further deterioration". This means that all deterioration resulting from previous agreements in Parliament "does not count", so to speak. In the case of the decisions of the former Parliament, dominated by the Liberal-Conservative coalition, concerning budget cuts for the following years, such an interpretation is questionable. But concerning the budget for 2012 and 2013, Enhedslisten has made the choice of considering that as "old" damage. This concerns "targeted management" (introduced by the previous government), which imposes a reduction of 2.5 per cent of expenditure on wages and on other operating expenses of the central administration in 2013, as well as the 2010 "stimulus plan", which imposes a reduction in government spending of 0.5 per cent in 2013. In total this means budget cuts of 3 per cent, which are considered as "old" deterioration. Thus, government spending is reduced by a billion kroner, but this is mainly the result of budget cuts decided previously.

On the other hand, the new "budget savings" (scattered across most sectors) represent a new deterioration in some areas. In this case the money does not disappear from the system, as is the case with "targeted management" and the "re-launching plan". These funds are subject to new priorities, of-

ten within the same ministry, and it is not easy to spot them. After having examined and identified these deteriorations in the Finance Law, the parliamentary group of Enhedslisten obtained the agreement of the government to withdraw from the Finance Bill "new" deterioration to the amount of 530 million kroner. It also managed to get removed from the bill more than two-thirds of "old" deterioration identified in education and research. We can therefore conclude that, as far as possible, "new" deterioration has been removed from the draft budget.

On the other hand, the transfer of the taxes on fatty and sugary products to income tax, as well as the reduction of benefits, represent clearly a deterioration. The calculations show that there are families of workers and of recipients of benefits with no children (those who retired early under the new system and who own their own homes) whose purchasing power will thus be reduced. This tax change can therefore be considered as a deterioration of the situation of certain social groups (based on the average purchasing power of each group) and furthermore a deterioration for those who do not eat fat and sugar.

Compared to the tax agreement signed in the spring with the Right, where the maximum threshold for taxes and tax deductions for workers was lowered, it seems provocative that Enhedslisten should vote in favour of an increase in taxes that affects everyone, including the poorest.

It is questionable whether the limitation of the subsidies accorded to private clinics for hearing aids is a deterioration. It seems suspect that these funds are not being transferred to the public system, where the length of time on the waiting list has already reached 110 weeks.

Does the Finance Law contain significant improvements? In the 2013 budget there are a number of new initiatives, including legislative changes. However most of the improvements are relatively weak, given the framework set at approximately 2 billion kroner in 2013.

The improvement in funding for vocational training and social services is the most significant. "Training with monetary compensation" will probably rise to 480 million kroner (64 million euros).

The green plan for 2013-2015 is just a simple transfer of one billion crowns from the programme of construction and improvement of housing in line with the standards of low energy consumption already signed with Enhedslisten in the negotiations over the 2012 budget. From 2016 it provides for spending 700 million kroner, spread over several years. In this context the green plan does not constitute a significant improvement.

In the social field there is an improvement of several hundred millions in 2013; in particular the improvement in allowances for dental care for the unemployed stands out.

Overall, we can see that there are a number of good points, but these are small changes that are not decisive in an austerity budget. Nor do we find any significant trace of a social policy, based on solidarity and sustainable development.

Is the Finance Law the product of a year of austerity?

In the spring we examined how the budget could put a stop to the 3 billion kroner of cuts in social spending, negotiated by the government with the Liberals and Conservatives, as well as the reduction of spending by nearly 1.5 billion kroner because of the reform of early retirement costs and of labour flexibility (it is true that this reduction will only be significant in 2016).

The new positive spending (employment, social spending) is far from equalling these cuts:

- Approximately 160 million kroner to recruit municipal consultants to help businesses that choose to implement labour flexibility;
- 180 million kroner for dental care for recipients of pensions and allowances (currently you cannot get early retirement before the age of 40);

– There will be a law on companies who practice social responsibility, making it possible for municipalities to create jobs for people who are currently outside the labour market.

All these good budget initiatives for 2013 are clouded by the fact that this budget is totally neo-liberal in its conception. It is not only the sum of the major neo-liberal reforms, in particular the tax reform and the reform of early retirement and flexible working, which amount to a billion kroner in budget cuts. It is also the fruit of the agreement on economic policy which is imposing a brutal austerity that Denmark, with the exception of the year 2011, has not experienced since the systemic crisis of 1990.

This Finance Law is designed in conformity with the artificial recommendation of the European Union, commissioned by Lars Løkke Rasmussen (neo-liberal Prime Minister) in 2010, according to which Denmark must reduce its structural deficit in public finances by 1.5 per cent of GDP per year between 2011 and 2013. To achieve this goal, the government is applying the brake to budget policy. The effect of budget policy is a reduction of growth of 0.6 per cent of GDP. This is the result of a growth of public expenditure by only 0.1 per cent in real terms and a reduction in public investment by more than 11 per cent in real terms. The Finance Law will therefore result in a reduction in employment due to budget cuts.

The 2012 budget was a significant break with the policy of the previous Conservative government (stimulus, eradication of poverty, 5 billion kroner to improve social assistance, breaking with the policy against refugees and asylum-seekers, etc.). In comparison, the 2013 Finance Law is a step back. It is significant that the general framework within which Enhedslisten negotiated with the government concerned only 2 billion kroner for 2013 and that this sum must be reduced until 2016. In addition, in this context, 0.5 billion kroner come from the "own funds" of Enhedslisten, i.e. spending already planned last year in the framework of the

house-building plan, converted into the new green plan.

In other words, it is a question of shifting crumbs onto the 2013 budget, and the main demand of Enhedslisten – to make a break with the policies of the Right - has not been attained.

Overall, the three conditions formulated by the 2010 congress to be able to support the Finance

Law have not been fulfilled. This is a budget that continues anti-popular austerity policies in the strict sense of the term and contains no significant improvements. By supporting it Enhedslisten has put in question the idea that the Left can/wants to do something other than managing the crisis of capitalism. The party has thus tainted his own credibility.

ALGERIA

"We are convinced that only revolution will finish off this regime"

Your list of candidates in the local elections of November 29 was rejected by the wali and then accepted by the courts, why, in your view?

Our list was accepted by a judgment of the administrative court on Monday October 22nd, but also, more or less, thanks to the support of the local people. The verdict was only just, because the decision of the wali was an arbitrary, politically motivated decision, which leads us, perhaps, to think that elections are not going to change things but are a moment of struggle, that this regime is not democratic and expresses its dictatorial and monopolist nature in the political field. It has already seen what we have done these last five years during the mandate we have exercised, our actions, our way of management that is in total antagonism with that regime. It does not surprise me that the wali rejected our list because currently I gave the resources of the local council to trade unionists, social movements because they are the resources of the people and they belong to the people. I took positions during gatherings of the unemployed, of local trades unionists and automatically it bothers the regime that an elected official is representative of the people instead of the state power.

Have you boycotted the wali of Bejaia during his visits to Barbacha?

We have not boycotted him at first glance. He had already made two trips to Barbacha, was very well received. He had guided tours in the majority of the villages there. Only, there were promises that were made on his part and the requirements on our part that have been made, including the minimum requirement made in early February on the acquisition of a bulldozer because our town is a rural area and its richness lies in agriculture, livestock, arbori-

culture and the products of the soil, and to develop them we need agricultural tracks. When these promises have not been met, we boycotted the wali, first telling him, you have not kept your promises, we boycott you but we will not prevent you from coming to Barbacha. We have not made a movement to stop him. Indeed, he has already come and he was received by the head of the district. Again, he programmed a visit in the bordering commune, Kendira and the district head asked us whether the wali could include Barbacha in his visit. And they were told if you have things to bring us you are welcome, if not it is better to postpone. The wali opted for a very wise decision in opting to postpone. But on the return from Kendira the wali stopped in our commune at the level of a social housing construction site, and we got angry and issued our statement denouncing the visit of the wali in the absence of local elected representatives.

Can you motivate your choice to participate in the upcoming elections?

For the elections, we reiterated throughout the year that it is not the elections that are going to change things in Algeria. It is our belief as long as there is no class consciousness among the broad popular masses in this country, when there is no huge relationship of forces to stop electoral fraud carried out by the administration of the regime, because the regime holds all the possible tentacles to defraud, so it takes a popular left movement strong enough to bring about change. What we want is revolution. We are convinced that only revolution will put an end to this capitalist mafia regime. We consider that where there is a space, it is necessary to open it up, including by elections. The elections for us are a movement to take advantage of a platform of expression to speak to the people, express our politics

because the political field is closed throughout the year and we believe these "recreations" represent an opportunity for the party, why not win some spaces to exercise its politics and expose the contradiction within the institutions of the state.

Of course, while keeping the umbilical cord with the popular masses and with the relationship of forces that you always need to create. This is what we did for five years at Barbacha. We have presented lists only in the communes where we have activists to avoid opportunists and "chkara" people, we are present in 11 communes at the national level and 2 communes in Bejaia, namely Barbacha and Adekkar. We were also willing to sponsor left lists, of trade unionists or activists in the associative movement, we have sponsored these lists in other wilayas.

You also have candidates for the elections for the wilaya assembly, according to our information. That's right?

At the level of the wilaya assembly, actually because it's also a pretty important issue, it is impossible to have a local council that can perform its duties if it does not have support at the level of the wilaya, including at the financial level because the wilaya budget is quite large and because it's a space that the wilaya represents where one can also influence policy. It is in this sense that we presented three lists at the national level in Mostaghanem, Tlemcen and of course Bejaia. Our candidate in Béjaïa is Kamel Acharya, a doctor of biology, a teacher at the university, a trade unionist and a veteran activist, with 30 years as party militant.

Some political parties have chosen to boycott the local elections of November 29 arguing that the vote would support the regime in place. What do you think?

But of course, we call them, who are these parties? We tell them, that a boycott is a political option that we share, but to boycott by staying idle is a resignation. Passive abstention is not in favour of the interests of the popular masses but we support an active boycott.

What do you mean by "actively boycotting"?

An active boycott means preventing the elections from taking place, this means revolution, people out in the street. That is a boycott that has a meaning. We boycotted and remained absent for several years during elections and we were not able to put forward a popular movement to prevent the elections, which is a resignation. As we said through our secretary general, to boycott and stay at home is not an option for the PST.

You have also mentioned the risk of fraud at every election. Are these risks not present at the next elections in which you take part?

The risks of fraud are also present at the level of the wilaya and the local council. It is still possible to counter fraud if the administration activates its networks at the level of the body consisting of the army and other bodies that are added to the lists of local voters. We have seen how fraud took place in the parliamentary elections of May 2012, through the vote of the constituent bodies and in other elections previously. This risk of fraud arises also today in Adekkar, where there are constituted bodies of the army. We have a list and our comrades in Adekkar started an action with the FFS and the RCD who withdrew at the last minute when the PST organized a gathering in Adekkar on October 30 to denounce these lists. In this sense, there may be fraud. But if the wali knew he could cheat in Brabacha, he would have not rejected our list. Where it has no bodies, where the population ensures transparency and safety and self organisation at the level of the polling stations, the authority cannot cheat. If we can generalize this awareness at the national level, you can create an anti-regime event at the national level.

The military have the right to vote like all Algerians but must vote in their places of residence. The massive registrations they have made in the town of Adekkar are things to denounce and we must prevent these fraudulent practices that violate the communal code.

Béjaïa has already experienced such scenarios in past legislative elections passed, at the level of the primary school of Quatre Chemins where young military conscripts have been brought to stuff the ballot boxes, what guarantees are there that such scenarios do not occur in the next communal elections?

Actually, it happened at the Boucherba school, the recount took place in Bejaia district. The distribution of votes at the level of the regime coalition was very clear, two ballot boxes to the FLN, there was no dissenting voice within a single box, it was blatant. The regime is capable of reproducing these fraudulent practices.

The national electoral monitoring commission suspended its work temporarily in protest, what do you think?

Actually, I think that the demands of the national electoral monitoring commission, filed at the level of the Ministry of the Interior, were not honoured, there was no response to the recommendations of the national commission. This regime is Machiavellian and has no desire to establish a democracy in this country. Therefore, we believe that only a broadly popular relationship of forces is able to put an end to this mafia regime. Otherwise it remains effectively that what we do is reform and it is recognized. But at the risk of repeating it, as long as the boycott promoted by ourselves or by others amount to a silence or a resignation which is unable to bring the masses onto the street to prevent the elections being held, then it is a tactical and symbolic participation on our part.

What legitimacy, according to you, can a local elected official draw from a vote where the participation rate does not exceed 26% as was the case in Bejaia in the elections last May or during previous communal elections?

This is not legitimate at all, first these are deputies produced by fraud, by a coalition co-opted by the

regime, with the absence of a legal framework. In 2002, we had deputies who were elected with rates of 2%, after the movement of 2001, because there was no text in the electoral code which required a minimum rate for the validation of the elections.

There is no legitimacy, obviously, as evidenced today by the minister of the interior who was more or less "honest" in declaring that he aspires to achieve a 45% participation rate. This is official recognition that no more than 45% vote in Algeria, that representation at the national level is to be reviewed today. But of course in our municipalities we will try to mobilize the population to vote in our favour to be real representatives. Because you cannot be representative with low rates. If we had not had, in 2007, the absolute majority in Barbacha, I think we could not coexist with the others.

You said recently that an SNMG [guaranteed minimum wage] of 35,000 dinars is needed in Algeria to improve the purchasing power of the citizens. An opinion shared by many economic experts, but the government is not listening. Do you think that this estimate is able to cope with the current inflation situation?

First, you should know that the SNMG of 35,000 dinars is not the estimate made by the PST; it is the UGTA which has made this calculation. Other autonomous unions opt for 42,000 dinars. For our part, we say, today with the galloping inflation that we have experienced in recent months, inflation that started in the mid-1980s; a general increase of prices in the long term and the long term today dates back 30 years. So today, I think a minimum wage of 50,000 dinars is insufficient to live with dignity in our country. I was a university before becoming a local councillor, and with my salary of 80,000 dinars, I cannot live decently and what about large families? Look at the prices of basic products, the price of educational materials, that is obligatory household expenditure, not luxury spending. So 35,000 dinars was logical a year ago today, it is already insufficient.

POLAND

Towards a general strike in Silesia?

JAN MALEWSKI ·

"We do not go on strike for the sake of it. If over three to four months we come to an agreement with the government and if that leads to a change in the socio-economic policy, then of course there will be no strike"- said the leader of Solidarnosc in Silesia, Dominik Vijay." [1]

This is the first time since 1989 that a regional inter-union structure of the four biggest trade unions has been set up in Silesia and it would be the first time since 1981 that a general strike had taken place in the region. Why now? The employers of the region already owe their employees more than 8 million euros in unpaid wages; 26.6 per cent of workers in Poland are hired on precarious contracts; unemployment officially affects 12.5 per cent of the workforce and redundancies are continuing: Fiat will reduce its production by 40 per cent in late December, is laying off several dozen workers every month and is preparing a collective redundancy; General Motors has reduced its production by 20 per cent; Mittal has stopped several blast furnaces... In the face of this, Prime Minister Donald Tusk has said that he will not accept any legislation enabling temporary workers to benefit from social security and has announced that measures of flexibilisation of working time, introduced in 2009, will be maintained. His neo-liberal government has decided on a "plan to revive the economy": between now and 2015, 52 billion euros will be made available to banks, producers of energy infrastructures and the arms industry, and will be used to finance the extraction of shale gas.

Last September the retirement age was increased to 67 and the government does not want to take into account years spent doing arduous work. Tusk has also announced that maternity leave will be in-

creased to one year... but will only be paid at 80 per cent, a way of reducing the employment of women.

At its regional congress, on September 27, Solidarnosc adopted the idea of a warning general strike and outlined five demands: 1) a system of protection of businesses who do not lay off workers when they reduce their production; 2) compensation for businesses which will be affected by additional taxes because of the adoption by the European Union of its climate package; 3) the legal limitation of precarious contracts; 4) the liquidation of the National Health Fund and its replacement by regional funds; 5) the maintenance of early retirement for workers engaged in arduous work. These demands are highly debatable.

However the members of "August 80" considered that the possibility of organizing a movement of all workers was more important than having a discussion on the nature of these demands. "First, we must overcome the atomisation of the workers and show that collective action is possible" said Boguslaw Zietek, interviewed by phone. The possibility of an agreement between the more combative union, "August-80", and the biggest trade union confederation, Solidarnosc, was enough for the two other confederations to agree to create an inter-union structure to prepare for the strike.

The "August 80" union has put all its forces into the preparation of the strike. It publishes a free 8-page weekly paper, *Kurier Związkowy*, whose circulation has been increased to 30,000 copies. It has produced hundreds of thousands of leaflets. "People take our newspapers and our leaflets with great interest. In one hour around 2,000 disappear. They discuss, they ask questions. As they say themselves, it's good that the unions have finally come to an agreement and are working together for people -

says Patryk Kosela, spokesperson of "August 80" [2]

Polish strike law is very restrictive: it does not permit a general strike against the government and requires that in each enterprise workers vote for strike action in a referendum. Furthermore, a strike must be preceded by a 4-hour warning strike. Referendums began to be organized on 21

November in the steel industry and on the railways. The first results are encouraging: 83.5 per cent for strike action at the rolling-mill for non-ferrous metals in Labedy, 96 per cent in the Buczek steel-works in Ruda Slaska, 96.5 per cent in the coke-producing chemical combine in Zabrze, 96.9 per cent in the Pokoj steel-works...

To be continued!

ICELAND

The constitutional referendum: natural resources are a national heritage

JAN MALEWSKI ·

1. Should natural resources which are not privately-owned be declared to be part of the national heritage (and therefore not privatizable)? Yes by 82.9

per cent.

2. Should the new constitution establish a national religion? Yes by 57.1 per cent.

3. Should independent candidatures (not on party lists) be facilitated for the election of the Parliament? Yes by 78.4 per cent.

4. Should the votes of all the regions of the country have equal weight (i.e. should the electoral districts be redrawn so as not to give an advantage to depopulated areas)? Yes by 66.5 per cent.

5. Should a certain percentage (the project mentions 10 per cent) of the population have the right to demand a referendum on a particular issue? Yes by 73.3 per cent.

The draft constitution was drawn up by a constituent council of 25 members, elected on November 27, 2010 in a vote where there were 523 candidates - "ordinary citizens" and not candidates of parties, whose legitimacy is widely contested. In this type of election it was well-known "personalities" who had the most votes – those elected were academics, journalists, doctors, business leaders and even a pastor, but no workers or fishermen!

This is the third referendum in Iceland since 2008. During the first two - in March 2010 and April 2011 - the population twice rejected reimbursing Britain and the Netherlands for the indemnities that these two countries paid to the shareholders of the

Icelandic banks that went bankrupt (about 3.9 billion euros), considering that it was not up to it to pay for the losses of speculators. This was in spite of the pressure for such a settlement from nearly all Icelandic parties (including the Greens and the Social Democrats, elected after the financial collapse of 2008, precisely on the basis of not paying...). The level of participation was higher in these two referendums (62.7 per cent in 2010, 75.3 per cent in 2011) and the "no" to reimbursing the debt had a substantial majority on both occasions (93.2 per cent in 2010, 60 per cent in 2011). The fact that the Icelandic government (with the support of the opposition parties) signed an agreement after these votes for the reimbursement over 15 years of foreign "small savers" (but not hedge funds, banks, pension funds and insurance companies) and that the trial of the bankers and politicians who were considered to be responsible for the bankruptcy was dragging on, led a number of Icelanders to the conclusion that their vote was not useful... which explains the turn-out of less than 50 per cent and the fact that the vote was finally favourable to the establishment of a state religion.

But the fact that 82.9 of the voters decided that natural resources that are not yet privatized can no longer be so is important. The resources involved are essentially fisheries, geothermal energy and hydraulic dams, as well as oil and gas, the offshore reserves of which (not yet exploited) seem to be significant.

After refusing to pay the illegitimate debt in 2010 and 2011, the Icelandic population has thus once again said no to a neoliberal society.

| BANGLADESH

Indignation after fire claims 112 victims

PIERRE ROUSSET ·

The Tazreen Fashion factory caught fire on November 24, leading to the death of 112 people, prisoners in a building where no safety rules were respected – and after two managers with the company had ordered frightened workers to resume work, saying that it was a simple fire drill exercise. The victims were mostly women making clothes for international groups. About 150 wounded were hospitalized. As in all tragedies of this type, the dilapidated premises had no emergency exits and fire extinguishers that could be used, while flammable materials were piled in every corner. The company should have only had three floors; it had nine - condemning to death without appeal those who worked on the upper floors.

Two days later, thousands of workers began to demonstrate in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, paralyzing the Ashulia industrial zone where the Tazreen Fashion factory was located, demanding better conditions of work and safety. Regularly attacked by the police, the demonstrations are continuing daily.

In 2010, a vast strike movement of had already affected some 700 plants in this industrial zone, on that occasion for an increase in wages. It is known that conditions of super exploitation in production are extreme in Bangladesh, which does not prevent large Western ready-to-wear and distribution chains, such as H & M, Carrefour, Metro, Walmart, Levi Strauss, Tommy Hilfiger, GAP, Tesco, Marks & Spencer and Zara continuing to supply themselves from the country.

Because of the involvement of these transnationals in Bangladeshi garment manufacture, November 24 fire caused a wave of indignation around the world, including in the United States (Walmart is found particularly in the line of fire of the protests). The indignation was even deeper in that the alert had been more than once sounded on insecurity in the Tazreen Fashion factory and the drama was perfectly predictable: the number of employees in the Bangladeshi clothing sector who have died in fires since 2006 is estimated at some 700!

If production is a high risk area in Bangladesh, it is because of ever increasing pressure from out-sourcers for just in time production, with night work, exhaustion of workers, prohibition of trade unions, and total disrespect of safety rules. With almost 4500 plants and 3.5 million employee registered in textiles, the country is today the second biggest exporter in the world after China.

As a major textile exporter, the whole of South Asia is affected. Last September, more than 300 employees were killed in two fires at a factory in Pakistan and 40 others in Tamil Nadu (India). Employers (accustomed to super exploitation) and (corrupt) Asian governments obviously have their share of responsibility. But the laws of the capitalist world market are directly involved. Indeed, transnational corporations are playing on competition between various countries in the region, driving down wages, working conditions and safety standards. Big ready-to-wear and distribution companies can no longer continue to hide behind a cascade of subcontractors to conceal their roles in these repeated dramas.

Mexico: Opposition Parties Sign a Neoliberal "Pact" with the President, Left in Disarray, Radical Youth in Violent Rebellion

DAN LA BOTZ ·

Representatives of the Mexican Ecological Green Party (PVEM), a satellite of the PRI, were also present at the signing as observers. The president also called upon employers and labor unions, academics and the media, and the society in general to join together "so that this will be a pact for Mexico." In the past, such national unity pacts have only been agreed to in times of national emergency, such as during World War II. The pact shocked and infuriated many on the Mexican left, who felt betrayed by the PRD's complicity with Peña Nieto.

Youth Engage in Violent Protests

While President Peña Nieto was taking the oath of office in the Congress the day before, youths responding to the call of the #IAM132 student movement and the National Convention against Imposition (that is, the imposition of Peña Nieto and the PRI) engaged in small but violent protests outside, where they fought police with clubs, stones, and Molotov cocktails. The young protestors, many dressed in black, some painted with the letter "A," wearing ski masks and bandannas to hide their identity, broke shop windows, trashed at least one automobile, and destroyed cash machines. Some labor union members and #IAM132 members, who broke off from the protests when they turned violent, reportedly attempted to assist the injured.

The protests resulted in over 100 injuries, some of them requiring hospitalization; one person was critically injured. Police arrested and charged 69

for involvement in the riot, though lawyers for some of the accused say that they were either involved in peaceful protests or were simply innocent bystanders. The small, violent protests this year stood in stark contrast to the hundreds of thousands who protested peacefully for weeks six years ago. They also suggest serious problems in the #IAM132 movement which issued a call for protests but was unprepared for the violence that ensued.

Not far away, hundreds of teachers from the National Coordinating Committee of the Teachers Union (la CNTE) were contained by police on a street downtown and kept from joining labor demonstrations. The labor organizations, angry about the recent passage of a pro-business labor reform, had organized peaceful protests.

Inside, Peña Nieto delivered an address in which he promised to restore peace to the beleaguered nation, establish the bases for economic growth, overcome the country's social backwardness, raise the standard of living, and create a middle class nation.

Reaction to Peña Nieto's Political Maneuver

Remarkably, Peña Nieto, whose election had been challenged as corrupt and fraudulent by the left [1], succeeded in convincing Jesús Zambrano, leader of the PRD, to join in signing his national unity pact. The result has been an immediate uproar in the PRD, leading two of its Congressional deputies, congressmen, Gerardo Villanueva and Rodrigo Chávez, to resign from the party, becoming independent representatives for the moment, though they apparently plan to join the Movement for National Regeneration (MORENA) led by Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

Leaders of other factions of the PRD, such as René Bejarano Martínez, accused Zambrano of having entered into the pact without consulting the party leadership. Many speculate that the PRD will be shattered by these developments, though the par-

ty's ballot status and organizational resources make that unlikely.

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The Tragic Farce At Doha

SOLIDARITY ·

As the Doha COP18 climate talks draw to a close, they have unfortunately confirmed The Economist's description of the event as a "theater of the absurd." Even as the World Bank has released a report describing a rise in average global temperatures by a catastrophic 4 degrees Celsius over the course of this century, no greater sense of urgency emerged at the talks, largely due to the obvious futility of trying to formulate global policy without a serious commitment by Washington to reduce its own gargantuan carbon footprint. Meanwhile, the effects of climate change have accelerated with the ferocious global warming-fueled superstorm Sandy and the enormous Typhoon Bopha that has ravaged the southern Philippines, to mention only the most recent and dramatic that have ravaged communities as a result.

The irony of the current round of UN climate talks taking place in Doha, Qatar, the world's highest per capita emitter and a principal member of the Gulf Cooperation Council alliance of fossil-fuel based states was not lost on anyone, save some of the delegates. It was a foregone conclusion that the talks had reached an impasse over critical issues. As the Kyoto treaty was set to expire, no industrialized country met the target for reducing emissions. Both the United States and the European Union repeatedly cited "tough economic times" as their excuse. For them, capitalist profitability triumphs effective action to save the ecosystems. The intransigence of Washington as the "most obdurate bully in the room" murdered the hope of expanding the Kyoto treaty to incorporate the world's principal culprits—clearly the United States and China—and detail-

ing how a climate funding program to assist the world's "developing nations" would be set up as long ago as Copenhagen.

What did come out of this session from 36 straight hours of negotiations was an agreement by the Kyoto signatories—who collectively represent just 15% of the world's emissions—to extend the Kyoto framework to 2020. While this may sound like a "modest but essential" step in the right direction as described by Connie Hedegaard, the European climate commissioner, it is so full of loopholes that it will have negligible impact on carbon emissions. Greenpeace Executive Director Kumi Naidoo lamented, "The talks in Doha were always going to be a modest affair, but they even failed to live up to even the historically low expectations."

Although the countries of the global south are already bearing the brunt of the damage caused by the industrialized countries, neither US or EU delegates came up with concrete plans on how to raise the climate fund goal of \$100 billion a year by 2020. This crisis of political will is particularly damning given how much has already been allocated to bailing out criminal financial institutions and subsidizing fossil fuels, not to mention Washington's enormously bloated defense expenditures.

Once again, the only spark of hope came from the speeches of those who held no power at the level of policy-making, but are the voices of the growing global environmentalist movements.

In a passionate speech to the delegates, Syrian-American student Munira Sibai declared that none of the official representatives of the world's governments were worth addressing and so she addressed the climate justice movement directly, "Your governments are failing you," in a moment of clarity

and truth unsurpassed throughout the entire event [1]. Further, her two-minute address pointed out that this entire process suffered not only from "a complete absence of vision" but from "an active effort by some to move backwards." Further, she noted that those who have caused this crisis—the wealthiest countries on Earth—already agreed to take responsibility two decades ago with the Kyoto Protocol, but have utterly failed to live up to their own commitments. She ended with the prediction, "You are well on your way to leaving a legacy of global devastation."

Another powerful voice was that of the Filipino negotiator, Nadarev Sano, whose nation was ravaged during the talks by the most southerly typhoon ever reported, Typhoon Bopha. Sano's emotional address queried the assembly: "I ask all of us here, if not us, then who? If not now, then when? If not here, then where?"

The real answer to the question of *"if not us here, then who?"* is quite clear from the past 18 years of inaction on climate change by the world's most powerful countries. Patrick Bond, director of the Center for Civil Society at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, pointed out, "The elites continue to discredit themselves at every opportunity. The only solution is to turn away from these destructive conferences and avoid giving the elites any legitimacy, and instead, to analyze and build the world climate justice movement and its alternatives." [2]

Promising signs that the movement for climate justice is coalescing into a serious global force continue to emerge. Two international events to note are the massive day of global protest staged by Bill McKibben's 350.org project in 2009 and the 2010 World People's Conference on Climate Change in Bolivia. The crisis is too urgent to be left to the policy tinkering of foot-dragging governments that bear the greatest responsibility for the crisis. Now that high-level elites from the World Bank to Bloomberg Business Weekly (with its "It's Global Warming, Stupid" headline after Hurricane Sandy) have awoken to the seriousness of the crisis, the space for demanding action to save the planet has widened—but whatever modest steps "green capitalism" has taken, they are unable to confront the logic of profitability.

As ecosocialists, we call for a dramatic reduction in fossil fuel production and consumption in industrialized countries, and reparations to the former colonial countries so they can develop in a sustainable manner. This involves restructuring every aspect of how we live and work through a revolutionary process of social change, moving from an economy dominated by profit to one based on ecology and human needs. To accomplish this will require honestly confronting the severity of the crisis and democratically discussing and deciding how to move forward against the intransigence of the global elite. The voices of this growing climate justice movement will be central to this process.

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CONGO

Partition talk

When Belgium realized in the 1950s that, given that France and Britain were losing their African colonies, it would no longer be able to hold on to Congo, it set about trying to guarantee continued control over the strategic aspects of the economy, especially the mines. At first, it sponsored its local political groups, but lost control of these. The next step, just after the Congo became independent, was mercenaries and proxy warfare – a huge international crisis and United Nations mission that was, in the 1960s, called "The Congo Crisis". The political strategy accompanying the acts of Belgium's mercenaries (many of which were from apartheid South Africa) was to support the secession of Katanga province from the Congo. Once a dictator, Mobutu, came to power, the international community allowed him to crush the secessionists.

Decades later, the international community was not capable of stopping a real genocide in Rwanda. After the Rwandan genocide, when the victors in the Rwandan civil war took over that country and the losers of the civil war fled into Congo, the international community helped Rwanda invade the Congo. Rwanda's reason for invading was to force the Rwandan refugees to return and stop them from continuing to threaten the new Rwandan regime, headed by Paul Kagame. Rwanda's reason for staying in the east, however, was economic control. In the 15 or so years that followed, Rwanda has effectively controlled the eastern provinces of the Congo. The mining business goes through Rwanda. Several political and armed groupings (the RCD-G, the CNDP, now the M23) work on Rwanda's behalf to control the east and provide a local cover. Each time the Congolese government tries to assert con-

trol over the east, there is a flare-up, a rebellion, in which the Rwandan proxies rise to the challenge. The latest flare-up, in November 2012, in which M23 took Goma and are now negotiating with the Congolese government in Uganda, was indicative of this pattern.

The Economist analyzed this latest round accurately as follows:

"Goma's fall humiliated Congo's president, Joseph Kabila, who yet again watched his army crumble and a chunk of his ramshackle country fall into rebel hands with Rwandan support. But nor was the M23's victory a rousing success for Rwanda's president, Paul Kagame. Foreign donors have cut tens of millions of dollars in promised aid to his country as punishment for helping the rebels." [1]

The cutting of aid to Rwanda, now a member of the UN Security Council, was a political setback for Rwanda's ambitions in the Congo and is the reason M23 is negotiating instead of advancing to the next military objective, at great cost to civilian lives on its path. Because Rwanda's ambitions cannot be fulfilled without the international community, that complex set of donor countries and powers that has the ultimate say in that part of the world.

It is in this context that some of the recent commentaries about "solutions" to the Congo conflict should be read. The key piece is J. Peter Pham's NYT op-ed, "To Save Congo, Let It Fall Apart" [2]. Pham, who works for the NATO-affiliated think tank the Atlantic Council, writes:

"Rather than nation-building, what is needed to end Congo's violence is the opposite: breaking up a chronically failed state into smaller organic units whose members share broad agreement or at least have common interests in personal and community security."

Pham concludes that *"at least in some extreme cases, the best way to break a cycle of violence is to break up an artificial country in crisis and give it back to its very real people."*

Such a plan, if it were accepted by the international community, would be the perfect culmination of Rwanda's plans: the Kivus would become occupied statelets, whose mining wealth flows directly to the West, via Rwanda and Uganda and the various networks that the UN Expert Panels have repeatedly described in detail over the past decade. There is no reason to think that destroying the Congo's sovereignty would lead to democracy. Rather than reversing the de facto occupation, it would give it legal status.

The current Congolese government is unpopular in the Kivus, but this is at least in part because it has neglected the east and failed to protect it from external predation by the Congo's neighbours. The solution to this cannot be to hand the east over to those neighbours. Federalism and decentralization are popular proposals in the Congo, but Congolese nationalism is strong – no one is interested in breaking the country up.

But even if no Congolese are interested in the breakup of their country, Pham is not alone. Sam Akaki, writing for a Ugandan newspaper, *The Daily Monitor*, asks the rhetorical question: "Should Uganda and Rwanda be condemned as meddlers or applauded as midwives in the inevitable birth, by caesarean means, of the Republic of Eastern Congo?" [3] Akaki compares the eastern Congo to South Sudan, but the comparison doesn't make sense. South Sudan fought a war of independence for decades, leading up to a referendum in which the people of the country voted massively and overwhelmingly for independence. The eastern Congo has been under foreign occupation by a country (Rwanda) that has invaded the whole of Congo twice (in 1996 and 1998), an occupation that has led to a broad social collapse and the unnecessary deaths of millions of people.

Territorial integrity and sovereignty are not outmoded concepts, nor are they luxuries for the rich and powerful. Those who talk about partition of the Congo as a solution are offering a prescription for expanded and continued violence.

SYRIA

Foundation of the Dera'a section of the Revolutionary Left Current

The Dera'a branch of the Revolutionary Left Current in Syria has been founded. It is made up of left activists and revolutionary Marxists, activists in the Syrian revolutionary movement who have adopted the transitional programme of the revolutionary left in Syria. This is a current which has been active since the beginning of the revolution on Syrian territory. It has led the struggle within the revolution. The attempted confiscation of the revolution, by political and ideological currents lacking a popular character, requires those who identify with the revolutionary left to realise two essential tasks at this stage: the rallying and unification of the ranks of the left, civil and secular youth, participation in the revolution by all means, the highlighting of the democratic aspect and genuine civil character of the revolution. And in the long term, the establishment of a dialogue which is total and without boundaries around the unification of the Syrian revolutionary left in the context of united organizational work leading to the formation of a revolutionary Marxist left party, adopting a political programme aimed at building a society of social justice, the state of citizenship and law.

It is about developing a climate conducive to the development of a democratic consciousness for various currents and parties of different persuasions to practice politics and to think freely. And therefore, to achieve the objective and subjective conditions conducive to proposing programs and mechanisms of action to build a just socialist society. With this

in mind, left revolutionaries must carry out several significant tasks, of which the most important are:

- 1 - A critique of traditional Marxist thought, the renewal of the latter and its adaptation to historical and technological development. The development of new basic principles corresponding to a societal culture, a level of social consciousness and the development of the dominant relations of production.
- 2 - A review of the failed experiences of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and in the countries of Latin America and the Middle East.
- 3 - A critique of the traditional Marxist parties, conducted in an objective manner, including the Communist parties in the Arab region.
- 4 - A fierce struggle to sweep away the leftovers of the counter propaganda and campaigns of disparagement of socialism and of Marxist thought conducted by the imperialist countries at the global level. The latter have used to achieve their objectives the reactionary forces in our region throughout the cold or hot wars engaged by the so-called "socialist camp" and "capitalist camp".

The experience of the creation of a rank and file organizational structure which is the foundation of our current's Dera'a section - an experience appropriate to be generalized to all the governorates of the Syria - is in practice the realization of an attempt to build a political party from the base to the summit, in contrast to the form that predominated during the construction of the traditional parties. This reinforces the feeling of satisfaction and serenity towards the future of this nascent party, which will by this method concretise the concept of genuine democratic centralism, and not the caricature that has led to the submission of individuals and the arbitrariness of hereditary leaderships. We call

for urgent, but systematic and organised, work, at the same time to build sections in other cities of Syria, bringing together the largest possible number of left revolutionaries and their friends at the local level, in accordance with the outline of the transitional programme of the Syrian revolutionary

left and immediately begin executing the essential tasks of the current stage.

Left Revolutionary Current in Syria

Dera'a section

Liberty-Dignity-Social Justice

Free Duma - popular councils and democracy from below

Despite the intense and daily bombings of inhabited areas and the economic infrastructure of the city of Duma, revolutionaries have freed it from the domination of the apparatuses of the regime, its *chabbiha* and its blockades. The council elected by the population of Duma has issued a statement through which it has exalted our heroic people who have cleaned our city of all the services of repression (security, army, *chabbiha*) and blockades. It has made the vow that it takes responsibility for the administration of the city and the protection of public goods and private services by the state against theft, vandalism, fire and so on. It urged everyone to give any document relating to these services to the commission appointed by the Council to this end. Cooperation with the council of all is desired to make the city better than it was.

It should be noted that about 25000 km² of Duma was destroyed and the local council of the city of is regarded as an example of the democratic experience of the Syrian people implemented in several liberated areas. This city, inhabited by more than half a million souls, has been divided into regional and neighbourhoods committees. Here are the details:

(1) The city of Duma is divided into twelve geographic regions. In each zone a neighbourhood committee has been formed consisting of five members and a chair is chosen for each committee.

(2) Twelve specific committees composed of five members are put in place, each concerning medicine, protection of the districts, public and private

property, technical services, finance, judicial legitimacy, upgrading and reconstruction, the peace movement and demonstrations, public relations, information board, culture and education, documentation and the secretariat.

(3) The local Council is made up as follows:

- 12 members, chairpersons of district committees
- 12 members, chairs of specific committees
- The president of the Council

(4) The chair of the Executive Board consisting of eleven members is elected.

(5) A free forum of the city of Duma has been set up, which meets twice a week on Wednesdays and Sundays for all questions concerning the city.

(6) The Information Bureau of the city of Duma has been established which will relay information on the city. You can integrate it immediately and send us your comments.

Notes: the committee, council and bureau members agree on the following conditions and principles:

(1) The member must support the fall of the corrupt dictatorial regime and the establishment of a civilian, democratic state, based on the revocability of mandates and work to this end.

(2) The member must be an activist or supporter of the revolution, in any capacity whatsoever.

(3) The member must be moderate and non-fanatical, whatever their party, religion, confession, or point of identification within the revolution.

(4) The member must be trustworthy and noticed for good and moral conduct.

(5) Membership of the council or committees is a matter of public record.

(6) The mission of the committees and the board is to manage the life of the city to the best in an institutional way.

DENMARK

Budget 2013: A major mistake by the Red-Green Alliance

The Danish national budget for 2013 amounts to a setback, above all in relation to taxation rates. It contains no significant improvement, since it respects the limits that the government has decided to set. It does not go in the direction of greater prosperity, or in that of job creation, but on the contrary it aggravates austerity.

It incorporates the two main economic agreements made with the right in Parliament: tax reform and the imposition of employment flexibility on the sick. It contains no element challenging these setbacks.

When the majority of 25-person national leadership of the Red Green Alliance (Enhedslisten) approved this draft budget, they contravened the decision of the national congress of 2010 on principles and conditions for voting for a national budget. The executive committee of the SAP described, analysed and argued for this in a statement, published on November 13, 2011. The fact that the majority of the Alliance's national leadership has not followed the decision of the congress is problematic at both the political and democratic levels.

It is a political problem, because the national congress of 2010 had good political reasons to adopt the directives that Enhedslisten should apply during votes on the national budget.

First, it is crucial for the credibility of a socialist party and for its ability to strengthen unity for change and a better world that we are not complicit with rotten compromises, that mean that certain sectors of the working class and the people should pay while others obtain some extra morsels. This has been a well-established principle in Enhedslisten since we were founded, and it has be-

come still more important from the political point of view in a situation where the ruling class is enriching itself to the detriment of the rest of society. That is why we cannot vote for an austerity budget.

The 2010 congress also realised that this basic parliamentary principle is not enough to decide how to vote on a national budget. A minimum improvement going hand in hand with no cutbacks could not constitute a sufficient reason to vote in favour of a budget. The finance law is not an ordinary law. It is a vote on the economic policy and political orientation that Parliament follows.

As a consequence the national congress stipulated that the budget should constitute a genuine break with the neoliberal bourgeois policies applied by the coalition of liberals and conservatives. One might even think that our congress had prior knowledge of what became the declaration of the future government of the Social Democrats (SD), the Popular Socialist Party (SF) and the Radicals (centre-left party), stating that it would pursue the economic orientation of the former government of the right and respect the constraints of the markets. A choice that this government is respecting.

Our congress also defined what a break with neoliberal policies required: the demand, not only for (small) improvements, but significant change on the one hand and on the other a warning to the SD-SF coalition: don't believe that you can carry out a bourgeois policy all year with the support of the right and have our support during the vote on the budget that your right wing allies in parliament will not vote for.

With this orientation the Red Green Alliance had both the possibility of relying on external pressure during the negotiations and showing that an alter-

native policy was possible. But this is not the orientation that the majority of the national leadership has followed.

The political disaster involved in turning back on these wise criteria has been strengthened further by the fact that the majority of the national leadership of the Alliance decided to retreat on its demand for either jobs, training or unemployment benefits for those about to be kicked out of the unemployment insurance system because of the new two year limit. It was a demand:

- which has a great importance for the balance of power between the classes and thus does not concern only the immediate victims;
- which the caucus itself had publicly defined as non-negotiable;
- which was the central theme of the main campaign of Enhedslisten this year;
- which was on all the evidence obviously a "significant" improvement;
- which has the broad support of the population; a significant part of the people would understand if the RGA would not give in on this demand

The decision of the national leadership majority is also a democratic problem. When the majority of the leadership chooses to ignore a decision of Congress, it undermines democratic debate and collective decision-taking within our party — Enhedslisten. How can we involve members in the debates and make collective decisions when the leadership majority sends the following message: "you can adopt what you want, but when we are in a situation to decide, we do what we want".

The roots of this political and democratic failure date back long before the actual decision in November. The majority of the national leadership and the parliamentary group did not lead an offensive campaign for a national budget which would affirm Enhedslisten as a political alternative which wants to break with governmental auto-limitations and the neoliberal political and social orientation.

Except for short periods and isolated opinions, the national leadership majority and the parliamentary group never used the demands for an offensive in public. They have never said clearly to the public and the government what the conditions were for a vote on the budget by Enhedslisten. They have not used them to put pressure on the government.

On the contrary, they have negotiated and communicated on the basis of the government framework and how to improve it at little here and a little there. The national leadership majority has employed more resources for the so-called "listen-to-the-people-meetings" around the country than for organizing a campaign to build popular pressure in favour of demands for jobs, training and unemployment benefits.

This led the majority of the national leadership and the parliamentary group into a situation where it was more difficult to break the negotiations than necessary.

It was a bad and harmful decision. What has limited the damage a little is that the parliamentary group has made the choice of a media strategy of not applauding the agreement but addressing the population, calling on it to put stronger pressure on the government.

On the other hand, some of the arguments that have been used to justify the agreement have made it even worse, in particular within the Enhedslisten. We were told that the parliamentary group was "surprised" by the fact that the Social Democrats and the Socialist People's Party were ready to adopt a right wing policy, and by the fact that the government were ready to reach an agreement on the national budget with the Venstre Party (right wing liberal). This amounts either to an irresponsible lack of political insight, or a lie dreamed up by a spin doctor. The two are equally unacceptable.

We were told that the majority of the national leadership and the parliamentary group felt obliged to sign the agreement in case the government made an agreement with the Venstre Party, which would have been worse. If this becomes the guideline of

the Alliance in the future, it will be obliged to vote in favour of all the proposals from the government, whatever the content, because there will always be something worse. We were told that six months of special maintenance for the unemployed is better than nothing. This is true. It is a small amendment that Enhedslisten could vote for at the last moment, if it were a separate vote. But by abandoning the demand for a guaranteed unemployment insurance benefit beyond the two-year-limit they created an atmosphere that undermines the popular mood in defence of unemployment benefits and the options of creating a popular movement and building the party campaign.

The decision is made. The damage has been done. Now the question is how we continue. How can we act so that this decision is not the beginning of a trend that will lead to Enhedslisten no longer having any reason to exist?

We wish to indicate the following initiatives:

1. We must engage fully in the campaign on jobs and unemployment benefits. Efforts should be made both to strengthen the party to build a wide unitary campaign in trade unions and communities. Those who support the budget agreement must show that they seriously believe their own explanations for the budget vote (that it can be a stepping stone for a movement for further improvements). Opponents of the agreement should not give up on the pretext that the majority of the national leadership and the parliamentary group have made the fight more difficult.

2. Rank and file Alliance members must correct the leadership. We encourage all branches to discuss this budget agreement and to submit their objections to the national leadership majority. It is important that the majority know what the branches think. Some people will say that internal debate (which will be de facto public) can damage the Alliance. On the contrary we believe that it must be visible that there are within it many opponents of the agreement. Otherwise, we may see the critical activists leave Enhedslisten and critical, frustrated

voters turn away from the party looking for other pastures. Finally these debates should serve as a prelude to the preparation of the next national Congress.

We do not require an extraordinary Congress. We think it will take resources out of the efforts to develop the campaign for jobs and unemployment benefits as well as other activities turned outwards. An extraordinary Congress would not significantly change the kind of balance sheet that the party will make nor improve the effects of a change of course.

On the other hand we believe that a well prepared ordinary Congress can adopt a concise and critical balance sheet of the decision of the national leadership majority and confirm the 2010-guidelines laid down for the vote on the national budget.

This process has confirmed that the national leadership is the political leadership of Enhedslisten. This is a good thing. It is therefore important that Congress elect it on the basis of political criteria. Different members can choose to focus on different issues and political views. But at the Congress, right after an national leadership decision which has, to a certain degree, split the party and which threatens to lay a new foundation for party politics in the future, the attitude of candidates for the national leadership to the agreement on the national budget must carry important weight.

We believe that the Conference should elect a national leadership that will not repeat the mistake. We therefore call for a vote for leadership candidates who say clearly:

- The agreement with the government on the budget was a political mistake. In the future, Enhedslisten must be more offensive in budget negotiations, requiring a real break with the neoliberal policy that the rest of the parliamentary parties support.

- Approval of the agreement was a failure of our democracy, because it transgressed a decision of our Congress. Enhedslisten will continue budget

negotiations on the basis of the three criteria developed by the Congress of 2010.

– The Red Green Alliance-Enhedslisten is a party in opposition to the general policy direction of the

government, and our main task is to mobilize the population to put extra-parliamentary pressure on the the Government and leaderships of the three parties of the government coalition.

VENEZUELA

After Chavez's victory

FRANCK GAUDICHAUD ·

On Sunday, October 7, Hugo Chávez celebrated his third presidential election victory, with 55.1% of the vote against 44.3% for his main opponent, the neo-liberal candidate Henrique Capriles Radonski. The political polarization was such that the other four candidates in the running were literally swept aside [1]. Chávez's popularity, ability to mobilize and charismatic leadership remain then solidly demonstrated, entrenched and dominant among the popular layers, with electoral participation exceeding 80% of the electorate. The demonstration of hundreds of thousands of people (possibly more than a million!) who occupied the streets of Caracas on Thursday, October 4, was a clear demonstration of vitality of the "Bolivarian revolution" and also the omnipresence of the president at the time to raise the enthusiasm of the crowds. This under the auspices of a campaign slogan quite far removed from socialism: "Chávez, heart of the homeland".

We find here certainly the strength of popular nationalism as it is incarnated in Venezuela: that of a progressive and anti-imperialist "Caesarism" (in the Gramscian sense) or again this post-neoliberal "populist reason" described by Ernesto Laclau [2], which has managed to create, reconstitute at top and bottom, a new popular political community in Venezuela, throughout the last decade. However, if there is fervour, it is not the unique result of some "irrational" policy, as can be read regularly in the dominant press or a simple discursive plebeian emergence. This popular mysticism is also thanks to the social balance sheet, real and well understood, of the Bolivarian process: in contrast to what

was going on under previous governments, much of the oil revenue was used to fund social policies. "The (many) humble shouting "Viva Chávez!" are probably the millions of people who, every day, resort to the different programmes - Mercal, Pdval, Bicentenario, Farmapatria - where they can buy basic necessities at subsidized prices. The youth who get excited – "Chavez will win!" - are evidence of the policy of inclusion and education at all levels, the free books and computers (canaimitas) that they are given. The old people who dress in red t-shirts do so probably because the 200,000 retirees receiving an old age pension at the end of the Fourth Republic have become 2,300,000 today. When the mothers of families speak fondly of the "comandante", this is because the different "missions" put in place gave them access to health, because two million of them and their loved ones have been provided for by the social security system. That the inadequately housed are supportive has come as no surprise: the great Venezuela housing mission, certainly created too late, has built tens of thousands of homes since its inception eighteen months ago " [3].

According to the UN Economic Commission for Latin America, Venezuela is the country that has seen the most spectacular decline in poverty in Latin America: between 2002 and 2010, it went from 48.6% to 27.8% and 22.2% to 10.7% with regard to extreme poverty. In addition, the country now has one of the lowest levels of inequality in the region, which is not insignificant in the most unequal continent of the planet. The changes are therefore very real, very different from the neo-liberal years of the IV Republic (1958-1998). We should add to this the creation of spaces of popular participation, particularly through thousands of communal councils or peasant cooperatives emerging from the land reform; the recent reform of the

labour code, the most progressive on the continent; the implementation of the highest minimum wage in the region and the return of the discussion on popular sovereignty, socialism and anti-capitalism, far beyond activist spheres alone. The Chavez campaign program was also clearly oriented around these strategic orientations.

The election also had a clear geopolitical character. A defeat for the candidate of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and its allies of the Great Patriotic Pole (including the Venezuelan Communist Party) would have strongly degraded the continental relationship of class forces, threatening social and democratic conquests made in the last decade, but also threatening the new relative autonomy of the South in relation to imperialism, the very young Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and above all, derailed innovative, although still incipient or limited, projects such as the ALBA or the Bank of the South.

Yet, this new electoral victory - very clear and indisputable - cannot hide the many problems unresolved after 13 years of power, the "dilemmas" and the intense contradictions of the Bolivarian process, beyond the speeches on "21st century socialism" (of which we can still barely see the blurred outlines). Let's mention some of the more obvious:

? Corruption, which remains endemic, and at all institutional levels (and in particular at the level of the governors of the federated states), to the point that we can talk of it begin structural and encysted, the heritage of a rentier oil-dependent state which has not been transformed;

? Bureaucracy, inefficiency and low institutionalization of public policies, lack of productivity of state-owned enterprises, the permanent waltz of officials in the departments and, as acknowledged and repeated by the president himself during the campaign the lack of monitoring of projects, including those intended to improve access to electricity, to diversify the productive model or to en-

sure food sovereignty in a country that still imports more than 75% of its food;

? Insecurity (especially in the cities) and the magnitude of crime, making Venezuela one of the countries with the highest rate of homicide by light firearms on the continent (excluding armed conflict): a concern and a daily ordeal for the popular sectors, widely exploited by the right and the oligarchy, despite some real progress with the recent reform of the police and a beginning of taking into account of the phenomenon;

? The weakness of the structuring of the trade union movement, the defeat – and including the repression - of experiences of worker's control and co-management (such as at SIDOR or Sanitarios Maracay) co-management, the questioning of the independence of the working class, powered by the permanent temptation for control from above of trade unionism by the executive, verticalism reinforced recently by internal divisions and the crisis of the UNETE (Unión Nacional de Trabajadores de Venezuela) and the creation (in 2011) of the CSBT (Central Socialista Bolivariana de los Trabajadores), effectively under the thumb of the Ministry of Labour;

? The issue of the omnipresence of Hugo Chávez, sometimes called "hyperpresidentialism" and therefore the level of personalisation of power, in a context – moreover - where the president is seriously ill with cancer and therefore considerably weakened;

? The maintenance of a rentier model of development (and a state) originating from the paradoxical "curse" of oil abundance: a sustainable model essentially based on exploitation of this resource and a mixed capitalist economy where more than 70% of GDP is still in the hands of the private sector, while a caste - referred to as the "boli-bourgeoisie" - grows in the shade of this windfall and an "endogenous right" to government embodied by a few strong (and wealthy) men, such Diosdado Cabello (now President of the National Assembly);

? Foreign policy, particularly in the Middle East, where on behalf of a "campist" anti-imperialist strategy, Chávez has chosen to support, come what may, a number of autocratic, indeed bloodthirsty, governments in the region: a strategy renewed as early as the day after the election, when the president at a press conference reaffirmed his friendship for Bashar Al-Assad in the face of "terrorists" and NATO.

However, and this is what we have seen during our stay in Caracas during the last election, more and more voices from the "critical Chavismo" collectives are renewing their conscious support for the process (and its conquests), while denouncing its stagnation and the lack of progress in many areas, and explaining that if a part of the popular electorate has decided to vote for Capriles it is in order to express its displeasure or distress. As noted by Patrick Guillaudat: "looking closely at results, the victory is fragile, despite the fact that Chavez won against Capriles in 22 of the 24 states of the country. Between the last presidential elections in 2006 and those of 2012, Chávez gained 752,976 votes while the opposition gained 2,175,984, or more than three times as much. In the popular districts of Caracas (Petare, 23 de Enero, La Vega and so on) the Chavista vote fell by 6 to 9%. We see the same movement in the other cities of the country. On the other hand, the accurate count of the votes of each candidate, divided party by party, showing that more than a fifth of the votes obtained by Chavez came from parties other than the PSUV. [...] Defiance or criticism was also expressed by a vote for organizations other than the PSUV, including the PCV. In the days that followed the election, conflicting signals have been launched. On the one hand, Chavez advocates dialogue and openness towards the opposition. On the other, PSUV militants are demanding a "rectification" in the sense of a deepening of the process" [4].

It is also important to note that the panorama of the opposition has largely evolved: it can even be said, as the Marxist Manuel Sutherland has said, that Capriles Radonski, the candidate of the oli-

garchy and imperialism, is in one sense a "winner-loser". The candidate of the MUD, (Mesa de Unidad Democrática), a broad coalition of 30 organizations (ranging from ex-Maoists to the extreme-right splinter groups), managed to win in primary, including against the main parties of the historic "ancien regime": COPEI (Christian Democrats) and Acción Democrática (Social Democrats). In his thirties, of bourgeois origin, leader of Primero Justicia (a new party created in 2000 with the support of US ultra-conservatives) and very active during the coup of 2002, Capriles has largely achieved his goal: by imposing his strategy, he also rejuvenated and revitalized the image of the opposition, performing with brio at many meetings across the country. This was far from the semi-fascist hysteria of previous years, with a propaganda campaign of centre-left, "humanist", tones, identifying with Lula and attached to social progress, while soft peddling a program which was violently neo-liberal. Sutherland concludes: "Capriles Radonski clearly gave the impression of being a rival, who is preparing to take power in the medium term (2018), at a more favourable electoral context, that is at a time where the deterioration of the popularity of Chavismo because of increased problems within Venezuelan society (insecurity, high cost of living, unemployment and so on) will be crucial. If electoral trends continue to evolve in these directions on both sides, Capriles could well be the next and most neo-liberal President of Venezuela" [5].

The regional elections (elections of governors and federal parliaments) from mid-December will no doubt be a new test for the Bolivarian camp. And already some unease is felt inside militant Chavismo, faced with the candidates selected, all appointed from above and representing the bureaucratic leadership of a PSUV ever more distant from its base or directly originating from the military regime that surrounds the President. For example, in Bolivar State, we find Francisco Rangel Gomez, who aspires to a second re-election, even though he had been known in 2008 for his fierce opposition against the workers of SIDOR or again in the State

of Lara, the former governor and soldier Luis Reyes Reyes will again wear the Bolivarian colours, although accused by many social movements of being responsible for violations of human rights in the past.

Nevertheless, and in spite of this openly critical panorama (which seems necessary in order to know how to express our internationalism as well as to confront the intense anti-Chavez media campaign waged by the oligarchies of the South and North), the Bolivarian people (and its struggles) remains alive, dynamic and rebellious. The process is therefore not dead, far from it. Just browse the "ranchos" of the big cities, the streets of Caracas, the factories of Ciudad Guyana or the interior of the country to find out. What the political scientist Edgardo Lander has called a "strained alternative project" thus remains a central component of the political coordinates of Venezuela today. This project, though characterised by a "tension between control by the top and autonomy at the base", crystallizes around the core notion of all Bolivarian political discourse - the sovereign people.

And the next few months will depend precisely on this latter. According to "La Jornada" columnist Guillermo Almeyra: "those who vote for Chávez are not blind to the problems of corruption, of verticalism, of bureaucracy, the military leadership of a process which requires, on the contrary, the decisive participation of the population, open discussion of the various options to resolve the major problems, and popular control of governmental institutions and activities". He adds "instead of presenting an independent and anti-Chavista candidacy like that of the combative trade union leader Orlando Chirino, separating socialists from Chavistas, the revolutionary left should work together with the Chavista supporters of socialism to reinforce the self-organization of workers and, after the defeat of the right, battle in better conditions against the verticalism and bureaucrats-tech-

nocrats who await the disappearance of Hugo Chávez to control the state apparatus. Because the major battles will take place after October".

This option is shared, notably, by Marea Socialista, an anti-capitalist current in the PSUV. During the presidential election, these activists - strongly involved in the trade union movement and among youth - launched a campaign around the slogans "October 7: president Chávez; October 8: rid the revolution of its bureaucrats" and "for a government of working people without capitalists!" They regrouped in May 2012 in the APR (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria) which is trying to build an autonomous Bolivarian mobilization, not restricted to the structures of the state or the PSUV, alongside the peasant organization "Revolutionary Bolívar and Zamora Current", the movement of pobladores, the National Association of Free and Alternative Media Communities (ANMCLA), Surco (a university education collective), feminist organizations and so on.

Against the desire of a part of the government for reconciliation with the opposition or the oligarchy, which has seemed to emerge in recent weeks, these critical sectors emphasize that only social struggles and the deepening of the democratic conquests, forms of autonomous participation and control over the economy and the functioning of the state, and the creation of forms of real popular power will be able to give substantive content to calls for "21st century socialism". And starting thus to transcend the obstacles and contradictions of the Bolivarian process, without allowing the return of the neoliberals and agents of Washington to the country. It is certainly the last opportunity in this new political sequence which is opening after 13 years in power. And nothing says for the moment that it is the most probable outcome, far from it, even if it remains the most desirable from the point of view of consistent anti-neoliberals and anti-capitalists.

VENEZUELA

Venezuela: After the Chavez victory

FRANCK GAUDICHAUD ·

In your opinion, what importance does the recent election victory of Hugo Chavez have? What are the main points and what will its regional impact be in Latin America?

Gonzalo Gómez: firstly, in the light of the election results, it should be noted that Chavez has won and that with him, it is the people who won. The Chavez re-election means that the revolutionary process remains open in Venezuela and continues the opportunity for further progress of the social and political transformations that have marked the Bolivarian revolution.

Juan García: Actually, the October 7 election has not allowed the bourgeoisie and imperialism to halt the Bolivarian revolution. The country continues to pursue an orientation of relative independence in relation to imperialist domination. The bourgeoisie has not managed to gain the space that would allow it to restore its neo-liberal policies and its direct control of the state, of which it was deprived by the revolutionary process.

Gonzalo Gómez: With regard to the regional impact, with the victory of Chavez, the relationship of forces in Latin America continues to be favourable to the revolution and the so-called "regional integration". The interventionist imperialism option was weakened and delayed, which opens the way to other strategies which they attempt to use to neutralize the Bolivarian revolution on the Latin American geopolitical scene.

Zuleika Matamoros: Having said that, even if we begin our analysis by recognizing the significance of the triumph of Chavez, we must also recognize the growing threat of the right. In this election the gap in favour of Chavez was slightly more than 11% of the votes, which is very significant. But we must

not forget that, compared to previous elections, like the presidential election of 2006, Chavismo has lost its lead in percentage of electors and the right has made advances.

Juan García: Of course, Zuleika is correct and we must draw attention to this in the debate which will take place on the results of the elections. In 2006, Chavez won almost 63% of the vote while the candidate of the right won nearly 37%. The difference in favour of Chavez was 27%. At the election of October 7, 2012, Chavez won with slightly more than 55% while Henrique Capriles Radonski got slightly more than 44%; the gap has been reduced to less than 12%. In number of votes, Chavez received 7,500,000 more than in 2006, while the right won 2,100,000 votes - there were more than 3 million new voters (these are approximate figures published today). Chavez won in 22 of the 24 States and the right lost the majority in many regions that it led, but it has also been strengthened in many big cities and has progressed significantly, both in percentage and in number of votes.

Stalin Perez Borges: This is why you need to draw attention to the danger posed by this trend. If electoral behaviour continues to evolve in the same way as we observed on October 7, there is a serious danger that the next Bolivarian presidential nominee (either Chavez or anyone replacing him) would lose the Presidency: the right would have a great chance of winning. The same risk may occur halfway through, if the bourgeois opposition were able to call a presidential recall referendum, as it did in 2004. That is why, although we were celebrating the victory, we say that there is a problem because Chavez has gone backwards, while the right has gone forward. And this has happened when the rate of abstention was the lowest of all recent national

elections. So we can speak of electoral erosion for Chavez.

Before we talk about the causes, reasons explaining this result, can we talk a bit about the outline of the programme of the candidate of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) during this campaign

Gonzalo Gómez: Chavez presented a program around five historical objectives. The message of his campaign sought an emotional attachment, an emotional bond with the people. To do this, he used the slogan "Chavez, the heart of the country". But this slogan, beyond the psychological impact it can have, was by no means an ideological definition of the left and could be used by his opponent to the right, Capriles Radonski. Of course, he doesn't have the emotional impact of Chavez in the population and his image is not associated with the feelings of patriotism, sovereignty and national independence that Chavez wanted to express. But in reality the objectives set out in the programmatic proposals of Chavez were little discussed and his campaign was more focused, especially in the final weeks, on the denunciation of the threats posed by the neoliberal agenda of Capriles and his right wing Coalition of Democratic Unity (MUD) to the national independence obtained during the fourteen years of the Bolivarian revolution.

Juan García: You know this people has been marked, historically, by its reaction in 1989 against attempts to impose a neoliberal package of measures designed by the International Monetary Fund. It was the revolt of February 27, 1989, which initiated the revolutionary period that we live through, that is how the figure of Chavez emerged as well as the constituent process which took place after he came to power in 1998. That is why the denunciation of Capriles' intentions to challenge these policies has had a great impact. Here, the "spectre of communism" that the right always uses to scare people into believing that they will lose their personal property, has an opposite effect. This time it's Capriles who has embodied the threat that the Venezuelan people would lose the gains accumulat-

ed under the mandate of Chavez: access to health, education, housing, pensions, the reduction of poverty and so on.

Zuleika Matamoros: With regard to the people's movement, it was stifled by the PSUV and the machinery of government. The Great Patriotic Pole, which had generated great expectations and was seen as an opportunity to create an enthusiastic campaign, which was to be a space of participation for the rank and file and social subjects, was deflated because its policy initiatives were sequestered by the PSUV and the electoral machine, which imposed their line. It is distressing, because during the elections of 2006, the participation of the rank and file was much more vigorous and gave better results. This election campaign was much more bureaucratically controlled and it is a source of political damage. The PSUV was not up to it, it was not the true engine of the campaign because of the insistence of the bureaucracy on stifling the initiatives of the rank and file and the autonomy of the social movements. Ultimately, the most important factor in this campaign was Chavez himself, who really threw himself into it during the last weeks, as well as the participation of the population, aware of the threat posed by the right, despite the fact that its enthusiasm has been undermined by bad experiences of the bureaucratisation of the process.

How do we analyze the Capriles campaign, his achievements in the construction of a united opposition for the presidential elections, his actual ability to mobilize the masses well beyond the "hard core" of the right (and the oligarchy) and his electoral results in Caracas and in the provinces?

Stalin Perez Borges: With the help of imperialism and at its dictation, the right has managed to unite through a primary election, regardless of its tensions and its minor fractures. From the point of view of its own objectives, it has waged a very successful campaign and has been able to reach disgruntled popular sectors, who, despite the benefits obtained, resent the abuse of the governmental bureaucracy within public institutions and state en-

terprises, just as they resent its lack of consistency and its ineffectiveness with regard to the issues which cannot be resolved in the context of capitalism. For the first time in years - in fact since the failed coup of 2002 - the right was able to mobilize in the centre and west of Caracas, in Chavista and popular areas, and gather some 150,000 people in the capital on Bolívar Avenue. But the Chavista popular reaction on October 4 brought together, in various nearby avenues, more than five or six times more people at the same time. That said, it is clear that the right has been able to penetrate little by little into the popular sectors, in particular the so-called "middle class", who feel dissatisfied and make Chavez responsible for unsolved problems, such as insecurity and delinquency.

After this victory a new period of six years of government opens. Which will be the last government of Hugo Chavez, how is he going to address important issues such as bureaucracy, clientelism, state inefficiency and insecurity?

Gonzalo Gómez: If we follow the trend of electoral growth for the right and take into account the uncertainty generated by the possibility that the right will not have to confront Chavez at the next election, we cannot rule out the possibility of seeing here what happened to the Sandinistas at the end of the 1980s, when the bourgeoisie returned to power. If we do not advance the anti-capitalist measures and if the bureaucratization continues, if we do not build a collective leadership, working class and popular, of the revolutionary process, if the extreme dependence on Chavez continues... the erosion may be irreversible. That is why Marea Socialista says we need to promote, with all our strength, the exercise of social control and genuine participatory democracy against bureaucratism. We say it is necessary that Chavez opens a permanent consultation with the organizations of the working class, the peasants, organs of popular power and social movements active in the process, so as to share the design and approval of policies. We need a revival of the constituent experience, around the

new program presented by Chavez in this election, and with the participation of the social actors of the process in the exercise of governance of revolutionary type. It is with these movements that we need to identify the priorities and the measures to be implemented.

The president has been weakened by his illness and, at the same time, he was very present in the last weeks of the campaign and there is no doubt that his popular and charismatic leadership was fundamental for the victory. Is a "Chavismo without Chavez" imaginable?

Juan García: Without Chavez as a factor and without the construction of a collective leadership originating from the organized people, we believe that "Chavismo" will sink into dispersion and confusion. That is why we are saying we need to build a new government that would be the real expression of the popular movement and organizations of the working class.

What are the prospects for the December local and regional elections?

Zuleika Matamoros: Some speak of a "knock-on" effect from Chavez's electoral victory of October 7. But we believe that the designation from above of the candidates for governor, without taking into account and even ignoring the popular rejection of some names, will not contribute to reversing the clear trend in the rise of the right. There is a real risk of loss of regional government and allowing the right to obtain an even more favourable relationship of forces.

What are the medium and long term perspectives of the Bolivarian process, as well as the positions which compete in the political space of Bolivarianism concerning the deepening – or not – of the conquests and ways of transcending its contradictions? What are the positions defended in this debate by your current, Marea Socialista?

Gonzalo Gómez: We increasingly insist on the need for a radical left current in the revolutionary

process. While the government spoke recently of the need for a "responsible right", with which it is possible to have a dialogue and reach an agreement, we and a good part of the radical activists believe that what is needed is a consistent revolutionary left able to pressure for a change of direction. It must be a force able to guide the implementation of the policies that we will take to complete the break with capitalism, which allows us to go beyond the "mixed economy" schema and thus facilitate the transition to socialism. Because the construction of the new society has been slowed and bureaucracy slows down the solution of important problems, both urgent and structural.

Where are we in relation to the experiences of popular participation such as experiences in workers' control (at Sidor for example) and popular power at the neighbourhood level (communal councils) and the communes? We hear much about 21st century socialism, but the campaign has focused on more "emotional" or general slogans such as "Chavez, the heart of the homeland": what does "21st century socialism" mean beyond the rhetoric?

Stalin Perez Borges: As you have noticed, the rhetoric often takes precedence over the concrete policy. In the case of workers' control, we recognize that Chavez has opened the possibility of trying it out, on the basis of the fight that the workers led; but the behaviour of the state bureaucracy stifles and perverts these experiences. Of course, the challenge that we face is to overcome these challenges by combative capacity and revolutionary consciousness. As for popular power, with the neighbourhood councils and communes, even though this is a very progressive experience, it remains confined to the local level and these emerging organizations must also face bureaucratization, cooption by the State and clientelist relations, while there is no specific policy which would allow them to pass from the neighbourhood level to a real involvement in the exercise of territorial and national power. That is why we say that Chavez should make a call - and we must demand it - so that what has been built as structures of popular power, as well as the social movements, have a right to expression at the level of the government and the policies it will impose, in close consultation with the people. We need a clearly anti-capitalist and socialist orientation and that means the real implementation of the power of the workers and the people.

RUSSIA

"We, representatives of the Russian radical left, turned to you with a call for solidarity"

RUSSIAN SOCIALIST MOVEMENT (RSD) ·

We spoke about how the shameful "May 6th affair" was directed not against individual people or groups, but against the entire new protest movement that has arisen in Russia over the last year. Freeing political prisoners, consequently, has become one of the most crucial issues for the future of that movement.

The response to our appeal exceeded our expectations. Days of united action against political repression, November 29th through December 2nd, were held in 15 countries in the world. Actions of solidarity took place in London, Paris, Berlin, Frankfurt, Milan, Dublin, Geneva, Colombo (Sri Lanka), Seattle, San Francisco, Houston, and also in Riga, Kiev, Kharkov and Almaty. Letters of support came in from Hungary, Belgium, Germany and Turkey.

Leading intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky, Étienne Balibar, Michael Levi and Alex Callinicos spoke out in solidarity with our demand for the immediate release of all those arrested over the "May 6th affair." The internationally renowned director Ken Loach also expressed his support. During those days, activists gathered on the streets of 20 Russian cities, in order to clearly express one more time their readiness to fight for the freedom of the political prisoners. This massive campaign inspired the participants of the protest movement in Russia, and demonstrated our general capability for international mobilization. [1]

However, that remains too little for victory. In the month that has passed since our appeal, the first of those arrested over the "May 6th affair," Maksim Luzyanin, was sentenced to 4-5 years in prison.

They are separating a second prisoner, Mikhail Kosenko, from the rest and planning to send him to involuntary treatment in a prison-like psychiatric hospital. Practically all of the other prisoners have had their pre-trial arrests extended until spring of next year. The Investigative committee at the center of the campaign of repression has already officially announced its readiness to start another investigation, linked this time not only to violence against police, but also to calls inciting massive disorder.

In Moscow new witnesses are being interrogated, searches are prolonged – and in the early morning of December 13th, police broke into the apartment of renowned film director Aleksandr Kostromov, currently the co-author of a documentary film on the Russian opposition. There can be no doubt that the Investigative committee is planning new arrests and is even now preparing a large political trial as an example.

With enormous gratitude and admiration for your support, we ask you not to stop, to remain attentive to the tragic events going on in Russia today. We suggest creating an active information network linked to the opposition to repression in Russia, and beginning preparations for a new series of protest and public actions in January of next year.

No to repression!

Solidarity is our weapon!

The Russian Socialist Movement

Autonomous Action - Moscow

The Left Front

TUNISIA

The trial of strength did not take place

In what context did the attack on December 4 against the national headquarters of the UGTT (Tunisian General Labour Union) take place?

This was the umpteenth attack since the elections of October 2011. For example there was, in February 2012, during a strike by rubbish collectors, the dumping of heaps of rubbish in front of offices of the UGTT and the starting of fires at some of them. There are also campaigns in the media against the UGTT, arguing that it should confine itself to a strict defence of immediate demands.

However for months there has been the development, particularly in the regions, of social struggles where trade unionists are playing a decisive role. But Ennadha [1] and the CPR [2] refuse to recognize that the UGTT has a deserved role on the political terrain. All the more so as the ruling coalition is in crisis.

Why has Ennadha stepped up its attacks?

The elections of October 2011 made Ennadha the hegemonic political force, and underlined the weakness and fragmentation of the left political parties.

But Ennadha comes up against the existence of the UGTT, which is the best established and most organized force in the country. Hence its desire to divert public opinion, destabilize the mobilizations and harass the UGTT in order to limit its influence and prepare in the best conditions for the 2013 elections.

In what way is this attack linked to the recent mobilization in Siliana?

What happened in Siliana was based on the strike called by the UGTT on

Tuesday, November 27, which was renewed the following day.

This movement followed movements in other parts of the interior of the country in which the UGTT had played a decisive role. So this government, weakened by its inability to meet the population's social and economic expectations decided to fire buckshot into the crowd. Faced with the continuing mobilizations locally and the wave of solidarity in the country the government has been forced to partially back down. And this Ennadha does not accept.

Why was the call made for general strike on December 13?

The December 4 attack provoked even more indignation in that it happened on the day of the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the assassination of Farhat Hached, hero of the struggle for independence and founder of the UGTT. [3] Immediately, regional strikes started, and the next day a national strike was decided for the next week, demanding in particular legal action against the aggressors and the dissolution of the Islamist militias.

Why has this strike call been cancelled?

Today, a number of activists say that the decision to call a national general strike was probably hasty. They think it would probably have been better to take the other option which had been discussed, namely, to continue to organize regional strikes.

Once past the immediate emotion, many people were unsure about the chances of success of such a trial of strength with the government.

In all its history, the UGTT has in fact only once called a national general strike, on January 26, 1978, and that ended with hundreds of dead and wounded, as well as a thousand arrests. [4] The UGTT was dismantled and almost disappeared for good. It took it more than ten years to rebuild.

This cancellation disappointed some trade unionists, as well as radicalized activists in other sectors. All the more so as the agreement finally reached with the government does not even include the dissolution of the Islamist militias.

A meeting of the Administrative Commission of the UGTT is scheduled for mid-January to decide on the initiatives to be taken in the event that the demands of the UGTT are not met.

How has the relationship of forces evolved after this test?

Over the last month, the relationship of forces has improved a little: important mobilizations have

taken place; the determination of the UGTT not to restrict its activity only to immediate demands has been reaffirmed. The wave of solidarity with the UGTT has been considerable, particularly on the part of the Popular Front [5], associations of women, young people, the Union of Unemployed Graduates, the UGET [6], the LTDH [7], etc. For the LGO [8], this arc of forces represents the workers' and people's pole which alone can make possible the achievement of the objectives of the revolution. Many trade unionists are determined to regain the offensive in mid-January in the event that the agreement with the government turns out to be a fool's bargain. Moreover, tensions seem to be developing within the Islamist ranks.

PORTUGAL

8th Congress of the Left Bloc: Defeat the Troika

MANUEL GARÍ ·

This congress took place after a major electoral setback for the Bloc in the legislative elections of June 2011, the effect of what Fernando Rosas called "a vote of panic", but also after a rapid learning curve by the popular classes as to the devastating social effects of the policies implemented by the government of Passos Coelho under the diktats of the Troika, whose political spokeswoman is Chancellor Angela Merkel. This learning is accompanied by a growing social mobilization, of which the demonstrations on September 15, 2012 were the most recent expression; demonstrations which, regardless of the differences in the political situation, were compared with the legendary revolutionary First of May 1974, and which, according to the Left Bloc, "changed the country". Broad layers of the population have thus gone from having confidence in the recipes of the austerity measures to the slogan "Que se lixe a Troika" (more or less, "the Troika can go and get f... "). In this context, the debate between the different contributions presented at this 8th Congress [4] far from being an expression of pessimism among the membership, was proof of vitality, of hope in the potential that the people demonstrates when it engages in struggles and of confidence in Bloc's own forces, its analyses and its alternatives. Thus, the theme of the congress was nothing less than "defeat the Troika".

The congress had to solve two problems: the launch of a new public leadership and the definition of the

strategic objective of the new period of struggle. It had to do so taking into account two vectors that are consistently present in political action and in the life of organizations: the need for change and for continuity. Perseverance, the ability to orient without losing sight of the chosen path and the patient building of the organization are the principal qualities of the Bloc. You cannot understand anything if you do not see the importance of this way of understanding the activity of a revolutionary organization which was born from an agreement between various forces and which has attracted thousands of activists to its ranks. The other aspect, of innovation and initiative, has not been lacking but up until now the Bloc has not been faced with the need to replace its principal leaders, whereas it now had to deal with the absence of one of its founders, Miguel Portas, recently deceased, and with the changes in the tasks of Francisco Louça, who has been for the Portuguese people the most identifiable face and voice of the Bloc.

New ways of conducting politics

Louça recently publicly expressed his right and his decision to no longer assume the responsibilities of political co-ordinator of the Bloc and of its parliamentary group, as well as his function of spokesman in Parliament. He did so by a political explanation that breaks with the tradition of those who exercise public functions, who cling to their positions, of which they believe themselves to be the owners, who do not hide their intention of remaining professional politicians. To replace the public personality and the political role played by Louça since the founding of the Left Bloc required a high degree of agreement within the party. In an organization which has important political, social and electoral responsibilities, which is present in the media on a daily basis, such a change, as well as

the agreement necessary to effect it, are not minor matters.

Louça reminded the media present as well as the delegates of the Bloc, that not only would he continue his political activity (and that, as a result, I should add, he was ready to be part of the future leadership of the Bloc if the delegates decided to elect him, which they did), but that he could not imagine living without fighting and arguing. He simply wanted to change his role and his responsibilities. He thus short-circuited the worries of Bloc members as well as the twisted interpretations of the spokespersons of the Right and showed that the Bloc can operate in a way that is alternative and unconventional.

The congress addressed this first problem by electing Catarina Martins and Joao Semedo as political coordinators and spokespersons of the Bloc. A formula that seems to me correct, but at the same time risky, given the inertia and the customs of politics in societies that tend towards the concentration of responsibilities in one person. As for replacing the function of parliamentary spokesperson of the Bloc, it was not a decision for the congress to take and was not discussed.

I have no doubt that Louça's voluntaristic decision not to become fixed as indispensable in the institutional or organic representation of the Bloc innovates "good practices" of organizations and deals a blow to the "political class": it combats in a practical way the populist discourse about politics and politicians, distances the left of the Left from disrepute and makes it possible to test the capabilities of other activists. And, above all, it is a decision that demonstrates to the Portuguese people, to those who are fighting and those who are waiting to see, that the members of the Bloc want to be and are "worthy of confidence" for those below.

The political axes

The other key issue that the congress had to resolve was the strategic reorientation of the Bloc or, rather, the discourse and the political orientation of

the party. The congress worked to reformulate and bring up to date the objectives and the alternatives of the Bloc in the era of the debt crisis and the new formulation of a proposal that can unify the struggles and the hopes of the working class and the people: the government of the Left.

In my opinion, the discourse of the Bloc, "the Left against the debt" can be synthesized as follows:

1. Portugal's debt is not a debt of the people, because the people did not contract it; so we must denounce the neo-liberal discourse which makes the victims feel guilty and exonerates those who are responsible for it.
2. The Troika has a central role in Portugal: to save the banks.
3. The so-called "reforms" are a direct attack on rights, workers and public services; with as a result the accelerated and massive pauperization of voters of all parties and the absolute poverty of the working classes and of wide layers of the population which until yesterday still had a different status.
4. The country and its economy are collapsing. This is the result of transfers of income from the South to the North of the EU, of the irresponsibility of public and private authorities in Portugal and throughout the EU, of privatization, of the rescue of the banks, etc.
5. The present model of the euro favours an institutional construction that deepens inequalities, favours creditors, imposes austerity, with the goal of increasing unemployment in order to exert pressure on the labour "factor", imposes sacrifices in an authoritarian manner on the subject classes and takes us further away from the possibility of getting out of the crisis. So it is necessary to break with the neoliberal political logic.

The situation is changing rapidly

The pace of political events has accelerated, as is indicated by the changes and the electoral instability in some countries of Southern Europe. We are faced with new defeats, very soon and more definitive, or, on the contrary, we are at the beginning of a new popular resistance, of electoral progress by

left formations which were until then not very influential (Greece), or at the potential growth of options that break with the dominant policies (Portugal). The speed with which tens of thousands of people are learning, their mobilization and their necessary (and probable) organization enable us to encourage in Portugal the possibility of changing the present state of affairs in society and on the political terrain. It is more than likely that the movement of social protest will grow: building it is one of the central tasks that the Bloc has fixed for itself.

That opens up a space of social confrontation, allows to influence and win over the bases of the other parties and thus modify in a positive way the relationship of forces between social classes and between political orientations. These are the material bases that make possible a new hegemony within the left and within society. Under these conditions a window of opportunity is opening to surpass the Socialist Party (PSP) in political influence and on the electoral terrain. Everything will depend on having the adroitness and audacity to formulate protests and proposals. The capacity to formulate proposals is central for a party whose aspiration is not only to make propaganda, but to be useful for popular struggles and demands in the present and in the future (the Left Bloc has largely demonstrated this by its achievements), and which claims to not only assert its anti-capitalist identity, but wants to lead the political struggle for socialism.

The attitude towards the Troika and the memorandum marks the border between policy options. It is not a question of proposing, as the PSP do, a toned-down austerity: the problem is austerity itself. The Left Bloc introduces an important dimension: the interest of the working classes is the interest of the country, which the Left Bloc defends to ensure the future of the nation. That is why it wants to defend the country against the government of Passos Coelho and why the first priority of the Bloc following on the congress is to take the government, because it is necessary, and if it convinces the people, it is possible.

The government of the Left

It is obvious that the alternation between neoliberals and social liberals, between parties of the Right and self-proclaimed parties of the Left which implement right-wing policies is useless, worthless, that has already been verified. In Greece for months now, and in Portugal today, it is possible to defend as a political task on the horizon (close in the first case, in the second medium-term) the need for a new government against the Troika, because either we manage to defeat it or there will be an irreparable catastrophic defeat of the working class and of the whole country.

That is why the strategy of the Bloc focuses on the issue of political and social unity around the break with the memorandum and traces on the horizon the privileged instrument to break with the Troika: a government of the Left which does not accept submission to the memorandum and which throws it in the rubbish bin.

In my opinion, the slogan of a government of the Left is not propagandist, because then it would be just one more of the many formulas without practical application. It is a slogan which responds to three objectives: to give a political perspective to all of the revolts in Portugal, to draw the attention of the social movement to the need for a major confrontation with neoliberal policies, and above all to show the working classes that the Left Bloc has decided to take on the tasks of a government which will oppose the markets, their diktats and their institutions.

The masses now see the need for the struggle, but they also see the wall formed by a government in the hands of their enemies. No one can deny the obvious. The fight against the Troika necessitates having instruments, like the government, which are supported by mobilizations and which are at the service of these mobilizations so that they can break the demands of the debt. To leave the struggle for the government to an undefined future in Portugal is like saying to the people: we are not able to solve the problems. And then once again there

would be emptiness, bringing resignation, the "useful vote" and the lesser evil. The lessons of Syriza in Greece are very much present in the reasoning put forward and, of course, in the debates of the congress of the Left Bloc.

The fight for the government of the Left is a step that the masses can grasp as being necessary and giving time to prepare new and more decisive confrontations: making incursions into private property, putting an end to the dictatorship of the markets, consolidating democracy in every domain and rights at every level. The fight for a government of the Left can fit into a growing dynamic of social and political antagonism. Not to conduct it would be to reduce ourselves to the inane.

Profile and dynamics

The Left Bloc is a party which at present has a very limited electoral and political weight. How can it propose, against all the odds, a government? In such a government would all the parties who self-proclaim themselves to be on the left, or who are considered by their base to be on the left, be represented? The establishment of a government of the left must overcome the static and short-term debate on the possibility of governing with this or that party. On the question of which parties might be present in a government of the left, the Bloc starts from an affirmation: We will be. And the others? Which ones? What is at issue is not the present parties, the question is to influence the consciousness of broad layers of the population, impoverished, enslaved and indignant, which voted yesterday, or did not, for various parties. The question is that it is possible to disconnect from electoral inertia because their vote "does not belong to anyone". The fight for a government of the Left can be used in the present situation as a catalyst for a profound political recomposition of the masses, as we have seen in Greece.

Certainly such a government of the Left necessitates a prior reconfiguration of the present political map. It requires the people to become a new protagonist. It cannot be the arithmetical product of

the present political forces. Quite the contrary, it must be based on a new governmental majority, social and political, around fundamental questions that involve a 180-degree turn in the direction of the economy. The defining element for being in the government can be nothing other than the question of the attitude to the memorandum. The spokespersons of the PSP declared, during the congress of the Bloc, that to break with the memorandum would be an irresponsible attitude. This was the first effect of the proposal. Let us hope that the second will be the alienation of the PSP's voters from the compassionate austerity that it offers.

Content and alternatives

The Left Bloc concentrates the break with the Troika around four main points:

- 1 Cancellation, according to the terminology used by the Bloc, of abusive and illegitimate debt and renegotiation of the rest at a pace that makes economic recovery possible.
- 2 Revaluation of wages, rights, benefits and public services.
3. The nationalization of the banks that have been taken over by the state and the mobilization of resources for public investment, job creation, increased environmental sustainability and the re-appropriation of key public assets which have been privatized (energy, telecommunications, etc.).
- 4 A tax reform to combat fraud and shift the tax burden onto capital.

This is an emergency programme, a programme to stop barbarity and social collapse. The government of the Left is a common-sense proposal to get rid of the yoke of the Troika. This is not a "perfect" revolutionary programme to build a socialist society, abstractly worked out and idealized. It is a programme that makes it possible, under present conditions, to meet essential social and collective needs and that facilitates the breaking of the masses from neoliberalism and social liberalism, which can encourage them to take the road of self-management,

anti-capitalism and socialism. It is designed to achieve the unity of a large number of people (the majority) on a number of bases (solid and leading to a break). This is a project that can restore confidence to the people and prepare them to take the next step: to put an end to capitalism.

The European dimension of the conflict

The Left Bloc warns against a false dichotomy: stay in the European Union by agreeing to the imposition of austerity or leave the euro with the immediate impoverishment of the whole country. That is why it puts forward the need for a new European constituent process, far removed from the present model based on equilibriums and the intergovernmental constraints that destroy the very idea of the European Union. It proposes at the same time the pooling of the debt, a bigger and more redistributive European budget, the struggle against fiscal dumping and tax havens for fraudsters, a new European Central Bank subject to elected institutions, whose mission would be to guarantee jobs and funding for states, and finally the harmonization of the minimum wage and social benefits throughout the EU. This is still an emergency programme to turn the situation round and to encourage the struggle.

Which, once more, imposes international tasks. Whereas the European bourgeoisie recognizes no borders in attacking workers, passes over popular sovereignty, organizes the flight of capital and gets juicy profits, the political action of the Left is cramped within strict national frameworks, which it respects. Faced with the orientation of Merkel and her bankers there is no solid political Left within the EU, capable of overcoming the disaster and the stagnation in which social democracy, which has lost its way and is in decline, has engulfed the voters.

It is not possible to ensure progress by a government of the Left on a national level without taking new steps forward in other countries. Today, more than ever, effective coordination of forces between the countries of the South of Europe is urgent, so as

to make it possible, in turn, to encourage new expressions of solidarity in the North. The general strike and the mobilizations on November 14 in different countries pave the way for the convergence of social struggles. It is essential to establish its political correlation.

And after that? At the same time as the Left Bloc sets concrete objectives for a government of the Left, it projects the socialism for which it is fighting ("emancipation, fruit of all emancipations"), capable of resolving in favour of the people and of the planet – the material basis of life – the confrontation with the market. The path towards socialism and socialism itself are made of democratic material. The Left Bloc understands that socialism is total democracy or else it is not socialism.

Thoughts in conclusion

Our comrades of the Bloc, those in Portugal who are our people, have taken decisions and our internationalist duty begins by knowing them, understanding them and respecting them. We are also obliged to keep our minds open to arguments, which does not exempt us from being able to express doubts and to have our own criteria.

For the oldest participants in our struggle for, a metaphor may make clearer my position with regard to the proposal of the government of the Left. It could be compared to the slogan of the "workers' government", never realized, which we understand as the antechamber of the seizure of power, of socialism, etc. It was not yet a revolutionary government of workers' councils; it was supposed to precede it and lead to it. It was a "common sense" formula: since the governments of the bourgeoisie are not in our service, let us take care of public affairs. It was to be a government that would channel energies, would guide them and make it possible to follow the path and approach the transition. In fact, it was a government whose mission was to disappear almost immediately, once the working class had seen the need to go further – to break with the capitalist system. The difference between this abstract construction of the "workers' government" and the

present proposal of the government of the Left is that the latter moves forward in time according to the maturation of the conditions for the revolutionary seizure of power by the masses. Whereas the opportunity and the challenge of the tasks of government are coming closer to the present time, the time scale for the socialist revolution is getting longer. The time to take governmental power is approaching, whereas probably the moment of the final confrontation is receding. Or not. We do not know. The threshold of sensitivity of the bourgeoisie to the loss of its power and profits is extremely active. But, in any case, no one has a clock that marks the rhythms and the tasks of the class struggle and there is no predetermined timetable.

The success or failure of the proposals will depend on a long sequence of decisions that the comrades of the Bloc will adopt. It will also depend on the progress of the class struggle in Europe. The government of the Left has therefore multiple meanings, everything will depend on the concrete content and on the dynamic that it will have. It would be absurd to think that it is a magic formula free of errors and of dangers that will distort it. But it is

even more absurd to judge the formula by starting from a model which defines a priori its results and the need to correct it.

It is unnecessary to remind ourselves that in politics only those who dare can win. That is why it would be very conservative and therefore ineffective to not adopt decisions on the grounds that we are not sure of success or of the absence of political dangers. And, worse yet, to make commentaries from the outside, in the name of supposed principles of the Left, whose only result would be to remain quiet, restful, reasonable, but reduced to the condition of spectators of a work that others are carrying out. An expression of the peasants of my country comes to mind: only one who transports can fall over, but only one who ploughs and who is not afraid of hail, can harvest.

November 15, 2012

Manuel Garí, a member of the editorial board of the journal *Viento Sur*, was part of the delegation of Izquierda anticapitalista (IA, Anticapitalist Left, section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state) to the Congress of the Left Bloc.

EGYPT

Morsi's new manoeuvre for power

LEE SUSTAR ·

Having overplayed his hand in a bid for dictatorial power, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi is attempting to split the opposition with a snap referendum on a constitution that would give him much of the power he wants and consolidate Islamism as the dominant political force in the country.

A test of strength will come on Tuesday, December 4, when anti-Morsi groups plan to march on the presidential palace—by far the most direct demonstration against the president in his six months in office.

Morsi's announcement of a snap referendum came during a weekend of competing protests that saw democratic and secular forces once again mobilize in Tahrir Square—the symbol of the revolution in early 2011 that ousted dictator Hosni Mubarak. For their part, pro-Morsi forces gathered at Cairo University and held a protest outside the High Constitutional Court, which was expected to issue a ruling December 2 to disband the Constituent Assembly. This body, dominated by Islamists, is charged with writing a new constitution.

Crucially the draft constitution—which Morsi wants to put to a referendum vote on December 15—not only enshrines Islamist Sharia law, but also guarantees the Egyptian military the essential power and privileges it enjoyed during the 30 years of Mubarak's rule, including control over its own budget and even Egypt's foreign policy [1].

A new generation of top military officers assumed their positions earlier this year when the new Egyptian president pushed out dozens of associated with the old regime. Thus, the draft constitution represents Morsi's promise that while the old top

brass may be gone, the institutional and economic power of the military will remain.

The consequences of this would be continuation of Egypt's peace deal with Israel and an uninterrupted flow of aid from the U.S. That's a powerful incentive for both the leaders of Egypt's armed forces and the Obama administration in the U.S. to look the other way while Morsi grabs political power for the Muslim Brotherhood.

The constitution would give Morsi a chance to claim credentials as a democratic leader following his November 22 decree that centralized power in his hands [2]. In that document, Morsi gave himself sole legislative authority and barred judges from striking down any of his laws or the actions of the Constituent Assembly. The move apparently rattled many in Morsi's inner circle, who were surprised by the aggressive move [3].

The resulting disarray among top officials of the Brotherhood and its political wing, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), gave confidence to the opposition, which on November 30 mobilized a protest in Tahrir Square that was on par with those of last year's revolution. Supporters of Morsi, wary of a violent showdown between the president's backers and the opposition, called their own mass rally for the following day.

At the same time, however, the ultraconservative Salafist Islamists made a point of organizing the far more confrontational protest at the High Constitutional Court, which had been expected to issue a ruling that would have disbanded the Constituent Assembly.

As commentator Juan Cole summed up the competing protests:

"The toll from fighting in Egypt between pro- and anti-Morsi activists all over Egypt was two dead, 451 wounded (160 or so police) and about 250 people were arrested on Sunday. (Most of the arrestees were from Muhammad Mahmoud Street off Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo.)...Clashes and back-and-forth fighting continued all day Sunday in the Tahrir area, and the number of people camping out in tents increased." [4]

The referendum—which will come with no time for debate—is the latest controversy in the effort to write a new constitution following Mubarak's ouster. Already, out of an original 100 members of the Constituent Assembly, 22 have resigned and another seven reserve members have stepped down—mostly leftists and Coptic Christians. They quit after charging that the process was rigged to give the Muslim Brotherhood the dominant role in writing the constitution.

Now, by putting the constitution to a vote, Morsi hopes to win back FJP voters who were shocked by his attempt to gain Mubarak-like political power. The Muslim Brotherhood and its allies, the Salafists, believe they can portray the vote as a contest between Islamist values and those of secularists—people who either don't acknowledge the role of Islam in Egyptian society, or who are Western-oriented and decadent.

At the same time, Morsi continues to claim that the Muslim Brotherhood and the FJP are the real guardians of the revolution. Thus, he's fired the hated top prosecutor, a Mubarak holdover; neutralized the judiciary that's also identified with the Mubarak era; and pledged to prosecute those involved in the killing and torture of revolutionaries. That way Morsi can try to portray the democratic opposition as a vehicle for former regime elements known in Egypt as *feloul*.

Egypt's revolutionaries need to protest Morsi's attempts to establish the Brotherhood as the dominant political force, while not aligning themselves with the *feloul*, argues Hossam el-Hamalawy, a

journalist and member of the Revolutionary Socialists. As he put it in an interview:

"We have to put into consideration that there is a section of the *feloul*, the remnants of the previous regime, that also wants Morsi to go. And they are part of the current mobilization...[W]hen the polarization gets into Islamist versus secular, then this means that [Mubarak's former foreign minister] Amr Moussa can suddenly become a champion of the civil state, can suddenly mean that [pro-Mubarak talk show host] Tawfiq Okasha becomes a symbol of freedom of expression, can suddenly mean that [counterrevolutionary blogger] Ahmed Spider can march in the streets in order to retrieve the [mantle] of the martyrs. This is ridiculous and is opening the door for the real counterrevolutionary forces to get in.

Revolutionaries have to be very careful about this. The sons of Hosni Mubarak, the orphans of Omar Suleiman and the loyalists of [former Mubarak interior minister and recent presidential candidate Ahmed] Shafiq can never be our allies."

Tamer Wagih, editor of the Egypt Independent website, made a similar point:

"Due to the absence of a major coherent revolutionary bloc, Morsi's opposition is a mishmash of powers that belong to the corrupt former Mubarak regime and other centrist-liberal-reformist-populist powers—which can be collectively termed as "civilian powers," regardless of the exact meaning of that term.

Regrettably, since those civilian powers are not revolutionary and have an indistinguishable centrist character, they tend to reconcile, and even ally, with former regime supporters in their battle against Morsi, believing he is their archrival.

To my mind, this tendency will have catastrophic repercussions for the future of the revolution. It will allow *feloul* to be reproduced as acceptable actors in the political realm, and the possibility of the Mubarak regime making a comeback in a worse form.

Comparisons with the situation during the January 25 uprising do not hold. Then, millions in the streets were revolting against the regime and an alliance existed between revolutionaries and conservative reformist powers that hesitantly opposed the regime. Today, though, we are faced with forming an alliance with the worst and most extreme right-wing powers, and are outside the context of a revolution.

The revolutionaries' mission is tough, but inevitable. They should engage in a battle against the non-revolutionary and confused Brotherhood's dictatorship without falling into the trap of allying with other enemies of the revolution." [5]

The next two weeks will see a series of competing mobilizations and protests that could determine the direction of Egypt's revolutionary movement.

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PAKISTAN:

AWP founded: Will it sustain itself?

FAROOQ TARIQ ·

Four articles within a week of merger were printed in the editorial pages of commercial media including Dawn, Pakistan Today and Daily Times, written by well respected writers like I. A. Rehman and Professor Aziz-ud-din Ahmad, welcoming the merger on the theme of the "Left re-born". Several Urdu papers also followed the English papers to welcome the most intelligent move by the Left in decades to expand its social basis in a society dominated by political Islam.

The arguments put forward by some questioning the sustainability of this merger are based mainly on lack of information within the left of Pakistan and are short of understanding the objective and subjective realities under which this bold initiative was taken. Let us look some of the starting points for this merger.

The merger was simply a local act. It was not taken because someone from outside had done this. It was not a mechanical imitation but a dialectical response to some of the successful recent experiences on the Left internationally. Many on the Left in Pakistan were inspired by the success of SYRISA of Greece (The Coalition of the Radical Left –a United Social Front). It won nearly 27 percent popular votes in the general elections in Greece and became the second largest and main opposition party. It brought together several different socialist and political trends to form the party in 2004. Within 8 years, it became the talk of the whole world. However, the merger in Pakistan is not a carbon copy of SYRISA. It has its unique features.

The beginning of merger process was purely a product of the young revolutionaries within the three parties who finally decided to unite in one

single platform. The desire of the young revolutionaries for a bold and creative action for the uplift of the Left forces had all the foundations of a success story. It was not a hasty impatience of some "young petty bourgeoisie youth" to build a party overnight as described by some sceptical analysts. It was a painstaking long overdue strategy put into reality.

The merger would sustain and help to develop a radical left party in a short space of time. The main reason is the ideological basis for this process. It is done at a time when the very existence of the Left was in question because of the continuous growth of religious fanaticisms in all spheres of life. The insecurity among the left activists has been halted by this merger process.

The ideological differences in the history of the Left were long overtaken by the extraordinary events of the past 25 years. The collapse of the Soviet Union and euphoria among the capitalist class led them to go for an all out war against the working class in the shape of the brutal implementation of the neo-liberal agenda. The result was, as expected, the growth of poverty at an unprecedented level and the gap among poor and rich widened to an historical high point. The international capitalist crisis worsened this situation even further.

However, Pakistan was a special case. Here, the growth of abhorrence against the "system" was not translated in the progress of progressive forces. On the contrary, the extreme right wing forces with their anti-imperialist demagoguery were the main beneficiaries. They were better prepared with over 80,000 Madrassas and a whole range of social work they were involved in coloring with religious sentiments.

The Left was left out by political commentators as mere spectators from outside the mainstream polit-

ical arena. However, the slow and patient work of some Left groups and parties in building social and labour movements paved the way for the present merger. One of the main aims of this merger strategy was to strengthen the labour and peasant movement that they were able to build in parts of the country over the years. The movements were in some confusion about the three parties pursuing similar ideology and tactics with three different names. The merger has eased their lives.

One of the main beneficiaries of this merger will be the National Students Federation, a traditional left organization which saw splits among its ranks whenever the Left split for any reason. That was the main consideration among the leadership of the three parties who left their year's long hard work building their parties to adopt a new name. It was the NSF leadership that initiated the merger process and it is the youth who are in the forefront of joining the new party.

The merger will survive because it has more positives and no negatives. The cementing phenomenon is the ideology of Socialism that all three parties have agreed upon. They agree that the commanding heights of economy be nationalized [under democratic workers' control and management???] Nations [and national groups?] must have a right of self determination with a voluntary choice of succession. An end of debt with an audit of all the local and foreign loans is the high point agreed to tackle the worsening economic crisis. At least 10 percent of the national budget spent on education and five percent on health with drastic cuts in military spending will ease the life of millions once put in practice.

With a radical programme, committed and experienced self sacrificing leadership and whole hearted support of all the members of the three parties have put the merger formula on the road of guaranteed success.

From Viewpoint online

ITALY:

Berlusconi's and Monti's latest moves in Italian crisis.

ANTONIO MOSCATO ·

Berlusconi has decided to go into opposition at a time when the Monti government was becoming more and more unpopular due to the reintroduction of a property tax, the cuts in real wages and a rise in unemployment that is much greater than the level recognised by the official statistical agency (ISTAT). This demagogic turn of Berlusconi is particularly barefaced since his previous governments pursued policies with exactly the same consequences for working people for a number of years. Although Monti has carried them forward much more decisively – thanks to the consensus of 99% of the mass media and the shameful parliamentary majority cobbled together between Bersani's [1] Democratic Party (PD), Berlusconi's People's Liberty Party (PDL) which has been led by Alfano since the big man's temporary withdrawal and Casini's Union of the Democratic Centre (UDC) [2] (...)

Just as a year ago with the coming to power of Monti's team of 'professors' or technocrats, the government was not toppled as a result of a strong mass movement pushing events in a progressive left direction but rather as a result of political manoeuvres within the ruling class and its political structures.

In a very deliberate move, Berlusconi, who is being denounced in the press and by Monti supporters as 'irresponsible', is ensuring that before the government falls the important Stability Budget law is going to be passed which consists of the latest round of severe austerity measures. However he is presenting this final act of

support as an altruistic gesture and sacrifice so that the hapless PD is left with the 'honour' of firmly backing these anti-working class measures. Presumably the PD will consequently lose part of the fragile support it has recently gained with the primaries 'show'. [3] Of course Berlusconi's move will also stop the passing of legislation moderately combatting corruption and restricting the eligibility of candidates with criminal records (both directly impacting on himself!) as well as other measures such as the reduction in the number of provincial administrative areas.

But what is Monti up to with his precipitous resignation without waiting for the March election timetable to play itself out? He did not wait for a formal vote of no confidence in his government where he could have been able to see the crisis-ridden PDL's cards and whether it was really united around its ex-leader's action. His reaction to Berlusconi took the political class a little by surprise. The PDL MPs had walked out of the chamber, they did not vote against the government or call for a vote of no confidence. It cannot be excluded that Monti's haste is above all to do with improving his own position in case he throws his hat in the ring or indirectly intervenes in the upcoming elections. Monti could try to avoid a serious balance sheet of his own tenure by blaming those people (aka Berlusconi) who sabotaged it. From the PDL point of view bringing the elections forward [4] could also mean stemming the serious haemorrhage of

support the centre right is undergoing in key regions such as Lazio [5] and Lombardy and stop PDL politicians jumping from a sinking ship.

At the same time, Monti, who, contrary to what the PD leadership thinks and sustains, is a thoroughgoing right wing politician, does not want to be in a position where he is called by 'duty' to take up a position in a government dominated too much by the centre left – which could well happen if the elections produced an unstable outcome caused by an excessive success of the Five Stars Movement. [6] He would prefer to lead a coalition in which the weight of the centre right is not too much reduced.

Grillo is a little ahead of the game by having organised an online selection of his parliamentary candidates – in a way which is not more democratic than the centre left primaries that he so vehemently ridiculed. His movement could have a real impact on the electorate and could be the new factor. In any case Grillo has a nose for something since his slate is ready at a time the 'establishment' team is breaking up. This is in contrast to the *Cambiare si Puo* [7] (We can change things) political project which is still playing catch up – especially since it is spending more time on discussing who to exclude

and who to include (Ferrero [8] is even proposing to bring in the IDV [9] (Italia dei Valore) rather than its programme and how to politically organise. The latter has to start from a reflection about why the left has undergone so many defeats.

Obviously it is very tempting to downplay these byzantine manoeuvres between old accomplices which are enmeshed in a tissue of incredible lies. Berlusconi is saying that it is time to change the electoral law, after having previously sabotaged any previous possible reform by coming up with different proposals every week. Monti is piously resigning because he feels offended by the severe and disloyal judgment of the current PDL leader, Alfano [10] – as if Alfano is anything else but a puppet remotely controlled by Berlusconi.

But this farce is possible because the real left is absent – not only from parliament but also from the struggles which are continuing but are fragmentary and partial and which are not easily coalescing into an overall political challenge. The biggest trade union organisations, including the CGIL, have no intention of building mobilisations for the defence of the overall interests of workers, pensioners and those with short term, temporary, low paid jobs.

See Antonio Moscato's blog.

CLIMATE CHANGE:

Statement of Asia Social Movements on Climate Change at the Asia Social Movements Assembly

And yet, despite the increasing devastation wreaked by climate change on farmlands, livelihoods, and homes, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations are moving backwards instead of moving closer to a global agreement that will stabilize and cut greenhouse gas emissions. The premise of the climate negotiations has always been based on the principle that developed countries need to live up to their historical responsibility and yet from Cancun to Durban to Qatar, negotiations have instead focused on how developed countries can escape their previous commitments. Now, with the current proposals on the table, not only are developed countries going to be able to escape commitments by watering obligations down to voluntary pledges but they will also be able to create more carbon markets and loopholes in order to not take any action at all. Estimates from a study by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) have calculated that even without all the loopholes, these current pledges will lead to an increase in the temperature of up to 5 degrees centigrade.

It is not too late nor is it impossible to arrest this march towards climate chaos. We know what needs to be done:

First, science has been clear that a huge source of greenhouse gas emissions is the carbon dioxide (CO₂) produced from oil, gas and coal use. According to the International Energy Agency, two-thirds of the known reserves of the world's coal, oil

and gas should remain underground to have a 50% chance of staying below the 2 degrees centigrade limit. Therefore, if we want a 75% chance, we have to leave 80% of these oil, gas and coal reserves under the soil.

Second, the United States, as the main historical emitter, has to urgently drastically reduce its emissions more than everyone else. All developed countries called Annex 1 parties in the UN climate negotiations should urgently make drastically deep cuts, until 2020, at least 40 to 50% of their emissions based on 1990 levels. These commitments should be translated into concrete targets in coal, oil and gas usage per year, without using loopholes, offsets or carbon markets.

Third, the right to development should be not be interpreted as the right to continue polluting and follow the dirty development path of the industrialized countries. The right to development should be understood as the obligation of states to guarantee the basic rights and needs of the population and their right to live a life in harmony with nature.

In this light, China, Brazil, South Africa, India and other emerging economies should also have targets for emission reductions as they are fast becoming the big emitters of greenhouse gases. These binding targets should be lower than the targets of Annex 1 countries, following the principles of historical and common but differentiated responsibility.

Fourth, ending subsidies to oil, coal and gas companies and limiting their use are a very important step forward but not enough. We also need to block the advancement of all kinds of false solutions are a very important step forward but not enough. We also need to block the advancement of all kinds of false solutions that can equally wreck nature and

negatively impact the livelihoods of people that depend on a healthy environment like: agrofuels, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), synthetic biology, geo-engineering, nuclear power, resource grabs by big corporations and the green economy.

If we want to have a future on this planet, we need real solutions. We need to move beyond the all-dominating, profit-driven and unsustainable capitalist system that exploits people and ruins ecosystems. If we are to have genuine progress in the fight against climate change, social movements from around the world will have to reclaim the power and momentum in this struggle. Grassroots mobilizations against mining, coal plants, fracking, tar sands, big dams, land grabbing, water privatization, agrofuels, GMOs, Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) are already showing the way. We need to strengthen these struggles and to connect the urgent demands of the people for food, water, health, energy, employment, rights and access with the struggles against climate change, financial speculation, land grabbing, neoliberal free trade and investment agreements, impunity of transnational corporations (TNCs), criminalization of migrants and refugees,

patriarchy and violence against women, austerity measures and social security cuts.

We also need a collective and gradual transformation from the fossil fuel-addicted system of consumption and production towards a low carbon society. This also requires a transformation of the unsustainable capitalist system. Social movements already have many of these transformative proposals and solutions in their hands. Alternatives like food sovereignty, agro-ecology and several others are already being practiced and further developed. If we are to harmoniously co-exist with Nature, we need to abandon the anthropocentric vision of capitalism and recognize that we are only one component of nature and that in order to live a healthy life we need to respect the vital cycles, the integrity, the interdependence of nature by recognizing and upholding the rights of Mother Earth.

Humanity and Nature are standing at a precipice. But it is not too late. We know what needs to be done, and if we do it together, we can change the system.

November 28, 2012, Manila, Philippines

From Via Campesina (link includes the list of signatories)

PHILIPPINES

A critique of the Framework Agreement on Bangsamoro (FAB) between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Front (MILF)

ANZELMO GUERRERO ·

The signing of the FPA had gone through several meticulous processes and resulted in the strengthening of cooperation between the government and the MNLF. Four(4) months before the September 1996 signing, an agreement was reached in June 1996 to establish the Southern Philippines Zone of Peace and Development (SZOPAD). It would be composed of 14 provinces (including the new province of Sarangani) and the nine cities as stipulated in the Tripoli Agreement in 1976.

The FPA has two phases namely: Phase I, which covered three (3) years, and would be for the establishment of transitional mechanism specifically the formation of the SZOPAD. This would be chaired by the MNLF Chair, whose task was to oversee the development initiatives and programs in the 14 provinces and 9 cities. The MNLF Chair would also be elected as Governor of the ARMM. This phase of three years would culminate in a plebiscite in the SZOPAD areas to approve amendments to the Organic Law R.A. 6734 of 1989. The plebiscite would also determine the provinces and cities which would be part of the ARMM. The Phase II would have started after the plebiscite and when an expanded ARMM was formed. The ARMM was composed of only four provinces and no city after 1989 (a result of the plebiscite). Cotabato City, the political center of the ARMM since 1987, did not vote to be part of the ARMM.

The whole process would be implemented for several years but only the part of the Agreement which mentioned about the integration of the armed combatants of the MNLF was said to be relatively successful. Enormous amount of resources both financial and human - had been poured into this political activity – and now it had been considered by everybody as a failed political project.

It is easily noticed that there are many similarities between the FPA and the FAB- which will eventually lead to signing of FPA between the GPH and the MILF.

But this period, everybody was very excited because for once and for all and after the almost four decades of the Moro struggle for self-determination led by the MNLF, it had reached a political resolution and peace had finally been achieved. Although, there were sectors who raised and expressed doubts about the success of the political process. No one had questioned the fact that such event could have indeed marked the resolution or at least achieved towards that direction - the Bangsamoro problem vis-a-vis the national oppression in the Philippine-Mindanao context.

The full support of the whole administration and government under the leadership of then President Fidel V. Ramos had made the doubts and hesitations of some sectors of society rest their concerns with much ease. The legal and constitutional experts of the administration had done their job well that the constitutional basis for the nature and function of SPCPD was fulfilled with the Article X of the 1987 Philippine Constitution. In short, the

cooptation and the mainstreaming of the MNLF to the Philippine dominant system had been almost completed both legislatively and judicially. The struggle for the right to self-determination of the Bangsamoro led by the MNLF had been almost consummated. It was now a matter of implementation which would prove to be the most difficult part of the Agreement. The enormous works of rebuilding the social infrastructure damaged and the physical infrastructure destroyed during the decades-long civil war, would prove to be even more difficult.

Only a few months after the signing of the FPA with the MNLF, the government sat down with the leadership of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) to start another peace negotiation for the purpose of another ending of the Bangsamoro struggle for the right to self-determination. Since less attention had been given to such initiative, nobody really bothered to point out in the open about the stated political objective of the new peace negotiation for a new political settlement in the context of the newly signed FPA between the government and the MNLF which was also to have resolved the Bangsamoro problem. The act seemed to tell us that the FPA with the MNLF was already foreseen to be a failed political project before its implementation began.

Looking back at this stage, one can just surmise that the government did not really believe that with the FPA, the Bangsamoro problem was resolved that was why it had started another talk with the MILF or because of the peace momentum of the political event with the FPA, the government would not want to miss such opportune moment and it wanted to have the MILF in the package, hoping of course that such political initiative would be finalized in a short time or at least during the Ramos' term – a clear sign of underestimating the MILF.

On the other hand, the MILF had agreed to start the peace talks to make a political message to the country in general and to the Bangsamoro in particular that they were still a political force to reckon with and therefore they could not be sidelined be-

cause of the FPA between the MNLF and the government. Another point was that the leadership of the MILF was truly convinced that nothing would happen with the FPA and that it (MILF) could easily fill-in the political vacuum left by the MNLF. The MILF's engagement with the peace process with the Ramos government would provide the much needed political and democratic spaces for such moves and opportunities. The MILF central leadership had strongly believed that the opportunity that could be provided by the peace process would create a very excellent situation for their political and military expansion outside of the Maguindanao and Lanao provinces. It saw the political advantage to consolidate its political and military organizations without being bothered by military operations of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The MILF had also maximized the space that the peace process had created an excellent situation to strengthen its international networks outside the OIC which was tied like glue with the MNLF at that time.

It is very important to take note at that point the attitude of the MNLF leadership about the Indigenous Peoples' and their struggle for the right to self-determination. In the FPA, the IPs were never factored in and their ancestral domains were treated as part of the Bangsamoro territories. As a people, the IPs were referred to as highlanders.

For the MNLF, the whole of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan were part of the Bangsamoro homeland which explained the inclusion of the thirteen (13) provinces out of twenty one (21) at that time of Tripoli Agreement and nine (9) cities out of fifteen (15) cities. The historical blind spots were intentional to exclude those citizens who were the original inhabitants of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan but who did not convert into Islam and even those who converted into Christianity during the Spanish colonization. And worst, even those who were Moro Muslims but would not wish to be part of the MNLF were unilaterally claimed by the MNLF. The concrete case of this situation is the MILF unilaterally claimed by MNLF but which would later claim

the same right over the other peoples' in Mindanao in its Framework Agreement on Bangsamoro.

The framework of compartmentalized peace could be a clear case of not really wanting a genuine and sustainable peace but more to divide the revolutionary movement and the people. And worst could be integral part of the Agreement although almost always covertly or implicit, the decommissioning or the disarming of the combatants of the revolutionary front involved would not really be stressed because they would be asked to help the government to control and disarm the other armed groups in their claimed territories.

The experience of the MNLF and similar situation in the current context could definitely fail in building and sustaining peace in Mindanao. The selective historical amnesia of the revolutionary fronts and movements would promote more divisions than the basic unity of the broadest possible sections of the population that genuine revolutionary front worth its name would really work out as one of its urgent tasks.

The historical context and current realities of Mindanao should be understood objectively and put into hearts by any revolutionary leadership so that it can get the widest and broadest support in its peace process and sustaining it. Concretely, the not so recent experience would tell us that "peace from above" would never succeed. The talks done and concluded between and among the leaders of both the government and Moro Fronts and keep other stakeholders in the waiting and will be involved only during the plebiscite would never go far in reaching a comprehensive political settlement and sustainable peace in the country.

Does the Right to Self Determination of smaller and weaker nations have to be liquidated in an arrangement between bigger and stronger nations?

In a multi-nationalities and multi-ethnic nation like the Philippines, the struggles for the right to self determination of oppressed and dominated nations against national oppressions have been complicated since the basic framework used by the revolu-

tionary movements is more theoretically inclusive but exclusive in deed.

The issue has become more complicated when political resolution and the so-called peaceful settlement is reached by one revolutionary movement with the dominant system because they (revolutionary party/Front and the government) tend to be very divisive and mainly politically self fulfilment process.

In no way and in no other situation/condition can a practice or fulfilment of the right to self determination of any nation/people can justify the liquidation of the right to self determination of other people/nation. This is very un-revolutionary to say the least and can invite more wars rather than create situation conducive in building and sustaining peace.

The exclusive framework for the resolution of the struggle for the right to self determination is politically synonymous with the neo-liberal program of globalization as implemented by the dominant system of the country and the perpetuation of the political divide among and between people.

The adoption of such framework in both theory and practice by any revolutionary movement is simply political capitulation in favour of the elites of both the dominant and dominated nations.

The unevenness and the backwardness or the combination of both in the economic development of the areas where the minority nationalities are found can be a very strong reinforcing factor in the mainstreaming of the revolutionary group/party which represent the abovementioned nationalities in their struggle for self determination. The introduction of modern technologies in agriculture for instance would easily attract the attention of the Bangsamoro farmers in the context of its own very backward technology and absence of development model in agriculture by the MNLF. It would create the situation to easily adopt the neo-liberal framework of capitalist globalization.

In the Philippine context, inspite of its archipelagic nature, the neo-liberal orientation of its economic development has been geared towards the formation and strengthening of one market since the early 90's or the post dictatorial period.

Under the Presidency of Fidel V. Ramos (1992-1998), the country had formulated the Philippine 2000, a comprehensive economic development program based on the neo-liberal framework of capitalism. Mindanao would be integrated into the Philippine economic program and its specific role had been identified in the development of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines (BIMP) East Asia Growth Area (EAGA). And it was such historical context that the Philippine government entered into a final peace agreement with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), without which Mindanao and the neighboring islands would not have a favourable and secured environment for the development of a vibrant and feasible market of the country and in the region.

The MNLF did not have a distinct economic program and direction to present and argue with the Philippine government before, during and after the 1996 FPA and therefore its leadership under Nur Misuari with the ARMM and SPCPD as core and expansion areas covered by the agreement had to follow the government's neo-liberal framework of the Ramos government. Hence, during those times, one could always hear Misuari boasting about building eight-lane super highways in Sulu and other parts of ARMM instead of prioritizing the well-being of the peoples in ARMM through providing the proper environment and enhancing the skills needed for the economic productivity and development in the region and with its population instead of having economic hallucinations disguised as economic vision.

A nation/people who do not have a clear economic framework and agenda with its people in the course of their struggle will definitely have difficulties in achieving its political independence be it in the form of secession or by autonomy from a bigger and stronger nation. Relative economic indepen-

dence of a smaller and weaker nation fighting for political self determination from bigger and stronger nation can sustain the former in its struggle and even make it less susceptible from the bullying or blackmailing of the latter.

The 1996 FPA agreement between the government and the MNLF had definitely been a unilateral show of the government over Misuari's MNLF which swallowed the neo-liberal economic framework of the Ramos government and in the process politically marginalizing itself as manifested in a weakened organization and a split/divided leadership. It was just a matter of time when it would be completely sidelined and become irrelevant. The money and resources which were pour down to the ARMM and the MNLF could not do something to reverse the situation in favour of the MNLF. In fact, these resources and finances had added to the divisions and splits of the MNLF.

In the case of MNLF and its FPA with the Ramos government, it was clear that is (MNLF) had been used by the representative of the dominant class of the dominant nation to subjugate and liquidate the right to self determination of the smaller and weaker nations. This was done by simply ignoring the issue and citing historical legitimacy as understood by them. Through the integration of the Bangsamoro Armed Forces (BAF) into the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police, the Ramos government had intended to use them against the other revolutionary groups but at the same time distancing them (BAF) from the leadership in the MNLF.

Furthermore, any nation or people who oppress other people cannot liberate itself. Hence, liquidating the right of self determination of other nations in the name of other's right to determine itself is in essence allowing itself to be enslaved by the dominant system's national oppression which it has vowed to eliminate. The enslavement that it did not want others to do to itself is the same enslavement it had done with other nation/people when it included them unilaterally in its claim and possession.

Can the freedom of smaller and weaker nations be secured by the "victory" of the bigger and stronger nations?

The freedom of smaller and weaker nations cannot be achieved by becoming integral part of the system of the neoliberal capitalist globalization. It should be the result of struggle for self determination of peoples in smaller and weaker nations and can only be sustained and won if it will be part of the struggle of other nations against today's version of Imperialism.

The struggle against national oppression can be effectively waged and eventually won if solidarity among and between smaller and weaker nations is established. Furthermore, it can be strengthened and sustained if the oppressed and the most exploited sections of these nations are united in struggling against the national oppression and forge solidarity with the oppressed and exploited sections of the stronger and bigger nations.

The establishment and strengthening of solidarity from below can only be genuinely done in revolutionary context and when the oppressed and exploited sectors of the dominated and dominant nations have become empowered. Their solidarity has made them assert and struggle for their rights, build their own lives and determine their own future.

This is building peace from below wherein people can genuinely express their voices to become part of the arrangement of the bigger nations. The opposite is the peace from above as claimed by the stronger and bigger nations. The latter will first claim or occupy the territories of the smaller and weaker nations and they ask the population's consent to be part of their claim. Consultations such as these are reduced to a shameful comedy. Peoples should give their reply/consent with regards to their inclusion in any political arrangement without being threatened by ready to shoot guns.

The democratic unquestionable "right" of the nations to self determination should not necessarily become into the right of strong and big nations to

make acquisitions and impose oppression over weak and small nations. The right of the big and strong nation to self determination does not and cannot negate the same right of the small and weak nations to freely determine their lives and their future.

The basic right of small and weak nation can only be secured by themselves and in solidarity with other oppressed nations and the most exploited sector within the weak and small nations with the unconditional support of the oppressed and exploited sectors from the strong and big nations. Those from above from both strong and big nations as well as from the small and weak nations cannot be relied upon to deliver genuine support to those from below.

Only political charlatans or hopeless simpletons can still believe that the freedom of the small and weak nations can be secured by the victory of one side or the other. Determining people's lives and future cannot be relied on to others' struggle for genuine emancipation. National liberation starts in the process of struggle in achieving it and democracy should be realized in the process of the same struggle of peoples for self determination.

Can self suppression or passive opposition to remain at home and become neutral, as form of self preservation of the weak and small nations a viable political option?

Achieving political option of the self determination can only be done in a political and democratic struggles against the dominant system which has created the national oppression.

In the current context of neoliberal globalization, the dominant system becomes part of the global capital domination of the poor people/nation in weak and small nations. The ruling classes of the strong and big nations and the weak and small nations have united in the interest against the poor of both strong and weak nations. Furthermore, the ruling classes of the weak and small nations can also be prominent in leading the weak and small nations in the national struggle against the domi-

nant and strong nations in order to maintain its monopoly and self interest within the former nations. The people of weak and small nations can have material bases to unite in the struggle against the dominant system which cause national oppression but at the same time ensure that democratic content of such struggle should be part in all the stages and not at the later part of the struggle.

The ruling class of the dominant and strong nation will always reach out with the ruling classes of the dominated and weak nations to suppress the democratic and national struggle of the oppressed sectors of the latter. The former can even use one or two small and weak nations to fight the other similar situated nations through granting a pseudo form of political options for self determination in order to weaken the democratic forces so that they can easily be neutralized and defeated.

The national oppression even in the current context of neo-liberal framework cannot be eliminated by granting political autonomy to any weak and small nations by the big and strong nations within its framework. The substantial change can only be achieved by changing the power structure and real power built from below. The oppressed section of the weak and small nations should empower themselves politically and economically and from this point reach out to the oppressed sections of the dominant and strong nations to complete the power structure change. It would be hopeless and directionless to ask the ruling class of the strong and big nations to grant political accommodation for the latter. The struggle and ownership of the political option that will be appropriate for a genuinely struggling people can only be earned and not given as a grant.

The people who do not struggle for their political option to self determination do not deserve to have one because if they do not work hard to achieve what they should deserve to win, they cannot also sustain and even reach a higher stage of development as a people building their own future.

Any form of self determination can only be as good as the people who struggle for it, earn it and make the best out of it. This process cannot be requested or be transferred to any people regardless how deserving or undeserving they can be.

Can the Framework Agreement on Bangsamoro (FAB) be an answer to the Moro Question and the Philippine/Mindanao problem?

At a glance, there are substantial similarities between the processes and the substance of the MNLF-GRP Final Peace Agreement (FPA) and the FAB and the eventual FPA between the GPH and the MILF.

Both have gone through elaborate stages before reaching political arrangements for the transition from old to new forms of political governance. In the case of MNLF, the process and agreement had been reached to form an expanded ARMM and had amended R.A. 6734 to have R.A. 9054 to ensure its constitutional bases. It had established the SPCPD which would manage the development activities in the SZOPAD under the leadership of the MNLF. In the case of MILF, it will make laws called Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) to amend R.A. 9054 and form the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) to replace the ARMM. All of these initiatives will be under the leadership of the MILF and which will be part of the formation of the Bangsamoro Government (BG).

Both processes look very elaborate at least theoretically and politically doable except that, they both would be implemented in the socio-economic and political context of the existing dominant system of the Philippines. This brings one and all to ask basic question of the root cause/s of the Bangsamoro struggles for self determination. The dominant system in the country is a neo-liberal stage of global capitalism which has caused the intensification of the current form of national oppression of the Bangsamoro especially the most oppressed and exploited sections of its population. The Bangsamoro people in general has been economically exploited, politically marginalized and culturally alienated for

a very long time. The struggles for self determination led by different Moro revolutionary fronts were all geared towards the elimination of the national oppression and the causes which made them possible. The setting-up of the political and economic structures has been part of the process of building a nation within a bigger nation.

Instead of initiating activities to resolve the causes of the national oppression the dominant system through the Philippine government has tried to hasten the mainstreaming of the Bangsamoro into the system of the country. This kind of solution has been patterned to the pacification model used by the colonial governments in the past.

The glaring ineffectiveness and failure of this kind of model had caused the upsurge of the Moro uprisings and revolutionary movements since the colonial years and even today.

The FPA between the government and the MNLF is the latest version of this model where peace is won not in the battlefields but on the negotiating table but miserably failed. And one of the strong manifestations for its failure is the FAB. But where did the MNLF-FPA fail that the FAB can take on and learn from it?

The national oppression of the Bangsamoro which is the main reason for its struggle for self determination has never been addressed in the FPA. The focus was only on the MNLF leadership especially Nur Misuari and when the former and the latter became divided and weak, they became marginalized while the whole population of the Bangsamoro

have been subjected to the process of mainstreaming.

The FAB, this early has shown similar signs where the MNLF is being swallowed by the dominant system. The BBL cannot be and will never be allowed to be contradictory to the substantial laws framed by the dominant system of the country. The BG will soon become integral part of the country's political system which will be dictated by the neo-liberal framework and its technocrats. The MILF does not have its own economic system and therefore it is a matter of time when new Bangsamoro elite or recycled elite will dominate the whole Bangsamoro population in connivance of the elite of the dominant system.

The FAB is not inclusive in spirit and in deed and if this orientation will not change it will lose the vital support of the non-Moro and non-Muslim population in Mindanao in particular and the whole country in general.

It has never factored in the distinct history and circumstances of the Indigenous (IPs) both as a people and having their distinct territories. Therefore, it cannot have genuine support of the IPs before, during and after the BG is established.

These are just few signs that the FAB cannot really answer the Bangsamoro issue on self determination and the Mindanao/Philippine problem with regards to the national oppression in the context of the neo-liberal capitalist-led globalization in Mindanao in particular and the whole country in general.

PORTUGAL

"We are not living in a period of resignation"

IZQUIERDA ANTICAPITALISTA ·

Izquierda Anticapitalista: What is the situation of Portugal today and what is the situation of the Left Bloc at the opening of its congress?

Catarina Martins: Portugal is today being subjected to a "rescue" plan of the Troika (European Central Bank, European Commission and International Monetary Fund) and to very high interest rates on government bonds, which is adding austerity to the austerity from which it was already suffering before.

We had a government of the Socialist Party (PSP), which said that it was imposing austerity (cuts in wages and public services) in order to "avoid" being subject to the IMF. The truth is that, as we had warned, the economy deteriorated even further and so we find ourselves with a "rescue plan" which is not intended to solve the problems of wages - as they claimed - but to solve the problems of national and international banks.

The social situation has greatly deteriorated, because the economy is in a worse and worse state. Since we have had the Troika in Portugal 200,000 jobs have already been lost, which is a lot considering the size of the country. Cuts in wages ranged between 20 and 30 per cent, depending on the sector. Public services suffered a major attack. At present the youngest sectors of the population are emigrating, as at the time of the colonial war in the 1960s. We are therefore in a situation of a very alarming deterioration of collective life and social conditions. The Secretary of State for Education was himself obliged to recognize that tens of thousands of children suffer from hunger in school.

While all this is happening, the state is reducing social benefits for the poorest in society and delegating public assistance by signing contracts with in-

stitutions linked to the Catholic Church. Thus, not only have economic infrastructures been privatized (electricity, transport, and they want to privatize the post office, water, etc., etc.), but they are also destroying the Welfare State in the name of charity. This government and the Troika are completely dismantling the social consensus that existed in Portugal since April 25, 1974 - progressive taxation and help for the weakest members of society.

A year and a half ago we had elections. At that time the Bloc said: "the Troika will not pay wages, it will protect the banks and therefore the only way out of the crisis is to renegotiate the debt". A year and a half ago it was very difficult to get this message across. There were many people who said that to renegotiate the debt was "to not pay, to not meet our national commitments". Our discourse was not understood... it was worth nothing.

The economic and social situation has increasingly deteriorated. Today, we see that people of all political colours – even various sectors of the Right - including those who attacked us, find that the economic recession is reducing our GDP so much and that interest on the debt has increased so much, that it is not possible to pay the debt while it exceeds the country's GDP. And, even if they are very far from us in the ideological field, they are beginning to say that the only way out of the crisis is by renegotiating the debt.

That's how far we have come in a year and a half of deepening social crisis, a period that has made it possible to take forward this great debate in Portuguese society. And it is the instrument that is available to the Left now: it is possible to say that in order to protect the Welfare State and wages, we must renegotiate the debt, that it is the only way. This is what we are engaged in today.

IA: You said that when the PSP headed the government, it said that its measures would make it possible to avoid the "rescue" and then we saw that this is not the case. However it is not suffering from a crisis as deep as that of the other European social-liberal parties, such as the Greek (PASOK) or Spanish (PSOE) parties. Why do you think this is not the case? How could this crisis develop in the future?

Catarina Martins: Countries are different and have different social majorities. There is a social base of the PSP, which is saying today that we must renegotiate the debt, and there is disaffection, increasing with every passing day, between the social base that supports the PSP and the leadership of this party. There are also a few leaders of the PSP who are finally saying that now we must renegotiate the debt, that privatization is killing the economy, that we are losing the capacity to invest, that we are losing sovereignty. But in reality the PSP continues to say that the solution is possible only in the framework of the memorandum of the Troika.

It is natural that in Portugal a part of the population thinks that the Welfare State was built by the PSP, although the Left fought for that. Because it is true that public education and the national health system were developed under Socialist governments. But it is also true that the PSP has turned its back on the Left on many occasions, it has turned its back on its social base, and is largely responsible for the discredit of politics that exists now. And it is a worrying phenomenon, because when people do not have confidence in their ability to organize, to be present both in the institutions and in the street, to "run inside and run outside", as we say in the Left Bloc, they lose power, they give up.

However we should point out the positive signs that exist in Portugal today: in September of this year we had successive demonstrations with a level of participation that we had not had since the early days of our revolution of 25 April 1974. This shows clearly that there is a change. This means that we are not living in a period of resignation. The people

who now take to the streets are not saying, "We want better austerity" or "We want a smiling Troika"... They are saying "the Troika should go and get....." and demanding an alternative.

Bipartisanship, this centre of interests that had governed the country, has already lost the confidence of the majority of the population and people are taking to the streets to express their demands. As a result, we are in a moment where we have to build new social majorities. That is, to mobilize all those who feel that bipartisanship has never provided them with answers, who understand now that the Troika project has suffered the same failure, that it is not controlling the debt and that it is increasing the deficit in order to have new pretexts to impose more austerity.

That is how the Troika works: it provokes the recession of the economy, unemployment skyrockets, the deficit remains out of control and the debt rises still further. And when that happens, it says "we need still more": more cuts in wages, more cuts in the Welfare state... It is a vicious circle that has a clear objective, which the Troika does not want to admit but which is clear to anyone who looks at what is happening in Europe: destroy the Welfare State and break the working class.

I think that we are on the point of building this social majority in Portugal and that this is a job that needs to be done, in which we are involved, about which we are enthusiastic. We see the importance of doing this with many forces and in a form that will be broad and non-sectarian, because we must unite to create this force. We need to revive the Left. In Portugal, this is the time to do it.

IA: Formally, the next elections you will have will be the municipal ones. At this congress there were discussions around the hypothesis of electoral alliances with the PS at this level, on the initiative of the minority motion. How could you envisage such a scenario?

Catarina Martins: I must say that at this time in Portugal the debate about the municipal elections

interests the "barons" of the big parties of bipartisanship who hold office more than it does the people of the Left. Our forecast is that there will be early legislative elections before the municipal elections, because the coalition is crumbling and we do not have confidence in presidential governments. We say that democracy must respond to the crisis.

If there is a political crisis because the government is incapable, because it no longer has support even in what was its traditional social base, that there is a coalition which people no longer understand, which is undermined by scandals, then we have to appeal to democracy.

So the first battle must have as its objective the overthrow of the government and the rejection of the state budget which is being discussed in Parliament. It is a budget which reduces wages and which does something very perverse: it exacerbates inequality. Portugal is one of the most unequal countries in Europe, according to all statistics and indicators. This government is preparing to implement a brutal tax increase which will not only reduce wages and will thus cause huge difficulties, but which makes taxation less progressive and which will therefore increase inequality and cause the destruction of public services.

The government knows that its budget will be rejected and is already saying that it will have to "refund" the Welfare State. But for it "refund" means privatizing health, privatizing social security and imposing 50,000 or 60,000 redundancies in the civil service. So, rejecting this budget, not letting it go through, that is the battle that interests people.

With regard to your question about the municipal elections: in the Left Bloc we take the position that we have to make alliances with parties and movements, whenever it is possible and whenever the whole Left unites to fight the Right that is installed in power. But these alliances must be based on programmes. What we do not accept are "tactician" games (imagine the absurdity of coalitions in some places with the PSP against the PCP and in others

with the PCP against the PSP...). Such games make no sense and in this regard, we do not make such tactical or arithmetic calculations. That is why we believe that we must have our own programmes and our own lists in the municipal elections; we must be prepared for that. But being prepared doesn't mean not building bridges, not allying with independents, with groups that are active in defence of public services, of public water supply (this is currently a debate in Portugal), nor does it mean that we do not make any coalitions with left parties. But then it must be all of the Left.

IA: Faced with the retreat into national identity that we see in Europe, the Bloc demands "more Europe". What Europe is it demanding?

Catarina Martins: what we have always said is that we need more Europe, but more of a Europe of peoples, more of a democratic Europe, more of a Europe based on solidarity. We have had a Europe of the "directory", in which the big countries control the small countries, and at the same time a Europe of finance, whose governments are not at the service of their people, but at the service of the financial system. The way in which the European Central Bank has been conceived proves it. That is where the inability to respond to the crisis comes from. This demonstrates that our analysis was correct.

We say that solutions do not come from nationalisms that isolate us from each other. We have always said that the nation was the space of democracy and as a result, we reject federalisms which put in question this space of democracy. But we need a more democratic Europe, a Europe which invests in employment, a Europe where the Central Bank (ECB) will be at the service of the peoples and not of finance, a Europe where all countries have a voice and not a Europe of the "directory".

What we propose are economic measures: the pooling of debt in Europe is necessary; the ECB must take action on the sovereign debts and not action that favours the bankers; we need strong concerted

action on a European level against capital flight and tax evasion (whether through offshore companies, transfers, etc.). We know that without cooperation on a European level most of these problems will not be resolved, which does not remove the responsibility of each government of each country to renegotiate the debt, to combat capital flight, to combat offshore companies... We do not accept that they do nothing on the grounds that everyone is waiting for Europe. This is a discourse with which governments are trying to deceive the people and which we refuse.

On the other hand we defend the need for a more democratic Europe and therefore we believe that we need to initiate a constituent process which would actually be discussed and voted on by the peoples. In Portugal no European treaty has ever been submitted to a referendum. The Portuguese population has never been called upon to give its opinion on anything at all that was decided in Europe: it was not consulted on the eurozone, on the Treaty of Lisbon, on the fiscal treaty, or any other! What we advocate, therefore, is a broad European debate involving all European organizations, so that all the peoples and all the countries are represented. We need to create a balance of power that does not currently exist at present in Europe, against the "directories" and against a Europe that has been captured by finance. We need such a debate.

We put forward a proposal: a bicameral Parliament, where one chamber represents the countries and the other the peoples. We have always been internationalists. We are internationalists. We are a Left in solidarity with peoples in solidarity. And of course the European space is a space of conquest for this solidarity, for this force, against the financial system. That is why we do not abandon Europe, we are very demanding about Europe and we will fight with all our might against this Europe of the "directories" and of finance.

IA: As a leader of the Left Bloc and as a member of Parliament, what do you think of the movements that have surrounded par-

liaments, such as the 25 September movement in Madrid and those that have taken place on some occasions in Portugal? What results can they have?

Catarina Martins: These are very demanding movements. In other words, democracy is not limited to electoral acts. Democracy is exercised every day. So if laws are adopted that are so violent against the peoples, it is good that the peoples call the parliaments to account. But it is important that these movements should be for democracy and should be pluralist. Because at this moment in Europe there are temptations towards a far-right populism that is against democracy, against representation.

The bourgeois bipartisan parliamentary system is not what we want; this is not the democracy we need. But the destruction of the representative bodies that exist would not change anything; it would give an even greater space to finance, because if finance is organized, the people must also organize. In Portugal we have a somewhat different political system from other European countries, because our Constitution is derived from the democratic revolution of the years of the "ongoing revolutionary process". It was really discussed and is very popular. Thus, despite all the deficiencies, we have a more representative democracy in Portugal, which means that the opposition parties have more possibilities to present draft legislation... It is not enough. But we must demand more and not less.

The movements which are appearing and which are making demands on parliaments are very important. The Left must understand this and be present. Some people say that movements of this type have never built anything. I think that is a mistake. They are building the alternative, they build ideas, they build political demands, they are fighting capital. If the Left is not in these movements, then yes, extreme right wing populism can fill the space and these movements, instead of being the builders of democracy, could become the destroyers of it. But we take on all our responsibilities. We are present and now these movements are reinforcing democ-

racy, strengthening the power of the people, the sovereignty of the people. They are very important.

IA: Another important issue addressed in this congress is that of the "government of the Left", also looking to the example of Syriza in Greece. How do you see this from the strategic point of view?

Catarina Martins: We believe that the government of the Left is both an instrument and a goal. It is an instrument for building when we say that we want a government of the Left and we make concrete proposals which should be the basis for the building of such a government. We are open to discussion regarding these proposals. To strengthen them, to create an alternative, we develop a critical space for discussion in order to change the social majorities, the relationships of forces. But it is also a goal, because the only way out of the crisis is a government of the Left, which breaks with the memoranda of the Troika, which renegotiates the debt, which recovers the wages that have been lost, which reclaims the dignity of labour, which does not tolerate people saying that it is finance that is supporting the world. It is labour which founded the world and that is why we have to impose respect for labour and solidarity with it.

A government of the Left is not an offer. It cannot be built on the basis of arithmetic "tactical manoeuvres", on the basis of parliamentary relationships of forces. This would be meaningless. The government of the Left will be built in the course of the struggle for the social majority and the majority of ideas. And so if someone speaks of a "government of the Left" by looking towards the present Parliament to see what could be a majority in favour of such a government, that will never come to anything. The arithmetic of this Parliament does not provide a basis for a government of the Left. Such a government will be the result of a reconfiguration of forces.

We have always put forward proposals of convergence. We have not sat on the "correct" side of History, saying that "we are right". We want to

change things now, by putting these proposals into action and thus creating social majorities.

There are difficulties, as there have always been on the left, but the Left Bloc overcomes these difficulties when everyone says that it is impossible. When the Bloc was formed, it united left currents which up until then had not been able to unite. Everyone said we would only survive for six months. Well, thirteen years later the Bloc is still there. Similarly, we were the only ones to say that it was possible to renegotiate the debt and now everyone is saying it.

The road to building a government of the Left is open. It will not be easy and nothing will drop down to us from the sky. Looking at the Greek example – however, Greece and Portugal are very different countries, with their own political, cultural experiences... - the example of Syriza is important because of its coherence. Syriza has always said that it was necessary to break with the memorandum of the Troika. In other words, there is no "good" austerity. There is no question of supporting a government which would be "the lesser evil" with the Troika, because there is no evil that is "lesser". It is in the nature of the Troika to reduce budgets for more sacrifices, more destruction, more bankruptcies. That is why the example of this coherence is so important for the European Left.

Syriza has grown because it has this coherence, because it understands that the problem is not a question of alternating governments, that what is needed is an alternative. The bipartisan system is useless. Other faces doing the same thing is not an answer, it is the loss of the heritage of the struggles of the Left. The example of the coherence of Syriza is for us important because the Left Bloc has always said that there cannot be "tactical manoeuvres" based on despair, that that leads to abandoning what is essential, the matrix of the Left, our matrix. A new social majority in Portugal, as in Europe, will be built by the Left that has kept its coherence. A Left which has the coherence of socialism, of internationalism, of the defence of labour.

IA: What role could the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) play?

Catarina Martins: In Parliament we have already voted together in favour of many initiatives and, recently, we took a step forward by presenting together with the PCP a motion of censure. We are very committed to this debate. The PCP must also discuss its positions, it will soon hold its congress, we'll see. We are completely open to mobilization, as always.

IA: What are the prospects for the general strike this coming November 14 in Portugal? In your opinion, what is the importance of such a form of struggle in several countries at the same time?

Catarina Martins: In Portugal general strikes are difficult, because employment is very precarious, unemployment is high and wages – including for those who have regular employment contracts - are very low (the minimum wage is less than €500, the nominal wage has been reduced to the level of ten years ago). But despite all these difficulties there will be a big mobilization. People are mobilized. So it is very important, because such a strike is a weapon in the struggle.

The Portuguese Right is at the moment developing a discourse about "the harmful effect of strikes on the economy" and other similar barbarisms. When there are so many people who cannot go on strike, it's easy to have this discourse and it is thoroughly irresponsible. A general strike involves solidarity between all sectors, for whom it is a very hard form of struggle, it's difficult and so we have to do it. It is important that there is a general strike at the very moment when the Right is against the right to

strike. To say "no" to that. The strike is the weapon of those who work, it is a response to the government, it is an act of resistance.

Moreover, this strike is all the more important for Portugal because it is an Iberian strike and because other European countries are also joining it. Because the government relies heavily on our isolation. We are a "small" country, we are "alone", "we must do what we are asked to do"... It is very important to understand that the austerity that is killing Portugal is the same austerity that is killing the whole of Europe. The fact that workers are rising up in solidarity, all together, has very great importance. It is a strong signal of a struggle in solidarity against capital and it is also important to show that we are all together, that the struggle in Portugal is the struggle in the Spanish State, the struggle in Greece, Cyprus, Malta... And also in France, Italy and other countries that will certainly join it. This is our Europe, built on solidarity, the Europe of labour, the Europe of the people. We must strengthen it.

For this Europe, the European general strikes, which we need to prepare, are a step forward. It was so difficult to get there. So many people said not so long ago that it was impossible and now look, we are getting there. We must continue, we must deepen the struggle. Because if we want to solve European problems in the governments where we will be, in the European Parliament, saying that Europe must be based on solidarity, this will only be possible if a struggle based on solidarity exists, in the workplaces, in the streets, in the popular mobilizations. For that reason too, this strike is very important.

DENMARK

A major mistake by the-Red Green Alliance

MICHAEL VOSS ·

This was the second National Budget since a centre-left government took power in September 2011. The first budget was also upported by the RGA. While the decision in the first year provoked almost no debate, this year a considerable opposition inside the party has evolved. In both cases, as stipulated by party rules, the National Leadership approved the decision, this year only by a 15 to 9 vote, though. The critical members of the party have put forward two major arguments.

Unemployment benefits

One argument concerns the issue of unemployment benefit. The former government changed the law on unemployment benefit in order to limit the period that one can receive allowances from the trade-union-administered unemployment scheme. This change of law will take effect from January 2013, and it has aroused anger and protests, especially from the trade unions and from the members and voters of the two workers' parties, Social Democracy (SD) and Socialist People's Party (SPP). [2]

For months a proposal to either get jobs to the unemployed or prolong the benefit period was the most important RGA demand for the National Budget. At times it was even called a non-negotiable demand. But in the end the RGA accepted much less. The opponents inside the party have argued strongly that the party undermined the protests and weakened the possibility of building a movement by accepting this less than minimal solution.

Break or no break?

The other major argument against the RGA vote is that the budget does not fulfill the conditions laid down by a decision of the RGA National Convention in May 2010, before the elections and the new centre-left government. As part of a text about the RGA and the expected change of government the resolution stated:

"The RGA encourages a new government to make a break that replaces the policies from the previous government with policy that is based on social equality, solidarity and sustainability. A budget that marks such a break will also have our votes. But we will under no circumstances vote in favour of a budget that:

- includes setbacks;
- doesn't include significant improvements;
- is the summary of one year of austerity policies, decided together with the parties of the right."

Opponents of supporting the budget argue that the budget includes cutbacks for some groups of working people or poor people. More important is that the national budget actually sums up one year of austerity policy. Since the first national budget of this government major reforms have been voted without the support of RGA, but instead with the support of the liberal party and the conservative party.

These reforms are clearly based on a neoliberal approach aiming at increasing labour output and increasing the income gap between the unemployed and people with jobs. In line with this overall approach capital and high income layers are not forced to pay any part of the bill.

One of them is a tax reform, which lowered the taxes for the higher incomes. Another is a social secu-

city reform that made it even more difficult for disadvantaged people to get a state-funded job.

On top of that there was no room in the budget for expansionary policies that might improve social welfare and create jobs in the public sector – and no single element that would make the rich pay.

In negotiating the budget the RGA succeeded in getting some relief for disadvantaged people or people with health problems, but nothing that changed the overall direction. Some extra funding for green policies was added to the budget, and a number of minor improvements in other areas – as a result of RGA proposals. But when the RGA National Leadership accepted to vote for budget without a real solution for the unemployed the last chance was lost to seriously argue that the budget contained major improvements.

Lesser evil?

The parliamentary group and the majority of the National Leadership argue that they were taken by surprise tactically when the Liberal Party entered the negotiations on the budget – after the party had for a long time stated that they would not help the government to get a parliamentary majority for the budget.

This made the leadership and the MPs fear that the government would agree with the Liberal party about the budget. The leadership feared that the electorate would criticise the RGA because (i) it would look as if their non-negotiable demand had forced the government into the arms of the Liberal party, and (ii) the party had turned down the government's offer for the very partial solution for some of the unemployed. Some parts of the majority even argue that the RGA has to vote for the budget to prevent a budget with the Liberal party that

would be even worse, that is the "lesser evil" argument.

SAP, the Danish section of the FI, has been part of the RGA since its inception in 1989. Members of the SAP is actively building the RGA and its youth organization the SUF [3] A National Assembly of SAP was already planned for the weekend two weeks after the agreement on the national budget. The agenda was quickly changed to make room for discussion and decisions on a statement on the budget.

The headline of the statement is "The agreement on the national budget was a major mistake". It concludes that the necessary conditions for supporting a budget were not met. The statement also emphasizes the abandonment of the demand of job security as a serious tactical mistake – that was even more serious because the party was running a campaign about unemployment benefit and jobs at the time.

The statement calls for all parts of the RGA to accelerate their commitment to the campaign – especially to try to mobilize local branches of the trade unions around these demands in order to put pressure the government.

Furthermore SAP calls upon every local section of RGA to discuss the decision and to adopt critical statements for the leadership.

SAP promises to work for the next National Convention of the RGA in May 2013 to make a negative balance sheet on the decision on the National Budget and to reaffirm the original principles that were neglected this year. Finally SAP calls delegates to vote only for opponents of the national budget vote when the National Convention elects a new National Leadership.

FRANCE

Competitiveness: victory goes to the pack

CHARLES MICHALOUX ·

The offensive has been remarkably conducted: leaks organized around the contents of the Gallois Report on competitiveness; a battle engaged on Internet by the "pigeons" against the (very limited) planned increase in capital gains tax on share transfers, in the name of the "entrepreneurial spirit"; a barrage of interviews and statements by the MEDEF, the national employers' organisation, against "anti-business racism" and the "tax burden"; an ultimatum by the bosses of a hundred of the biggest companies, grouped in the AFEP (French Association of Private Entrepreneurs), defending their own interests without mixing them up with those of smaller companies); publication of the Gallois Report, followed by the announcement of government measures, reinforced by the press conference of the President of the Republic. In less than a month it was all cut and dried.

This victory of the pack is a lesson: the employers have used every lever to defend their options, being relayed (if there was still any need for it) by the mainstream media, making themselves heard by attentive ears in the spheres of power, not hesitating to make barely veiled threats, and finally imposing their policy as the only possible and legitimate one ("there is no alternative..."). You begin to dream that workers, with their different organizations, would be able to do the same - even though the means are disproportionate - by an ideological, political battle on a large scale.

The measures are being prepared to be adopted by parliament: a reduction (of approximately €20 billion) of tax on businesses, an increase in the rate of

VAT (€10 billion), a reduction (€60 billion) of government spending, with a timescale of two to five years, depending on the measures. The bill is a hefty one and it will not fail to have rapid effects on consumption, on public (and also private) investment, on employment and purchasing power. Europe is in recession; France is close to being so. With this jackpot, it will not just get there - it will run! What is happening, on quite a different level of course, in Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy gives us a foretaste. This also confirms that Southern Europe is not an exception or a borderline case, but a training ground for the pack of the employers and their ideologues.

The violence of the tone employed, the determination of the protagonists, their excessive invective, really amounts to a global political offensive against the present government (aimed at making it give in easily, as the Right explains very well), but especially against workers and all those who oppose this policy of austerity. It is quite simply a question of blaming workers by holding them responsible for the crisis in general and the problems of competitiveness in particular. What is involved is nothing less than the deployment of forces for the next phase, where the remaining social gains and rights, which in the eyes of the rich and powerful hinder the recovery of the market economy market and of profits, will come under serious attack.

To clearly define this so as to understand that the battle is and will be harsh, difficult and crucial should not make us neglect to take apart the arguments used by the opposing camp. This is also a condition of the credibility of the solutions that we propose and of making all those who defend them convinced of what they are arguing. So let us talk about competitiveness.

Competitiveness: what are we talking about?

In the wake of the famous Gallois Report and at the origin of all the reasoning of the employers and now of the government, we find the lack of competitiveness of the French economy. The share of France in global trade declined by 42 per cent between 2000 and 2011 and its share in European exports by 25 per cent over the decade. France is therefore losing market share on the international level and the contribution of industry to the production of wealth (Gross Domestic Product or GDP) continues to decline in the country, with imports from Asia for goods of current consumption and Germany especially for industrial equipment (machines, etc.).

Competitiveness therefore concerns the international market in sectors involved in exports, so that means mainly the products of manufacturing industry (and almost no services). This definition, commonly taken as a revealed truth, deserves to be discussed, because it is far from clear that the purpose of the economy is to sell more and more goods abroad. It could easily be argued that its aim should be to meet the priority needs of the population in the best possible conditions of quality and cost. Moreover, this is the case, including within well-established international institutions.

But in the world as it is, let us recognize that these are today the instruments for measuring competitiveness. This loss of competitiveness is due to production costs and in particular the "cost of labour", say the advocates of the "competitiveness shock", even in its governmental version of the "confidence pact". Nothing is less sure, even by comparing with Germany, as has become the rule.

"Cost of labour": not so sure!

The employers and the media always hammer on this nail. However:

- Despite the 35-hour week that is so much denounced by employers, the French work more than the Germans: **an average of 1,476 hours per**

year, compared with 1,413 in Germany. The actual weekly working time, on average for the workforce, **is 38 hours in France** (the 35-hour week was got rid of a long time ago), **compared to 35.7 hours for German workers**, due to the many part-time and casual jobs that flourish on the other side of the Rhine. At the end of 2011, the share of these mini-jobs in Germany was nearly 22 per cent (the same as in England, another social paradise) compared to 14 per cent in France (the same as in the United States) – which is already high.

- Per hour worked, **productivity is higher in France: €45.4** of wealth produced (value added) per hour, **compared to €42.3 in Germany.**

Figure 1

Source: INSEE, Eurostat and OECD (data for 2011)

- **The overall cost of labour** (wages plus social contributions from employers) appears to be higher in France (€35.3 per hour) than in Germany (€32), but this is because a part of the social contributions paid by employers have been transferred to workers in the form of various taxes and duties, or even to private insurance (the dream of the big French bosses!). But **in manufacturing industry, the industry that exports, the costs are pretty much the same (€35.9 as against €35.4)** and the slight (50 cents!) difference can explain nothing.

Social security contributions by employers: too heavy?

The social security contributions of employers (SSCE) are too heavy, say in chorus their spokespersons and devoted advocates. Compared with Germany SSCE represent in France about 2 per cent more as a proportion of the wealth produced in the country (GDP) and 10 per cent more compared to the United Kingdom and the United States. The gap comes from the levels of social protection (sickness, old age, unemployment).

If we reduce public funding of social protection, then the door is open (it is already half-open) to the private insurance companies which will make those who sign up pay not according to income, like today, but according to the risk the companies consider they are taking. The countries which already practise this give an illustration: insurance against chronic illness or a precarious situation is so expensive that whole layers of the population no longer have access to it. According to the CSA-Europe Assistance barometer, 30 per cent of Germans stated in October 2012 that they had chosen not to have health care in the previous 12 months. They were only 15 per cent a year before. In France, on the same date, they were already 27 per cent.

National accounts, accessible via INSEE, make it possible to compare the respective shares in value added (VA) of social security contributions (SSC) by employers and net dividends (dividends paid minus income). This is what Henri Sterdyniak did group for the OFCE. [1]

- Since 1984, due to multiple exemptions from contributions, **the share of employers (SSCE) has declined quite clearly**, from almost 17 per cent to slightly more than 15 per cent before the crisis; since 2009 it has risen a little because value added has stagnated or decreased. So we can hardly accuse the SSCE of being responsible for the loss of competitiveness of the French economy...

- On the other hand, **the share of value added transferred to the dividends of shareholders has more than tripled** over the same period (from 1.5 per cent to 5 per cent of VA). A real choice.

This is one expression, among others, of the deformation of the sharing of wealth produced over the past 30 years - for the benefit of big business and the privileged at the expense of workers. Over this period, the transfer is gigantic: nearly a dozen points of the added value generated by enterprises (or of GDP, which is the national sum of it), estimated at €2,000 billion.

Wages and exports: a link?

In France, over the last 25 years, it is interesting to compare the evolution of wage competitiveness (measured by the gap between unit labour costs in France compared to the competition, as liberal writers advocate) with export performance (as measured by market share, Export market share on the graph).

The work of Michel Husson (see note 1) enables us to distinguish three phases:

- **Between 1995 and 2001**, wage competitiveness improves by about 15 points. Despite this export performance does not increase.

- **Between 2001 and 2005**, the loss of competitiveness causes a fall in export performance, partially due to the rise in the level of the euro during this period, which makes French production more expensive outside the euro zone.

- **From 2004**, the drop in exports is continuous. However the cost competitiveness of France has remained stable. So we cannot blame the loss of export market share on that.

? First conclusion: France's loss of market share is not mechanically linked to "excessive" wage costs or too heavy social contributions for employers. Any plan to improve France's performance that is focused on a "lower cost of labour" is based on a flawed analysis. Moreover, it is not an analysis but a real ideological prejudice, a selling point for another antisocial product.

Zero effect on exports

If we apply the recommendations of the big employers and the policies they have decided on, what will be the effect on the export performance of French products, which has actually been declining for years now?

Depending on the industrial sector concerned, labour costs represent between 20 and 40 per cent of the final cost of the product - which in addition

incorporates the profits of the manufacturing firm. The transfer of the social contributions of the employers to VAT or the CSG (or by reducing tax, which comes to the same thing) at a level of 2 per cent of the cost of labour would thus have a maximum impact of 0.4 to 0.8 per cent on the price (counting large). In other words, for an average car costing €15,000 €, for example, the theoretical reduction of the export price would be between €60 and €120. And for an industrial machine costing €150,000, it would be between €600 and €1,200. Can anyone seriously believe that it this would have on any impact abroad? Obviously not. It is real life that gives an answer to this false debate.

German products, to continue making the comparison, are more expensive than French products. In the car industry, the difference is of the order of 7-8 per cent. In industrial capital goods, it is even higher. And yet "made in Germany" sells well in Europe and elsewhere, because it is the guarantee of a quality that justifies its price in the eyes of the buyers.

On the other hand, the average positioning of French products (with few exceptions) prevents them from occupying this place at the upper end of the market and, therefore, raising their prices. And of course, lowering them does not solve this problem.

Competitiveness: substantial factors

Real competitiveness cannot be summed up by the "cost of labour" which is just one component and not the main one. Otherwise, what regions should be taken as reference points? Asia, Latin America, Central Europe? Admittedly, wages are lower there, but on the one hand, they are increasing under the pressure of workers in these countries, and on the other hand, they do not make these regions centres of innovation, competitors in the front rank - at least for the moment.

The case of Slovakia (included in the first three graphs on purpose) is eloquent. People work longer hours there, but with much lower productivity per

capita. If Germany has built several production platforms there and outsources a lot, it is still Germany that is the reference point and not Slovakia. Unless we imagine France and Europe doing the same with Spain and Italy, which is far from possible and desirable. The refrain that we hear today in the media on the rapid recovery of the trade balance of these two countries is fraudulent. Exports continue to fall, but imports consumed are now falling faster due to the sharp reduction in household income – which produces a slight drop in the deficit: the bloodletting will kill the cured patient.

The critical factors of competitiveness are different and more substantial.

For decades under-investment in French industry has been patent, which reflects on the quality and positioning of its products. Some quite modern facts strongly attest to this (September 2012 Xerfi study):

- **Industry missed the turn to robotisation and automation.** There are less than 35,000 robots in France, against more than 62,000 in Italy and 150,000 in Germany. A little more than 3,000 new robots were installed in France in 2011, in Germany there were approximately 20,000. This small dispositive is completely outdated. A robot lasts more than 20 years in France, against a dozen elsewhere.
- **As regards heavy professional computerization,** France has barely more than 23,000 secure servers. Relating this to the number of inhabitants to take into account the difference in size of the countries concerned, France has 4 secure servers for 10,000 inhabitants, Japan 7, Germany 10, the United Kingdom and the United States 16. Thus, a ratio of 1 to 2 or even 1 to 4 with the best-equipped countries.
- Considering the age and the saturation of these systems, **14 million working hours are lost** in French enterprises with more than 50 employees, because of computer failures (survey CA Technologies, 2011). Relating to the number of enterprises, this is more than 1,000 hours per compa-

ny, 20 per cent more than in Spain and twice as much as in Germany, England and Italy. During these breakdowns, productivity obviously falls; according to the same survey it is then at 57 per cent of its normal level, with all the costs that involves.

- **France is behind in the field of research and development.** It is now in 12th position, according to the latest ranking of the OECD, far behind the major developed countries (USA, Germany, Japan) and below the general average. To take just research in private enterprises, the German effort exceeds the French by 70 per cent. More than 4/5 of this private effort is centred in industry, but in Germany industry represents 22 per cent of the production of wealth (GDP), in France scarcely 11 per cent, half as much. How can we be surprised, under these conditions, by the lack of innovation and therefore of competitiveness?

Two elements complete this tableau:

- **Technical training courses** are undervalued in France and produce each year only a small trickle of technicians and engineers. This undervaluing continues on the labour market, in terms of pay for the engineers, technicians and skilled workers whom industry needs. This is not the case in Germany and even Italy.

- **Small and medium-sized companies (SMC)** are exploited by the major companies on whom they depend for orders. There are therefore half as many of them in France as in Germany and a third less than in Italy. In theory they provide jobs by their number, but with the crisis they have become a reservoir of unemployment. It is well-known that the situation and the position of these small and medium companies are different in Germany and Italy, where they are an important part of the system of production.

Finally the deficit of the French trade balance (the difference between imports and exports) will be roughly €75 billion by the end of 2012. In this context the industrial balance alone will be negative by

more than €45 billion (60 per cent of the total). At the end of 2011 the industrial surplus will be almost €270 billion euros in Germany and €60 billion in Italy. There you have competitiveness, but not primarily because of costs.

? Second conclusion: a policy of strengthening competitiveness should address itself above all to these key issues. Education and training, computerisation and automation, research and innovation, fiscal policy and cheap financial resources for SMCs. There is no lack of subjects and the "cost of labour" is not top of the list. First and foremost, an industrial policy is quite simply a policy, one that corresponds to long term priorities and needs to be given economic and social guidance: the opposite of liberalism (of left or right)!

The big employers who went on the offensive on the issue of competitiveness manage industrial groups, service companies, banks and high technology companies. For all of them, their complaints about the "cost of labour" are out of place. Globalised, having long since spread their investments and their sites all over the planet, these groups do not face a problem of export competitiveness in France.

Their offensive, as we know, is motivated by other French, European and global requirements.

To get an idea of what they are cooking up, here for example are some excerpts from a recent report from the European Central Bank (ECB) [2]

: "The priority should be to make wages react (flexibly) to the conditions of the labour market[...]. Increased wage differentiation between different types of workers and jobs is necessary [...] Such policies should also contribute to increasing the downward pressure exerted on wages by the unemployed..."

These people know what they want and what they are doing.

SPANISH STATE:

14N, the day after

MIGUEL ROMERO ·

All this without great preparation by the organisers, so that the "climate" still seemed quite cold the evening before. Yet hundreds of thousands of people came onto the streets knowing that there were not – in the short and medium term – perspectives of change, that it would be necessary to continue to suffer the "cuts" and to resist come what may. All this can only be the expression of a deep, powerful and lasting wave. The spokespersons of the government and the employers can thus repeat that "the policy of reforms will continue" and the media can speak of the "failure" of the mobilisation. The day after the general strike, "El País" opened its pages to Emilio Botín [the CEO of Bank Santander] to explain that "there is no plan B". It is true. However, the dominators begin to fear the social resistance which they face. This much we have won; it will be consolidated with difficulty, but it would be a crime to lose it.

If demonstrations count, what meaning does the general strike have? To begin with, they formed part of the general strike: without this, they would not have had the same success. But above all, the battle to paralyse economic activity and radically reorganise social life – the natural and specific objectives of a general strike – continues to be a space of fundamental political conflict between those at the top and those at the bottom. That is why it is necessary to make a balance sheet of what has worked well or not so well on the ground, the advances and the setbacks, and what needs to be taken into account for the future.

Obstacles to overcome

November 14 showed that there are some "black holes" which have not been resolved, the main one being the banking sector. At a time of growing financialisation of the economy, it is worrying that class based trade unionism is so weak in the banks, as shown again by 14 N. We are beginning to get used to the fact that strikes hardly affect this sector. Yet in the 1980s, this trade unionism was among the most combative. It was weakened politically and morally from the interior; the Workers' Commissions (CC.OO.) bear a heavy responsibility for this. We should today sound an alarm signal: we cannot resign ourselves to leaving the banks in the hands of corporatist trades unionism.

Commerce is another "black hole" but an advance seemed to take place with the participation in the strike by small traders. This was not the case with large scale retail, on the other hand, and there has been no information on actions in the department stores. In any case, we hope that the consumption strike – an initiative which corresponds to objectives very much present at the assemblies of 15M – had some influence and that it can contribute to the citizen based character of the strike and to its extension.

However, there seems to have been a setback in transport, a sector where we see the damaging consequences of "minimum services" when the latter are not self regulated but established by the regional governments, with the objective of weakening the strikes and not guaranteeing essential services – which are being destroyed on a daily basis by privatisation. The unions commit an error in appearing to agree to these "minimal services", generally abusive, on which they have practically no margin of negotiation. The General Confederation of Labour (CGT) has done well to reject them. Better

to let the administration impose them directly without linking hands with it.

It's about who gives the orders

The political meaning of a general strike does not fundamentally reside in the character of its demands. In an explicit or implicit way, it brings out a conflict of power: for a time, and in a limited context, it is about who gives the orders. For this reason, the political result of a general strike is not very well measured in quantitative terms, although they have their importance. What is fundamental is knowing who is weakened and who is strengthened politically, the strike movement or its adversaries.

The established powers have well understood this and that is why the "regulatory" mechanisms for strikes are ever more coercive. For the old trade union s movement: "the best strike law was one that didn't exist". A wise adage, confirmed by experience. But the consensus linked to the social state, strengthened by the practices of "social dialogue", has ended up in creating a more oppressive regulation where the control of the government over the development of strikes has improved, and where the strike movement has renounced its right to self regulation. To this direct regulation is added other instruments of anti-strike coercion by the government and the employers, from police repression to government fines, to threats of dismissal and so on.

The aim is to politically demotivate the strike, to stop it succeeding in weakening the established powers. That is why, for a general strike to be a success, it must be based on its own legitimacy and must inevitably clash with legality. That presupposes taking on significant individual and collective risks and being in a position to protect those who take it. It was not by chance that, in the big mobilisations of October 2010 in France, all the alarm signals of the system targeted the strike in the refineries: a legitimate action, illegal because it radically rejected the idea of "minimum service", left the petrol pumps dry and opened a new front in the struggle for control of transport. The majority trade union federations recoiled before this test of

strength. And this ended up weakening the strike movement.

The legitimacy/legality conflict should be a central, practical question in the preparation of future general strikes. So it is necessary to organise from today an effective rejection front against any anti-strike legislation concocted by the government and the employers, a protection for the victims of legal repression already in force, but also against the coercion of employers at work, invisible, yet very effective: these threats begin well before the strike day and should thus receive an early response. But beyond these immediate tasks, we cannot avoid a major political challenge: no significant victory can be won by submitting the social struggle to legal provisions. That is the lesson of the struggle of the Mortgage Victims Platform (PAH).

The challenges of "the day after"

An area in which there has undoubtedly been a significant advance, preceded by others in the same direction, was in the social extension of the mobilisation, the consequence of movements like the "tides" which develop in the sectors targeted by the most serious attacks against public services, in an autonomous manner, by learning to resolve their specific difficulties and teaching us how to face our common problems (for example, with the incorporation of the A.P.A. [Association of Parents of Pupils] in the "green wave" mobilisations [against cuts in public education]).

This extension also expresses the political maturity of 15M [the movement of the indignant], which has definitively emerged from stagnation, particularly starting from the demonstrations of "encircling the parliament" at the end of September. We should also note a pleasant last minute surprise: the support of Euskal Herria Bildu [the Basque left nationalist movement] for the demonstrations called on November 14 by the ESK, CNT and CGT unions and other collectives in the big Basque cities. Comrades from this region will tell us if this sign and others could indicate a modification of the approach of the

nationalist left in relation to mobilisations of national scope.

This has created a paradoxical situation where social indignation grows, despite the lack of political perspectives in favour of significant changes in relation to the dominant socio-economic orthodoxy. Such conditions could lead to the passivity of a majority of the population, but for now indignation is stronger than resignation. That will not last forever. The challenges of the "day after" are then still more urgent

What will the CC.OO. and UGT do? Continue to advocate the dead end of a referendum [on the budget cuts]? If we wish to fix a central theme against governmental policy, why not centre on the refusal to pay the debt? That would be a magnificent objective for a new Iberian action, or even for a European mobilisation.

With the general strike of 14N, a step has been made and it is necessary to prepare the following one. This is not a cheerful perspective, but it is unavoidable. We have already lived through five years of crisis. The situation will not change from one day to another. But there are indications that things are moving, of very diverse kinds: from Syriza in Greece to 14N in the Spanish state, via the courageous experiences of the "green tide" and now the "white tide" [against health cuts]. It is about learning from our experiences, recognising their limits and working to transcend them.

For example, the CCOO and UGT made a huge error in accepting the pensions reform of the Zapatero government. Now, Rajoy relies on the latter to prepare a new offensive against the right to a decent pension a basic right for those who work. The CCOO and UGT now have a magnificent opportunity to rectify the error.

The European strike and the construction of a political alternative

14N did not work so well at the European scale, even if this initiative sent a signal in the right direction, which should have led to some concern in the salons of the Troika. In reality, it remained an Iberian strike. The news coming from Portugal is quite good: broad popular sympathy; an impact for the strike similar to that in Spain, with a better impact on public transport. The demonstrations were smaller, but the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers (CGTP) does not have the tradition of linking demonstrations and strikes, and if it did so this time, it was in part under the pressure of the Left Bloc; on the other hand, only two days ago, there were big demonstrations against the visit of German chancellor Angela Merkel.

We can understand that 14N had no great echo in Greece, after the strikes of November 6 and 7. The biggest concern is the very slender impact of 14N in France and its restriction in Italy to vanguard actions. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) will certainly draw triumphalist balance sheets, but we are still very far from the European general strike. To organise it, much more than a date and a press release – the only things we can expect from the ETUC – are needed. It is an urgent task to create adequate tools to advance in the convergence of social struggles in the EU, using all the opportunities which arise, including ETUC initiatives.

As for the political left, we are also far from the "Syriza model" which with time, seems to cast off opportunist temptations to respond to the basic question - how to build unitary left alternatives which break from the bipartisan corset and create attempts at radical and credible change inside society? This need is not long term, it is an immediate political question. The necessary change in the relationship of social forces will take place without a change in the political relationship of forces inside the left. These are intertwined processes, but relatively autonomous, with specific tasks and responsibilities in each area.

RUSSIA SOLIDARITY

First responses to solidarity appeal

PENELOPE DUGGAN ·

Paris, France, Monday 3rd of December

In the context of an international week of protests against repression in Russia which is hitting dozens of political and social activists a delegation composed of Arlette Laguiller (LO), Olivier Besancenot (NPA) and Martine Billard (PG) representing LO (Lutte ouvrière, Workers Struggle), PG (Parti de Gauche, Left Party), NPA (Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste, New Anti-capitalist Party) the Alternatifs (the Alternatives), the Communist Party (PCF), the FASE (Fédération pour une Alternative Sociale et Écologique, Federation for a Socialist and Ecological Alternative) and EELV (Europe écologie-Les Verts, Europe Ecology-the Greens), was received today at 2pm for almost forty minutes by two representatives of the Russian embassy, including Mr Léonide Kadychev, minister and advisor to the Paris embassy.

During the interview the representatives of the Russian embassy explained that they could not give any information about the prisoners because they were the responsibility of the judicial system but the very badly-informed French delegation would be welcome in Russia to see for itself. The French delegation for its part undertook to continue its campaign against the repressive laws in Russia and for the release of all the imprisoned democrats.

Press statement by the NPA. Translation by International Viewpoint.

Milan, Italy, Monday 3rd of December, 2012

In Milan a symbolic "flash mob" took place under the flag of Russian Federation located in the center of the city in preparation of "Expo2015".

Comrades from Sinistra Critica chained their hands and gagged their mouths to protest against the condition of Russian prisoners, distributing flyers in Italian and English — and wearing signs such as "Stop political repression in Russia", "No more impunity for authorities", "Freedom for arrested for the events in the Bolotnava square", "Freedom for all political prisoners".

Colombo, Sri Lanka, Thursday 29th of November, 2012

A delegation led by Dr Vickramabahu Karunathne of the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) handed in a letter of protest to the Russian Embassy. The letter was signed by representatives of opposition political parties, leftists, trade-unionist and human rights activists.

These included the Tamil National Alliance, Democratic People's Front, New Democratic Party-Marxist Leninist, Frontline Socialist Party, Lawyers for Democracy, Health Services Trade Union Alliance, Ceylon Teachers' Union, United Federation of Labour, Federation of Media Employees' Trade Unions, Commercial and Industrial Workers' Union, Committee for the Investigation of the Disappeared, Movement for the Release of Political Prisoners, Young Lawyers.

London, Britain, Thursday 29th of November 2012

A lively protest was held at the Russian embassy in London last night (Thursday) to demand the release of democratic and left activists currently in Russian gaols, and an end to state repression. In attendance were Russian human rights campaigners from the group Speak Up! and student supporters

of Pussy Riot from Goldsmiths college, as well as members of Socialist Resistance and Counterfire.

Chants, in English and Russian, included: 'Free the political prisoners!', 'Free Pussy Riot!', 'Russia without Putin!' (it sounds better in Russian). Protestors were informed that the picket was backed by film director Ken Loach and Labour MP John McDonnell, among others.

In his message of support for Vladimir Akimenkov, Michael Kosenko, Stepan Zimin and Nikolai Kavkazskii Ken Loach said:

"The continued oppressive treatment of dissidents makes a mockery of the pretence that Putin's Russia is a tolerant and democratic country. I support the call for the immediate release of those imprisoned for political engagement. The true patriots are those who fight to end injustice and oppression in their homeland."

From *Socialist Resistance*.

Frankfurt, Germany, Friday 30th of November, 2012

Demonstrators picketed the Russian consulate-general in Frankfurt giving out leaflets to passers by and to those going in and out of the Consulate General. Despite a police presence they were able to continue their action.

They handed in a letter of protest - an abridged version of the Russian call for solidarity - to the consul-general's deputy.

There will be a protest in Berlin on Thursday 6th of December.

Geneva, Switzerland, Friday 30th of November 2012

There was a protest action outside Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation before the United Nations in Geneva. It was a first step, and it was decided to prepare follow-up events in the next future.

Earlier protests

Brussels, Belgium, Saturday 27th of October

On Saturday the 27th of October, the Young Anti-Capitalists (JAC, Jeunesse Anti-capitaliste) responded to the call from comrades in Russia and held a symbolic picket outside the embassy of the Russian Federation. They were showing their support for Konstantin Lebedev, imprisoned since the 17th of October and Léonid Razvojaev, kidnapped the same day then imprisoned and tortured, for Sergueï Oudaltsov, whose freedom is seriously threatened and well as for all the political prisoners from the "6th of May events".

FEATURES

In-depth analysis from International Viewpoint's Features section



A Plea for an Ecological Reconstruction of Marxism

DANIEL TANURO · 3 December 2012

Global warming exemplifies this constraint. In order to stabilize the climate system, the final energy consumption should fall by 50% in the European Union, and 75% in the US, by 2050 (UN, World Economic and Social Outlook 2011). Such objectives cannot be achieved without a reduction in material production and transportation, at least in the so-called "developed" countries. It's not enough to limit growth.

At the most, the energy system based on fossil fuels must be replaced by another one, renewable, completely new and different. A huge mutation must be carried out within two generations. It requires investments and thus additional energy consumption. In other words, the transition itself, at least in the beginning, will be an additional source of emissions and these must absolutely be compensated. Therefore, a plan is necessary, based on energy efficiency, not cost-efficiency.

It goes without saying that this constraint cannot be met within the framework of capitalism. It would be absurd to hope capitalism could follow a plan, reduce the production and ban the profit as the criteria for investment. The only solution is to get rid of capitalism.

Nevertheless, the ecological constraint means a radical change in the objective conditions for the transition to socialism. The question arises: is Marx's thought relevant to cope with it? Some say "no". John B. Foster says "yes", ecology is at the heart of Marxism (JB Foster, *Marx's Ecology*). My thesis is a bit different:

? firstly, Marx's conception of human-nature relationship is a pertinent framework for the discussion on the so-called "ecological crisis"

? secondly, his critique of capitalism provides necessary tools for the understanding of this crisis

? but "Marx's ecology" is only a potentiality. Its implementation requires a critical reappropriation, a reconstruction. Two pitfalls must be avoided: apology and anachronism.

I have no time to discuss Marx's materialist conception of nature, of human nature, of the historical relationship between humankind and nature and its evolution. I pass immediately to the second point: his critique of capitalism as a tool to understand the so-called "ecological crisis".

Marx's anticipations

Anticipations of the way the human-nature relationship would evolve under capitalism are numerous and remarkable in Marx's work. They are not intuitions but rigorous conclusions arising from his analysis of the dynamics of accumulation.

First of all, it should be noted that, for Marx, labor exploitation and plunder of nature are two inseparable aspects of accumulation. For four reasons:

– Firstly, the human labor force itself is a natural resource. "The natural force of people" and "the natural force of the earth" are "the only two sources of wealth", looted by capitalism;

– Secondly, the use of labor force as a commodity requires as a precondition the producer's natural force to be separated from other natural resources, that is to say the capitalist appropriation of land. Capitalist industrialization and urbanization would have been impossible without this "violent rift" between humans and their "inorganic body";

– Thirdly: the monopoly of land by landowners allows them to capture a share of the surplus value as a rent, at the expense of other sectors and the rest of society. Taken as a consumer, society pays products of the soil above their price of production, which means a waste of social labour;

– Fourthly: the combined exploitation of labor and nature has consequences both for agriculture and industry. In the countryside, it promotes a more intensive and specialized agriculture. In the city, it helps to offset the fall in the rate of profit by a relative decrease in the value of the labor force, due to cheaper subsistence products.

The capacity of this analysis to capture the present increasing integration of industry, agriculture and finance and its consequences is obvious in Marx's conclusion at the end of the section on rent, in *Capital*:

"Large-scale industry and large-scale mechanised agriculture work together. If distinguished originally by the fact that the first lays waste and destroys principally labor-power, hence the natural power of human beings, whereas the latest more directly exhausts the natural vitality of the soil, they join hands in the further course of development in that the industrial system in the countryside also enervates the laborers, and industry and commerce on their share supply agriculture with the means for exhausting the soil" (*Capital*, Volume 3, Chapter XLVII)

Productivism?

Marx is no "productivist": he opposes the production of use-values to that of exchange values. In *Capital*, he makes clear that the first is bounded by the fact that human needs are finite, while the second "has no end" because "the beginning and the end are one and the same thing, money"(...). "Therefore, the movement of capital has no limits" (*Capital*, Vol 1, Chapter 4). More exactly, no other limit than capital itself, which implies exploitation of the producers and appropriation of nature. The formula by which Marx posits that capital depletes the only two sources of wealth - the soil and the worker – is a direct result of this analysis.

The long-term implications of the dynamics of unlimited value accumulation are explored with amazing prescience in a little known passage from the *Grundrisse*:

"It will be necessary to explore Nature in all directions in order to discover new objects properties and new uses, to exchange, across the universe, the products of all latitudes and all countries, and to submit the fruits of nature to artificial treatments in order to give them new use values. One will therefore maximally develop the Science of nature" (*Grundrisse*, Chapter on capital, my translation).

Genetic engineering, appropriation of genomes and industrial biomimicry fit perfectly within this anticipation.

Some consider Marx's faith in the possibilities of development of productive forces as equivalent to the absurd neoliberal notion of absolute substitutability of capital to resources. The following quotation shows the opposite is true:

"Suppose labour-saving machinery, chemical aids, etc., are more extensively used in agriculture, and that therefore constant capital increases technically, not merely in value, but also in mass, then in agriculture (as in mining) it is not only a matter of the social, but also of the natural productivity. It is possible for the increase of social productivity in agriculture to barely compensate, or not even compensate, for the decrease in natural power — this compensation will nevertheless be effective only for a short time." (*Capital*, Vol 3, Chapter XLV)

Why does Marx write that an increasing social productivity will fail or just not even compensate for the loss of natural productivity? Because he knows, thanks to Liebig, that the increase in agricultural productivity is not a linear but a decreasing function of the capital invested in the soil.

Why does he write that compensation will be temporary anyway? Because he is aware of the fact that investments in capital can only postpone the consequences of the rupture in the nutrients cycle, driven by urbanization.

Agriculture and industry: uneven and combined development

Understanding the uneven and combined development of agriculture and capitalist industry allows Marx to identify a series of specific contradictions. I'll mention five, briefly.

1. Increasing fluctuations of agricultural prices.

"It is in the nature of things that vegetable and animal substances whose growth and production are subject to certain organic laws cannot be suddenly augmented in the same degree as machines and other fixed capital, or coal, etc., whose reproduction can be rapidly accomplished. It is therefore inevitable that the increase of the portion of constant capital consisting of fixed capital, machinery, etc., should considerably outstrip the portion consisting of organic raw materials, so that demand for the latter grows more rapidly than their supply, causing their price to rise" (*Capital*, Vol 3, Chapter VI).

Marx deduces a tendency to alternating inflation and depreciation in the price of agricultural commodities, resulting in the strengthening of the main regions of production and increased investment in these areas, so that the competition on the world market becomes even more unfavorable for other areas. This explains the formation in the course of capitalist development of large zones of monoculture destroying food sovereignty, ruining small farmers and transforming vast areas into green deserts.

– 2. Therefore, there is a trend to an imbalance of investment in the production of food and agricultural commodities. I won't develop this point: the massive production of biofuels from food crops is an example and everybody knows biofuels tend in turn to sharpen the tendency to price convulsions described by Marx.

– 3. In food production, there is a trend to a disproportionate investment in meat production ("unessential", according to Marx: tell it to vegetarians!), at the expense of grain production. The reason is "the price is determined in such a way that

the price of the product of the land — which is used for cattle-raising, but which could just as easily have been transformed into cornfields — must rise high enough to produce the same rent as on arable land of the same quality, so that the rent of cornfields becomes a determining element in the price of cattle, and for this reason the price of cattle is artificially raised by the rent" (*Capital*, Vol 3, Chapter XLV). The increase and industrialization of meat production is a consequence of this situation of excess profits.

– 4. There is also the same trend of overinvestment in fisheries, quarries and natural forests: "The rent plays an even more important role in extractive industries, where one element of constant capital, raw material, is wholly lacking and where by far the lowest composition of capital prevails (...) The capital here consists almost exclusively of a variable component expended in labour, and thus sets more surplus-labour in motion than another capital of the same size. The value of the timber, then, contains a greater surplus of unpaid labour, or of surplus-value, than that of a product of a (agricultural) capital of a higher organic composition » (*Capital*, Vol 3, Chapter XLV)

The criminal appropriation and destruction of tropical forests cannot be explained simply by the logic of profit, but by the existence of a surplus profit, growing when the demand grows.

– 5. In times of crisis, there is a tendency for capital to seek a safe place to make profit to rush to the land and other resources which generate rent, for the evident reason that the rent is a part of the surplus value gained without taking any risk.

This is exactly what we are seeing today with the rush on real estate, the massive purchases of land in the South as a financial investment, the appropriation of forests generating carbon credit, etc.

The fundamental irrationality of capitalist agriculture

Of all this, Marx draws repeatedly the same lesson: "The moral of history is that the capitalist system works against a rational agriculture, or that a rational agriculture is incompatible with the capitalist

system, and needs either the hand of the small farmer living by his own labour or the control of associated producers." (*Capital*, Vol 3, Chapter XXXVII)

Marx insists on the fact that his analysis of agriculture can be transposed *mutatis mutandis* to other domains of rent-earning capitalist activity: water, minerals, natural resources in general, and the space as fundamental element of any human activity. Actually, it can be seen as a theory of a combined exploitation of the earth and the producer. It leads Marx to a conclusion in two parts:

– Human development is bounded by two limits: "The fertility of nature is a limit, a starting point, a base. (...) The development of social productive force is the other limit" (*Capital*, Vol 3).

– "The only possible freedom is that social man, the associated producers, rationally regulate their exchange of matter with nature and make these exchanges spending the minimum force and in conditions most respectful and most consistent with their human nature." (*Capital*, Vol 3, chap XLVIII, my translation)

As we know, this second conclusion was inspired by the work of Liebig on the rupture in the nutrients cycle due to capitalist urbanization. The genius of Marx has been to generalize the problem to the exchange of matter in general. On basis of that concept, he develops two programmatic perspectives:

1°) - The need to switch to a mode of production based on the use value to satisfy real human needs, which involves the removal of capitalist ownership of the land and other resources, the return to "common goods":

« From the standpoint of a higher economic form of society, private ownership of the globe by single individuals will appear quite as absurd as private ownership of one man by another. Even all simultaneously existing societies taken together are not the owners of the globe. They are only its possessors, its usufructuaries, and, like *boni patres familias*, they must hand it down to succeeding generations

in an improved condition" (*Capital*, Vol 3, chap XLVI).

2°) - The abolition of the distinction between town and country. He goes even further: to the extent that global trade worsens the irrationality of the exchange of matter with nature, it is no exaggeration to say that the relocation of the economy and food sovereignty, although not explicit in *Capital*, are claims fully consistent with Marx's critique of capitalism.

An ecology of Marx?

In such conditions, why not speak of an "ecology of Marx?" Because "Marx's ecology" is a reconstruction. A brilliant reconstruction by John B. Foster, but, as an implicit reconstruction, it ignores the tensions, unresolved issues, or flaws in the thinking of Marx. For Marx, because he didn't know the global ecological crisis, did not always - and could not - draw "ecologically correct" conclusions from his genius anticipations. I could give many illustrations of this assertion. Suffice it to mention a few.

The remarkable quotation from the *Grundrisse*, for example, about the logic of accumulation, continues with following considerations, which largely empty its present ecological significance:

"The production based on capital creates conditions for the development of all the properties of the social man, with a maximum individual needs and therefore rich qualities most diverse, in short a creature as universal as possible, because the higher the level of human culture, the more it is able to enjoy" (*Grundrisse*, chapter on capital, my translation).

The tension between the radical critique of capital and a certain fascination for its "civilizing mission" is here obvious.

The attitude towards the peasantry is another example of tension. In the passage we have quoted, Marx asserts that rational management of agriculture can only be practiced by small peasants or the associated producers. But this statement is partially contradicted elsewhere in the book:

"One of the major results of the capitalist mode of production is that it has made agriculture a conscious application of science in agronomy (...) while it was a series of processes purely empirical and mechanically transmitted from one generation to another by the less advanced fraction of society" (*Capital*, Vol 3, chapter XXXVII).

Elsewhere in *Capital*, Marx is very ironical against Lavergne, an author who "believes in legends" such as soil enrichment by plants drawing from the atmosphere elements necessary to fertility. Of course, this phenomenon had not been scientifically established before the death of Marx, but the fact had been discovered "empirically" as early as the fifteenth century (in Flanders): the first agrarian revolution of modern times - the abandonment of fallow, allowing a significant increase in productivity and alleviating the pressure on the forests, has been the implementation of the "less advanced fraction of society". The weak point of Marx here is that he tends to deny the peasant's knowledge.

At the end of the section on the rent, in *Capital*, Marx does not choose between the small peasant and the capitalist farmer. To deplore this indecision would be anachronism: the historical conditions necessary to overcome the contradiction – an agriculture benefiting both the knowledge of science and the association of the producers – were not met. Nevertheless these pages show a kind of "contempt for the peasantry." While he praised the skill of artisans, and denounced its theft by capital, Marx did not do justice to the creativity of rural communities that, throughout history, have created remarkable agricultural systems and varieties of plants adapted to very different environments.

In addition to these tensions, there is, I think, a major ecological flaw: Marx does not see the qualitative importance of the transition from a flux energy – renewable (wood) – to a stock energy – nonrenewable on a human scale of time (coal). Given the fundamental role of fossil fuels under capitalism, this is a serious error in the modeling of this mode of production. Above all, it destabilizes from inside Marx's thesis on the rational regulation of matter

exchanges, because rational regulation is inconsistent with the long-term burning of fossil fuels stocks that cannot be regenerated. In addition, the confusion between flux energy and stock energy can give rise to the idea that energy sources are neutral, which may in turn lead to the idea that energy technologies are neutral, too, a conclusion that would be contradictory to historical materialism.

Greening Marx's conclusions, discussing new problems

These tensions, unresolved issues and flaws do not erase the fact that Marx's critical categories are essential to the understanding of the so-called "ecological crisis" (actually, an expression of the global systemic crisis of capitalism). But they invite us to revisit the work of Marx, to "green" his conclusions and to elaborate on a few new problems, in the light of the present global "ecological crisis".

One can start from Marx's vision of the "rational management of matter exchange", which is an adequate framework for discussing the crisis, and ask some questions: what exactly does it mean to stance that the exchanges should be regulated "spending the minimum force and in conditions most respectful of human nature"? What is the specific role of women among the "associated producer"? And what rationality should guide the regulation?

Today, the issue of "the minimum force" raises the question of labor productivity in agriculture, forestry etc. It is a crucial problem, because avoiding catastrophic climate change is impossible without resorting to local, organic agriculture. In the regions dominated by agribusiness, this requires an increased share of social work to be assigned to agriculture and environmental management. Consequently, a decline in agriculture productivity is needed in these regions. This introduces an important theoretical question, briefly touched by Ernest Mandel when he noted that "from a certain level, the development of productive forces can bring us away from socialism instead of closer" (Mandel, "Ten theses on the transitional societies").

But what is that level? Here, the issue of agricultural labor productivity can be related to that of the "conditions most respectful of human nature." The farming of poultry and livestock is utterly productive, indeed. Is it respectful of human nature? In my view, it is a form of abuse, of animal torture. Industrial meat production is an extreme manifestation of the objectification of life, characteristic of the capitalist system, which in another form, denounced by Marx, is the objectification of human labor, and therefore of humans, on behalf of the same instrumental reason.

This brings me to a third question: what is the rationality Marx is speaking about? I have mentioned his tendency to overestimate the rationality of science against the empirical knowledge of peasants. It is obviously not to idealize this traditional knowledge but to open a critical reflexion on the instrumental rationality as an expression of the "scientifically" organized objectification and appropriation of life.

Within this framework, the specific oppression of women and the identity between the social appropriation of the force of nature and the social (patriarchal) appropriation of the natural reproductive force of women should be taken into account. The concept of a rational regulation of the matter exchange should be amended on this basis. It should also integrate the fact that women in the global South, today, produce 80% of the food. Their specific role is crucial.

Energy, the Commune and the commons

Eventually, another important issue to be discussed is the relationship between planning and decentralization. This issue also can be approached pragmatically. Of course, the nationalization of energy is the fundamental condition for a successful energy transition. As James Hansen said, the energy lobbies are committing a crime against humanity and the environment, because they block the transition for reasons of profit. But their expropriation would only be a first step. The extreme centralization and uniformity of the present energy system is a technical consequence of the use of fossil and nuclear fuels. A system based on renewables will have to be very different: it will network local systems using a diversity of sources. That system should be owned and managed by a federation of local communities, not by a central state.

In his famous essay written after the defeat of the Parisian insurgents Marx said the Commune was "the political form at last discovered of the emancipation of labor." This brings me to my conclusion: within the framework of the ecological reconstruction of Marxism, this formula should be supplemented as follows: "the political form at last discovered of the emancipation of labor and ecological sustainability".

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