

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV459 April 2013

INDIA AND KASHMIR

Breaking the silence

ITALY

'Politics' stalled but austerity continues... and kills

Mediterranean

Syria

Bangladesh

India and Kashmir

Greece

Venezuela

France

Korea

Catalonia

The Arab Spring

Italy

Tunis World Social Forum

European crisis

Canadian State:

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

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The Manifesto of the Mediterranean Meeting in Tunisia

We, the representatives of progressive political parties from the Mediterranean region, gathered in Tunis from March 23 to 24, 2013, at the call of the Popular Front, and adopted the following resolution.

27 April 2013

1. - For more than a quarter of a century, neoliberal capitalist globalization has extended its dominance over the entire planet. The processes launched have accelerated the commodization of the world in favour of a minority and have confiscated peoples' citizenship and nations' sovereignty. They are exacerbating economic insecurity and social inequality in the North and South and further widening the gap between the rich countries and the so-called poor countries.

Peoples of the South are subjected to a particularly devastating regime of structural adjustment policies and free trade policies which impedes a fair development, destroys the environment and deprives them of their sovereignty, thus weakening them even more and exacerbating their dependence on dominant economic areas of the North.

The fate of humanity is now decided by a handful of transnational corporations and by the international financial institutions over which people have no control.

Since 2008, in the midst of a crisis of the world capitalist system, structural adjustment policies have been extended to the countries of the northern Mediterranean, the so-called contemptuously PIGS.

In Tunisia, these policies have been imposed since 1986 by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. In 1995, these were reinforced by the Association Agreement imposed by the European Union and its Member States. The politi-

cal dictatorship has ensured the application of such policies.

At present, the various neoliberal capitalist globalization actors intend to carry on with these policies, trying to take advantage of the revolutionary crisis, by strengthening and expanding their scope. Thus they seek to block the path that leads to the development of aspirations and the desire for radical change massively expressed by the masses, particularly youth, during the revolutionary uprising of December- January 2011.

2. - The removal of the dictator has disarmed the local neoliberal capitalist order without reversing it have led to some progress. The social system which is the historical product of imperialist domination and, more recently, of the restructuring of the neoliberal capitalist world, is still standing. But the revolutionary crisis that initiated the insurgency remains active. The victory of the democratic, social and national revolution in Tunisia, as in other countries in the region, still remains a possibility.

3. - The Tunisian revolution marked the beginning of the Arab revolution. To date, four dictators, whose average time in power exceeded 30 years, have been eliminated. These political changes are, without a doubt, the most important occurrence that has taken place in the Arab region and Maghreb in decades. This is clearly a turning point in the history of Tunisia and the Arab region.

This is, in the proper sense of the term, a "historic" moment. In fact, for the first time in their history, the peoples of the Arab region, who have not stopped fighting, are standing up today against their direct oppressors, bursting onto the political scene to take hold of their destiny in their own hands.

4. - The debt -odious, illegitimate- used under the dictatorship as a tool for political submission and

as a mechanism for the transfer of income from labour to local but above all to world capital, currently serves the counter-revolution to maintain the neo-colonial economy and imperialist domination in Tunisia. Furthermore, in Egypt, Morocco, Greece, Cyprus, the Spanish State and in many other countries of the Mediterranean basin, debt continues to serve the interests of a minority against the interests of the vast majority. It is everywhere, it is the pretext for the implementation of austerity policies imposed by international financial institutions and the capitalistic states that violate human rights.

5. - Everywhere, both in the North and the South, the same logics of profit, domination and destruction of the planet operate and continue to be imposed on the peoples and on nature. The Tunisian revolution, the Arab revolution, the heroic struggles of all peoples of the world against a neoliberal capitalist order, such as in Greece, Portugal, Catalonia, Basque country or the Spanish state, are the political founding acts of a new world order; one based on solidarity, that is democratic, feminist peaceful that ensures popular sovereignty and self-determination of the peoples and environmentally friendly for which all our respective political parties are fighting.

6. - But standing in opposition of this popular will for a radical shift are the ruling classes, the transnationals and global finance institutions. They form a united front to counter-attack and to implement even more antisocial and undemocratic policies in order to break through this liberating popular impulse and momentum, and thus continue to make the costs of the global capitalist system crisis fall on the same shoulders, those of the working people and the planet.

7. - We, the representatives of progressive political parties from the Mediterranean region in the world, are convinced that we must unite our efforts and our actions, both regionally and internationally, to support and contribute to the struggles of the people and of the exploited and oppressed classes, in the region and worldwide, who yearn for free-

dom, dignity and social justice. We support the revolutionary struggle of the Syrian people to achieve freedom, democracy, social justice, equality and national dignity. We condemn any foreign intervention that goes against the achievement of these objectives.

In order to work together in this direction, we the progressive political parties from the Mediterranean region, that participated in this meeting in Tunisia against debt, austerity policies and imperialist domination, advocate for a free, democratic, social, solidarity-based and environmentally friendly Mediterranean region. We therefore commit to:

- Support the process of mobilization and struggle of social movements, trade unions and social organizations for a citizen audit.
- Promote motions for non-payment of illegitimate debt and the external debt relief in the institutions in which we participate.
- Incorporate in our political programs the NON payment of the illegitimate debt and the promotion of citizen audit and the support of the struggle for the sovereignty of peoples and self-determination.
- Advance on the development of a network of mutual support between the nations to assist those who decided not to pay the illegitimate debt
Establish a permanent communication network for the exchange of information and experiences.
- Develop a concrete cooperation aiming at developing tools for the struggle and mobilization necessary to achieve our goals.
- Organize the next meeting in the Spanish State.

The progressive political parties in the Mediterranean region and other parts of the world that participated in the Tunisian Mediterranean Meeting welcomed the World Social Forum that was held in Tunis from March 26 to 30, and that allowed to advance towards the realization of the objectives enshrined in the Charter of Porto Alegre.

Finally, we strongly condemn the killing of Chokri Belaid, Secretary General of the Unified Democratic Patriotic Party and leader of the Popular Front, which we refer to as a political crime. We demand the truth to be told about all those involved in this heinous crime.

First signatory organizations (by alphabetical order)

Algeria

Parti Socialiste des Travailleurs - Socialist Workers Party

Mouvement Baath algérien - Algerian Baath Mouvement

Egypt

Union Populaire Socialiste - Socialist Popular Union

Spanish State

SORTU – Euskal Herria (Basque country)

IA - Izquierda Anticapitalista –Anticapitalist Left

CUP – Comités de Unidad Popular – Catalunya –Popular Union Committees - Catalonia

IU - Izquierda Unida – United Left

France

Parti Communiste français/Front de Gauche - French Communist Party/Left Front

Gauche anticapitaliste - Anticapitalist Left

NPA – Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste - New Anticapitalist Party

Les Alternatifs - Alternatives

Greece

Syriza

Italy

Sinistra Critica – Critical Left

Lebanon

Parti Communiste Libanais - Lebanese Communist Party

Forum Socialiste - Socialist Forum

Morocco

La Voix Démocratique - Democratic Voice

El Mounadhil

Portugal

Bloco da Esquerda – Left Block

Syria

Le courant de la Gauche Révolutionnaire Syrienne - Syrian Left Revolutionnary Mouvement

Tunisia

Front Populaire - Popular Front

With the support of the GUE / NGL Group at the European Parliament (Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left)

SYRIA

Syria's Bloody Civil War

GILBERT ACHCAR ·

Amandla!: What would you say to those who argue that the Syrian uprising may be an opening for imperialist interests in the region?

GA: We have to distinguish between two aspects of the question. One aspect hints at the kind of conspiracy theory among those that call themselves anti-imperialist and tend to see the hand of imperialism behind everything. But believing that the United States is behind this massive uprising in the region is senseless. The fact is that the US has been confronted with a major dilemma: recent events came at a point when US influence in the region was at its lowest since the first war on Iraq in 1991, and at a time when it the US was preparing for its final withdrawal from Iraq without having accomplished any of the invasion's goals. On top of that, uprisings overthrew faithful allies of Washington, including Egypt's Mubarak, a key strategic partner in the region. To think Washington would have wished for this is ridiculous.

Actually, these events were so overwhelming that Washington rapidly understood it couldn't oppose the tide; it had to pretend to welcome it in the name of the 'democratic values' to which it supposedly adheres. It had no choice but to renew the old alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood that existed until the 1990s, on which it now bets today, in the same way that it relies on the Emir of Qatar to play the go-between.

In Syria, we see Washington's great quandary. As in Libya, it refuses to deliver weapons to the insurgency despite insistent requests (although it intervened directly in Libya, by bombing). The result is a total disproportion in weaponry and training between the regime's forces and the insurgency, even though the insurgency encompasses a much larger section of the population. The truth is that the war

has dragged on much longer than it might have had the insurgency received weapons. And the cost is terrible and tragic because of the loss of thousands and thousands of lives. The war is devastating Syria to the point that the insurgents are convinced – for good reason – that Washington and the western powers are happy with the conflict because ultimately it will create a weak, post-Assad Syria, which the US and Israel believe to be in their interests.

A!: What are the specific formations that are acting in Syria right now? Is there a class basis to the uprising?

GA: It's not a class uprising in the sense that it has any form of clear-cut class consciousness. But the uprising started with a peripheral movement in poor rural towns, and the poorest, most downtrodden sections of the population were the insurgency's initial force. The bourgeoisie as a whole is very afraid of the whole movement and the chaos that it creates. So there is no doubt that the uprising is a popular movement.

But because of the historical failure of the left in the region, we have a massive uprising without any capable left-wing leadership. It's a very decentralised type of uprising with all sorts of groups waging a common fight against the regime.

A!: Who are the different groups?

GA: Even when they act under a single name, like the Syrian Free Army, they are actually local groups with little centralisation. You also have Islamic fundamentalist groups intervening, including one that Washington has recently put on its terrorist list. So here is an uprising, a section of which is seen by Washington as al-Qaeda, and yet you have people saying this is a US plot; this is just ridiculous.

A!: What about the reported conflict between popular democratic and fundamentalist forces?

GA: Well, there are tensions, but no direct clashes because everyone understands that that's not in their interests. They would rather wait to fight against the common enemy, which is the dictatorial regime. It's clear that when the bulk of Syrian territory is liberated, you will have nothing better than what you now have: there will be various armed groups, and it will be quite difficult to build a new unified armed force for the post-Assad state. As in Libya, there may well be clashes between these armed groups. This is, I would say, a natural and inevitable outcome of uprisings in countries that have been under dictatorial regimes for decades, with armed forces functioning as praetorian guards so that there is no way of toppling the regime without a civil war and without destroying the military machine of the regime.

A!: How do you see the role of Washington in the evolving situation?

GA: Recently Washington has intervened through Qatar to impose a new kind of body, the Syrian National Coalition, to supersede the National Council. The crucial point is that Washington wants a deal with the regime that would preserve the state, because it is afraid of chaos, especially in such a strategic location. But this strategy is doomed to fail in Syria. The degree of violence, the numbers of people killed, and the hatred that has accumulated, as well as the completely sectarian structure of the Syrian state, all make it illusory to believe that this kind of compromise is possible in Syria.

A!: To what extent has the monarchy in Saudi Arabia used the uprising to tip the balance towards fundamentalism?

GA: The Saudi kingdom has propagated Islamic fundamentalism in the region for a long time. Wahabi fundamentalist circles in the kingdom send money to people who think like them. So of course this is a problem. But in a region where Islamic

fundamentalists have been the dominant force in the expression of mass discontent for three decades, it's impossible to believe there can be an uprising without these currents playing a role. It's everywhere – in Egypt, in Tunisia . . . But very rapidly these forces are losing ground because the dynamics of the uprising, and the depth of the socio-economic problems, are such that the fundamentalists have no solutions and therefore their failure is inevitable.

A!: What are the socio-economic and political aims of the Muslim Brotherhood, in Syria and in the Middle East more broadly?

GA: The Muslim Brotherhood is actually a bourgeois reactionary force in the social field. They have opposed the regimes because they curtailed their freedom of action, so they were in a common front against the common enemy. But they don't share the same values and goals as other factions of the uprising, especially the young people, the workers' movement, or the women's movement. Their agenda is a reactionary one. Their economic programme is neo-liberal. After years of pretending to have a radical anti-Zionist or anti-Israel and anti-US policy, they have suddenly, since coming to power, become friends of Washington, even continuing Mubarak's policies toward Israel.

A!: What are the implications of what is happening in Syria for Israel and Palestine?

GA: Overall for the Palestinian people the whole Arab uprising is ultimately a major boost. It shows how much the Palestinian issue, as one of the burning issues in the region, is a destabilising factor. Also I would say that the Syrian regime has not been a friend of the Palestinians; it intervened several times to crush the Palestinian forces during the Lebanese civil war, kept Palestinian refugees in Syria under heavy control, and recently bombed Palestinian camps in Damascus. There is a further dimension in that Hamas is the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. The question is whether the Palestinians will have their own asser-

tion of the people's will both against the so-called authority of Mahmoud Abbas and against Hamas.

A!: What do you see as the main accomplishments of the past two years in the region?

GA: The main accomplishment is that the popular movement is boiling everywhere. This is something completely new in the region, which for decades has been under very despotic regimes, where any expression of mass protest was harshly repressed. And now there is a major explosion of popular struggles, which is not being stopped even by the elections. Many thought that after the elections in Egypt, it would be back to business as usual. But

there are daily demonstrations and social struggles that are not reported by the media. So this is just the beginning of a long-term process which may take years to get to any new kind of stabilisation in the region. The left in Tunisia was very scattered and divided at the last elections, but they can now draw their own lessons. The trade unions are gaining more and more leverage, and people have been responding with mass outpours to the political assassination of Belaid.

15 April 2013

See **Amandla** *here*.

| BANGLADESH

Tragedy in garment sector: support needed

BADRUL ALAM ·

A 9-storied building completely collapsed to ground and the garment workers inside the building were stuck. It caused a huge death toll and injuries. Until now the 297 dead bodies were found and more than 2 thousand injured and mutilated people were rescued with the help of army personnel, police, Rapid Action Battalion, fire brigade and local people. Nevertheless, an unknown number of people inside the debris and rubble of the collapsed building are calling over their cell phones and urging their nearest and dearest to save their lives. Unfortunately the rescue operation is going on slowly as they do not have modern technology of rescue. There is a blame that the people responsible to rescue task is not serious and the ordinary people dissatisfied took the responsibility on their own trying to find out the dead and survivors inside the wreckage.

The owner of the building called Rana plaza belongs to the ruling party, Awami League. The owner fled from the area at once.

In protest against the incident the garment workers in the city staged a demonstration and demanded punishment for those responsible. They also demanded proper security at work.

An incident like this is not something new. In 2005 in the same area the building of Spectrum Garments also collapsed and huge number of people died. However, the surprising is that the responsible never get punishment. So the incident is on the rise. Last year almost in the same area another fire incident in Tasreen Garments factory 111

garment workers were brutally burned. So far the guilty was not brought to book in proper way.

Bangladesh Krishok Federation is seriously concerned with the magnitude of the incident. It thinks it is not a normal thing that is taking place frequently. It is a failure of the system which does not care for the workers' lives and livelihood. It says it is reported that there was a big crack identified in the building just two days before the incident. Nevertheless, the owner of the building forced the workers to go into the building to work. This is a crime and the perpetrator should be brought to justice.

Bangladesh Krishok Federation(BKF) wants to stand by the victims materially. Although BKF is working among the peasantry of the country it will prioritize the issue because most of the victim workers, both men and women, hailed from the village. They have their rural background. They came to the town for job, for their very survival.

Therefore, BKF wants to go with relief and financial support for treatment to the victims and their families in solidarity.

As BKF is a subscription based organization working among the marginalized peasants of the country it is alone not capable to support the victims who need piratical material supports. Thus, we asked to our friends, well-wishers and sympathizers to contribute to our efforts in this regard. Any kind of support of you will be highly appreciated.

All the best regards,

Badrul Alam

President

Bangladesh Krishok Federation

BKS has a bank account in Australia

Financial solidarity can be sent directly to it:	Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)
Account Name:	10 boulevard Chanzy
Friends of BKF and BKS	93100 Montreuil
BSB: 633 000	France
Account Number: 145 327 037	ESSF, account number 445757C
Bendigo Bank	International bank account details :
Australia	IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12
International financial solidarity can be sent through the Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF) account, based in France. Please indicate "Bangladesh" on transfers.	BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP
Bank Account:	Account holder : ESSF
Crédit lyonnais	To use Paypal please go to ESSF Bangladesh – Tragedy in garments sector: support needed.

INDIA AND KASHMIR

Breaking the silence

DAVID BARSAMIAN ·

Pankaj Mishra writes for the New Yorker, the New York Review of Books, the New York Times Book Review, and the Guardian. He is the author of *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana*, *An End to Suffering*, *Temptations of the West*, and *From the Ruins of Empire*.

ISR regular contributor David Barsamian, host and founder of Alternative radio (www.alternativeradio.org), whose latest book of interviews with Noam Chomsky, *Power Systems*, has just been published by Metropolitan Books, spoke with Mishra in Boulder, Colorado.

DB: In your introduction to a collection of essays *Kashmir: The Case for Freedom*, you wrote: "Once known for its extraordinary beauty, the Valley of Kashmir now hosts the biggest, bloodiest and also the most obscure military occupation in the world. With more than 80,000 people dead in an anti-India insurgency backed by Pakistan, the killing fields of Kashmir dwarf those of Palestine and Tibet.

In addition to the everyday regime of arbitrary arrests, curfews, raids, and checkpoints enforced by nearly 700,000 Indian soldiers, the Valley's 4 million Muslims are exposed to extrajudicial execution, rape and torture, with such barbaric variations as live electric wires inserted into penises."

And then you proceed to ask the logical next question: "Why, then, does the immense human suffering of Kashmir occupy such an imperceptible place in our moral imagination?"

PM: There are several reasons for this, particularly in the last decade or so, there has been this idea of India emerging as a great economic power and also as a strategic ally of the United States. There has

been a lot of bad news coming out of India that's not been reported internationally, certainly not in the Western press. I think the government also places very heavy restrictions on reporting out of Kashmir, even on foreign correspondents.

Many of them start their tenure by going to Kashmir and being shocked and appalled, because nothing has prepared them for what they see there, so they go and do these anguished reports about this horrific situation. Very soon the government cracks down on them, and they are told to stay within their limits. And for the next of their three or four years in India, they observe those limits, because the price is you might have to leave your job or it might become harder for your newspaper to maintain a bureau or an office there. So there isn't really enough reporting happening of the kind that happens, for instance, in Tibet. Even though the Chinese government does not allow journalists to go there, still reports filter out all the time. And when there is a massive event there, like the riots in Lhasa back in 2008-09, it's on the front pages and in the headlines for days on end.

DB: You observe that whole libraries of books are devoted to Tibet and to Palestine, but not to Kashmir.

PM: The situation is inherently complicated. And I think the Kashmiris themselves until quite recently have been absent from this discussion of Kashmir internationally. It's only recently that Kashmiri writers have started to tell their stories and to write books. That is definitely making a difference. I'm thinking of Basharat Peer's memoir, and Mirza Waheed's novel. Those books are making a lot of people sit up and take notice. Sanjay Kak has edited a fine collection of essays called (*Haymarket Books*) But otherwise we've had very little academic writing on the subject. One of the unfortunate omis-

sions has been that Indian intellectuals have rarely taken up this subject. Because, once again, you can alienate and exacerbate and anger a large and powerful constituency in India if you talk about Kashmir in any kind of frank and objective way.

DB: This is not just an internal conflict between the people of Kashmir and the Indian state. One-third of Kashmir is occupied by Pakistan, two-thirds is occupied by India, and a small sliver is occupied by China.

PM: I think at least the Indian-Pakistan bits of this conflict can be resolved. There are parameters. And there actually have been serious talks on these issues, and the broad outlines of a solution have been clear. It's also been clear for a long time that, instead of being an eternal problem in India-Pakistan relations, Kashmir could actually be a solution to the larger problem of India-Pakistan relations. That once you have a border which is easily crossed by people on both sides of it and trade happens, very soon we move away from these narrow and harsh ideas of national sovereignty, which is good for South Asia as a whole.

We so badly need to entertain those ideas at this point. We've invested so much in defending our respective territories. We've invested so much emotional and physical and national energies in this whole project of consolidating the nation state, fighting several wars and sinking billions and billions of dollars over the decades into building up nuclear bombs, into building up these great militaries. I think we can step back from this completely mad process if we start to think of Kashmir as a way forward to a sort of South Asian federation of sorts, where people can travel, where you have extensive trade links across the subcontinent, of the kind that have existed for centuries and centuries.

Kashmir was a great gateway to Central Asia, and large parts of what is now Pakistan were gateways to the Silk Road and larger markets across Central Asia. And one should still think of these places in those terms and not just sort of lock oneself into

this very impoverished imagination of the nation state.

DB: It's striking, when you travel from Lahore to Delhi, to see the similarities. The major visible difference is in the signboards. In India, Devanagari, the Hindi script, is dominant; in Pakistan it's Urdu. But the spoken language, the food, the music, the clothing—the similarities, except for religion, seem to be greater than the differences.

PM: This is one instance where you could say the ruling elites of these two countries are almost entirely responsible for this problem: in creating this problem in the first instance, in the years leading up to the Partition of India, and then carefully sustaining this problem, very carefully feeding this over the decades. I think the elites have really remained very invested in Kashmir, in making their respective national claims on Kashmir because nationalism for them has been this great self-legitimizing ideology. This is true both for the unelected regimes that we've seen in Pakistan and for the elected governments that we've seen in India.

DB: A prominent lawyer, Prashant Bhushan, was physically assaulted for speaking out on Kashmir. Arundhati Roy, the writer, was threatened with sedition charges. There's a price to pay for speaking out on the issue.

PM: Very much so. I think especially in the last few years there has been a sort of intensifying atmosphere of intolerance, not just on Kashmir but on various issues in India, and any number of non-state actors now. The state really doesn't have to do much, because it can always rely upon various extremists to bully people into silence. I think anyone speaking out on this subject is exposing himself or herself to that kind of intimidation and violence.

DB: While I think the evidence is overwhelming that in 1947 the majority of Kashmiri Muslims would have wanted to accede to Muslim-majority Pakistan, I'm not

sure that's the case today. In the brief inquiries I did when I was there, I didn't find anyone having a good word to say about Pakistan. They know what's going on across the border. It's not a state that's very attractive to them.

PM: The infatuation with Pakistan, even during the most intense years of the anti-Indian insurgency, was limited. And that romance is pretty much dead. From my sense of it, they want to be equidistant from both India and Pakistan. I think that's why the whole sort of propaganda in India, certainly among Hindu nationalist circles, that certainly these people all want to be Pakistanis and if you give them any degree of autonomy, they will go and join Pakistan, is utterly false.

DB: One aspect of this, I believe, too, is the intensity of Kashmiri identity. When I first went there in 1966, I went overland from Delhi, people asked me, "Did you come from India?" I was taken aback.

PM: That been their historical experience. They were never really part of this political and administrative entity that we know as India, which, mind you, is also a creation of the British. In many ways Kashmir was culturally connected to the rest of India, through Buddhism, through Sufi Islam, but it also within the Valley nurtured, and developed certain traditions, which were quite different from Islamic and Hindu Buddhist traditions elsewhere in the country.

So it had a very clear sense of its identity and being geographically located where it is in this Valley, relatively isolated, which allows people everywhere, wherever they are in mountain valleys, to develop. There are many books on this subject, about Southeast Asian hill communities, how they are very different from the rice-cultivating communities near the coasts. So there are real differences to be observed there. And I think the y also had a very clear sense of their political identity, which in the years leading up to the Partition was formed by an active opposition to the very decadent, dissolute

Hindu rulers of the Valley. So their political journey, their cultural identity has departed in significant ways from the rest of India . And, very obviously, post-partition South Asia, post-partition India, the government did very little to make them feel part of this larger entity called India. In fact, their sense of alienation deepened all through those early decades when Jawaharlal Nehru was in power in Delhi.

DB: There were also the broken promises of plebiscites.

PM: Indeed All through these decades they felt more and more isolated and more and more alienated from the rest of India . Yet again, that cultural identity, I think, also prevents them from embracing the fundamentalist project, which is the one that many Pakistanis, many Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) operatives, many people in the Pakistani army try to foist upon the Valley, which is sort of militant versions of political Islam— fundamentalist ideas that, again, did not really find a foothold in the Kashmir Valle y b e cause their own traditions were so much stronger. So that's one reason, again, why that propaganda about them being closet fundamentalists or Pakistanis is so false.

DB In late 2009, a report came out called Buried Evidence, about mass graves all over Kashmir. Many thousands of Kashmiris have gone missing. What's interesting is that this report itself was buried and disappeared. There was hardly any commentary on it.

PM: There have been some of us writing about this subject, and also pointing out that the uncovering of 3,000 corpses in mass g raves anywhere else in the world would prompt a media firestorm. You would have headlines and commentary for days and days on end. But here we are. All the evidence is there. It's been well documented, it's been verified, certified by very respectable authorities in the realm of human rights. And no response. The government does not feel obliged to say anything about it.

There have been reports by various human rights organizations. But they have been met with silence. So this is a measure of just how all of us conspire in maintaining this conspiracy of silence over Kashmir: the international media, the various international governments, the Indian media, the Indian newspapers, television channels.

DB: These are not two ordinary countries. These are nuclear-armed states with the ability to deliver those weapons of mass destruction. There have already been multiple wars in the Kashmir area. The danger here is acute.

PM: We should all worry about this. And one reason why Kashmir remains an urgent issue, even though we don't really pay much attention to it, is because, as you point out, it is a dispute between two nuclear-armed countries. Here we've already got two countries which have fought major wars over this issue and are full of any number of belligerent people. Both of them have extremely jingoistic media. So this is something to be extremely worried about. We know from bitter historical experience how major wars can erupt out of tiny sparks. War has this completely irrational, illogical momentum, and it becomes very, very difficult to stop.

DB: One of the unusual characteristics of the Kashmir situation is something known as half-widows. There have been various reports issued about women who have lost their male provider, be it father, brother, uncle, or husband, but they don't have the death certificate. They've gone missing. The Indian state says, "Well, they've gone over to Pakistan or whatever, they've fled." Thus the women are unable to collect any kind of compensation. And of course they live in an emotional limbo. It is a painful and unresolved circumstance.

PM: I remember when I first went there and I was in my early days as a reporter, I remember tactlessly asking a Kashmiri journalist who had told me

precisely about this problem. I said, Where can I find these people? and he said, Knock on any door. He was more or less right. So this is a very widespread problem one of the many. You have people who are suffering from various trauma-related injuries who haven't recovered psychologically from the various scars reflected not just on the physical body but on their psyches. There are a number of documented cases of depression and suicide. You're really looking at a society that's undergone a very serious and long trauma. So you have all kinds of pathologies and all kinds of problems there. This is just one of them.

DB: That describes some of the effects of occupation on the Kashmiris. Have you thought about or looked at what the impact of the occupation has done to India itself in terms of civil rights and human rights?

PM: This is a problem that we have seen for decades, for centuries. Various writers, philosophers, thinkers have pointed this out. Colonialism, military occupation not only brutalizes the obvious victims, the people who are occupied, but also brutalizes the occupier, the colonialist. So you see a rapid deterioration in the political and intellectual climate of India. You see growing intolerance and the way in which the security forces, for instance, behave, the kind of impunity they enjoy, whether in central India or even increasingly in urban centers.

One of the things that has emerged from this recent horrific case of an assault on a young woman in New Delhi is how people actually fear approaching the police because they fear they might actually be further victimized by the police in all kinds of horrific ways. And there's no redress against that. There's no recourse to justice against the might of the police.

So I think the kind of damage this military occupation in Kashmir and the Northeast, this frequent recourse to brute force in these areas is really incalculable. We see the effects today. We see it all around us, in the way the political climate has been poisoned; in the way we talk about certain issues. Also,

the army used to be regarded as a largely apolitical force. We never really used to hear from military chiefs in the way we do now. Every time something happens in Kashmir or on the border, suddenly the army chief is doing multiple interviews. I think the enhanced role of the army in political affairs is an extremely disturbing development. The fact that the local army chiefs in Kashmir can publicly overrule the elected chief minister of the state tells you something about how things have deteriorated there politically. So I think in various parts of India you can see the effects of this kind of long and brutal military occupation.

DB: India has, to the surprise of many, one of the largest Muslim populations in the world, approaching, I think, 200 million people. They're cricket stars, Bollywood celebrities, the foreign minister is a Muslim, several presidents have been Muslim. But the parallel track to that is the destruction of the Babri Mosque, massacres in Mumbai, a major massacre in Gujarat in 2002. What is the status of Indian Muslims?

PM: It's a very demoralized and depressed minority at this point. Economically, in every index you look at of human development it's lagging behind.

DB: Because the state is not attending to its needs?

PM: The state is completely unresponsive to the Muslim minority. But, mind you, the state is unresponsive to even members of the so-called majority, so that is not an exceptional case at all. But I think what has happened since the advent of Hindu nationalism, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), as major forces in Indian politics is that Muslims have been marginalized and they have lost even the kind of political voice they used to have at one point. They're purely an electoral vote bank for many politicians, who still claim to speak for them. The fact is that all kinds of affirmative action projects to improve their capabilities and improve literacy levels, or improve employment levels in the govern-

ment, for instance, are torpedoed by various political parties. They don't really get anywhere.

DB: How has the Indian state and media interpreted what has been described as Tahrir Square before Tahrir Square, where hundreds of thousands of Kashmiris turned out to peacefully demonstrate in 2008, 2009, and 2010, completely flying in the face of the narrative that these are jihadis, militant fundamentalists supported by Pakistan? How have they navigated that? And isn't it interesting that nobody here, at least in the US, even knows that these demonstrations took place.

PM: It's been interesting. Because for a long time, when I first started writing about Kashmir, I used to hear this argument among Indian liberals, that if only Kashmiris were to renounce violence and terrorism, if they were to take to the streets in large numbers and demonstrate, India would be faced with an unanswerable moral dilemma. And that is precisely happened, as you say, in those years, when hundreds of thousands of Kashmiris demonstrated.

It was a difficult thing, I think, for most people to understand, because many people in the Indian media had already kind of subscribed to the propaganda that Kashmir has now been settled, infiltration from across the border is down to historically low levels, the militants have been routed, and basically the whole thing has been resolved. And suddenly this younger generation of Kashmiris were on the street. So it was a very difficult thing to figure out, to explain, to analyze. For a while the demonstrations were on the front pages. And soon enough the propaganda machine started cranking out reports of how these people are really in contact with their ISI handlers across the border, and various transcripts of phone conversations were published by outlets of the Indian media demonstrating that this is obviously true, that once again Pakistan is behind these demonstrations. So that's where it ended, basically, that even these big and spontaneous expressions of public anger and

disaffection in Kashmir could yet again be repackaged as a Pakistan-backed campaign against India.

DB: What role does water play in terms of strategic power and an incentive for the Indian state not to relinquish control over Kashmir?

PM: I think it's playing an increasingly important role. Water is going to be a source of conflicts not just in South Asia but across Asia. You already see a lot of tensions with China over the damming of the Brahmaputra when it flows through Tibet, and the same kind of tensions cropping up between India and Pakistan. That was one success story of the whole relationship, the Water Treaty. But that's beginning to unravel. We see in Pakistan a number of extremists who want to keep alive the idea of India as the great enemy. When I was there last year, among the extremists there was constantly this discourse about how India is basically responsible for the floods in Pakistan, for the drought, for basically everything bad that is happening in Pakistan. But water kept cropping up as the most important theme. Having failed to get their way in Kashmir, having failed to really inflict a serious defeat on the Indian military, what they have now cottoned on to in order to make themselves relevant to the Pakistani masses is this idea that India is cheating us out of our legitimate share of water. This is going to become, I think, a more serious issue between the two countries.

DB: Large areas of South Asia are described as water-stressed. I was in Uttarakhand a couple of years ago, where a major dam was built. People in towns, like Tehri, and in villages there don't have water to drink or for bathing. The water they were once using is now going to New Delhi.

PM: The water table has been plunging across North India for quite some time. This is one of the stories that isn't reported. What we don't hear is just how unsustainable this particular model of economic growth that we've signed up to is. For example, the fact that so many of India's limited re-

sources are being diverted to basically providing for these growing urban populations. We're seeing a slow catastrophe developing in large parts of rural India: water tables plunging, soil becoming uncultivable, even in the great granary of India, the Punjab, where we're seeing the long-term effects of the Green Revolution now playing themselves out. These are some of the most important, the most serious stories that are emerging out of India today. And very little attention is being paid to them because that's not what makes money circulate, that's not what gets foreign investors excited, that's not what makes for stimulating conversations at cocktail parties in Delhi, where so much of this knowledge circulates and then makes its way into the international pages of the New York Times and the Washington Post.

DB: Is there much focus on or attention being paid to climate change in India?

PM: Not as much as it should be. Definitely not. Because this is going to affect a vast majority of India's population who live in rural areas and depend on agriculture. Monsoon patterns have been shifting alarmingly. We know that major rivers, like the Ganges, are going dry at very important points in their journey towards the ocean.

DB: The Yamuna in Delhi is a veritable cesspool. It stinks.

PM: And it's all visible. That's the other thing. It's not like you have to do a lot of research or lose yourself in some library or archive for days on end to uncover this. It's in front of you. It hits you the moment you leave an air-conditioned mall. It's just all out there. But there is very little concern about this. Sometimes I feel there's more discourse about environmental issues in China than in India today. I think we really sort of close our ears from that whole conversation at this point and have completely devoted ourselves to building ourselves up as this great superpower all set on this uninterrupted trajectory all the way up to international superpowerdom.

DB: V. S. Naipaul once described India as a country of "a million mutinies." Indeed, from the Northeast, to Chhattisgarh, to Kashmir, there are various uprisings, rebellions, revolts, resistances. What accounts for this impressive pushback to corporate and state power from underprivileged, poor people?

PM: At some point people feel that they have to respond, they have to resist. One of the great things about India today, which gives me hope, is the network of activists and various organizations around the country : political, environmental people active in the field of adult literacy or fighting on behalf of the tribals being dispossessed of their land, trade unionists. Any number of people out there working very hard to create lives of dignity. One of the ways in which a lot of people realize you can live a dignified life is through actively engaging in resistance. Not forming political parties or standing for elections. That's absolutely the wrong way of entering politics. But this is one way many people across India have chosen, that we will not let ourselves be trampled into the earth by the combined powers of multinational corporations and the state, that we will resist. This idea has gone around. When Naipaul spoke of the million mutinies, he was thinking more in terms of individuals rising and claiming their share of the wealth. He did not really mean these various sorts of movements that have sprung up in India over the last two decades or so, which are more important than this individualistic aspiration for consumer modernity that he was describing. I think this is more crucial and probably more significant for India's future.

DB: What you see happening in Kashmir? Can the occupation go on indefinitely?

PM: I don't think it can. It's ultimately unsustainable in the sense that it can undermine many democratic institutions it has already done that and remain counterproductive. You can keep up the bare bones of the occupation, obviously. India has a very large army, so it can afford to keep that many

people in the Valley and continue the occupation as long as it can, technically at least. But I think the price it is paying for that occupation in terms of the damage being to civil rights and human rights, to the security infrastructure, to the future of democracy in India generally, that has just been too high a price to pay. I think if we continue to pay that high price, we're just going to see a lot more violence, not just in Kashmir but also within India today, and a lot more repression at the same time, a lot more authoritarianism. In that sense I think the occupation is unsustainable, not because India can't afford to have that many soldiers in the Valley.

DB: So the call for azaadi, for freedom, is still some distance away.

PM: Yes. And I think we have to specify what is meant by and in what context can it be realized. There is not just one context. I think for an outsider, especially for an Indian citizen like myself to say, look, is virtually impossible in the present circumstances, is a harsh thing to say, and I would hesitate in saying that. But the fact is that we have to think of innovative and creative ways in which we can think of, in which we can manifest the real meaning of and not just think of yet another nation state which becomes this buffer one between two hostile nation states, becomes hospitable to all kinds of imperialist interventions in the region.

We have to remember also that Kashmir itself is a multinational, a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society, if we are thinking of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. So the whole idea of national self-determination there also has a different cast. So there are all these complexities that open up once you start examining the idea of As an aspiration for an end to brutal military rule, it makes perfect and clear sense. But I think when we start thinking about it slightly more deeply, about political alternatives, then we have to be slightly more creative than thinking along these lines, which have led India and Pakistan into the trap which we find ourselves in, which is these unwieldy nation states.

GREECE

A few remarks on the question of government

FRANÇOIS SABADO ·

An old debate

From the beginning of the twentieth century, the question of government – workers' government, workers' and peasants' government, popular government – has been one of the issues at the centre of the strategic discussion in the workers' movement. This discussion rebounded after the Russian Revolution, when the Communist International discussed the perspective of a "workers' and peasants' government" distinct from the "dictatorship of the proletariat" identified with the power of the workers. There was a genuine debate about whether a workers' and peasants' government was simply synonymous with this dictatorship of the proletariat or was in fact proposing a governmental formula which, in the heat of the crisis, would be intermediate between the power of the bourgeoisie in crisis and the revolutionary working-class upsurge.

At the time, the majority of the International chose to experiment with this type of government. It was a question of defining the first steps towards a break with the bourgeoisie and the programme of a transitional government between a capitalist power which was collapsing and a working-class power that was emerging from the revolutionary crisis: an "already no longer" bourgeois power, in general a bourgeois state in the process of dislocation, and a "not yet" workers' power.

This discussion had started in Russia, when the Bolsheviks proposed a government emanating from dual power in the spring of 1917, a government of the soviets, a socialist-revolutionary/Menshevik

government before the seizure of power by the soviets and the formation of a Bolshevik government. It continued, in the light of the revolutionary experiences in Germany in the 1920s during the German revolution and in Spain in the 1930s during the Spanish revolution: a government responsible to the workers' councils of Saxony-Thuringia, in Germany in 1923; the Central Committee of the militias in Catalonia between July and September 1936.

In the 1920s in France, in a situation that was not directly revolutionary, Trotsky also evoked this perspective of a workers' government in the form of a government of a Socialist-Communist majority that could emerge from the mass struggle, but also from an election victory. While considering that "a workers' government worker can result from a "parliamentary beginning of the revolution", "it is the slogan of a massive movement of the proletariat counterposing the idea of its own government to all the bourgeois parliamentary combinations". (Trotsky).

In the 1930s, he defended a Socialist-Communist government on the basis of a system of transitional demands. It must be understood that in the 1930s, the differences between revolutionaries and reformists were in the context of the declared objective of the overthrow of capitalism. Trotsky believed then that "the crisis of humanity is concentrated in the crisis of leadership of the workers' movement. He also thought that a change of leadership of the workers' movement under the pressure of events was possible, even though "the social-democratic leaderships went over after the war of 1914-1918 to the side of the bourgeois order" and that Stalinism had become definitively bankrupt in the struggle against Hitler in Germany. He was convinced that the workers' movement could no longer count on these leaderships, but that it could

still rely on the propulsive force of the Russian revolution, which stimulated working-class radicalization, despite Stalinism.

With hindsight there were certainly also illusions in the workers' movement at that time: the strength of the movement would be such in the whirlwind of the war-revolution that the leaderships of the Socialist and Communist parties "could go further than they would like". These governmental formulas were taken up again in the period after the war and in the 1970s, when revolutionaries demanded that the Socialist and Communist parties take power to ensure the satisfaction of demands.

But after the Second World War, the situation changed: social-democratic and Stalinist bureaucratic domination stabilized and crystallized, both in their dealings with the union bureaucracies and in parliamentary institutions. The formulas of governments of the Socialist and Communist parties to implement an anti-capitalist programme had the advantage of giving a credible government perspective but the disadvantage of distilling illusions about the ability of these parties to ensure the beginning of a break with the bourgeoisie.

Beyond these historical experiences, it should be remembered that the discussion on these transitional governments is linked to moments of acute crisis - socio-economic, political - when the political crisis is exceptional and the upsurge of the masses is equally so. This discussion came back in a very sharp way in France in May 1968 and in Portugal in 1974-1975. In May 1968, the French Communist Party (PCF) opposed the popular revolt: all forms of government including the PCF or the social-democratic formations were rejected or discarded by the movement.

The young revolutionaries of the Revolutionary Communist Youth (JCR) put forward then the demand for the departure of De Gaulle and the call for a "popular government" based on all the organizations in the May movement: assemblies, committees, unions. In Portugal, in 1974, the carnation revolution put on the agenda the liquidation of the

dictatorship, the election of a constituent assembly and, very quickly, the construction of a new power. Many revolutionary organizations, each in its own way, put the accent on a government relying on the mobilization of the masses, self-organization and the revolutionary sectors of the army.

A historical change

We have a new historical situation, where the transformation of social democracy into social liberalism historically condemns any form of alliance or government with Socialist parties. These parties, "more and more bourgeois and less and less working-class", directly support the austerity policies of liberal capitalism. Although the existence of a popular base of these parties makes necessary policies of unity in action when the situation allows it, it is first and foremost unity with the Socialist trade union activists in the workplaces and with the voters.

Parliamentary or governmental alliances are unacceptable - this is the core of our disagreement with the Left Front in France and more particularly with the PCF. Admittedly, the dominant parties of the Left Front do not participate in the government and often vote against bills of the Socialist Party, which creates the conditions for joint action. But by refusing to position themselves as a "left opposition" to the government of Hollande-Ayrault, they reaffirm, at the same time, that they are part of the parliamentary majority and that they are working for the reorientation of this majority with the social liberals. We have a radical disagreement with this approach. Social democracy transformed into social liberalism has removed itself from a possible governmental equation for social transformation. This is a historic change in relation to the terms in which the question was posed during a good part of the twentieth century.

An "algebraic formula"

But a question is directly posed to us: if you are fighting the Hollande government what do you suggest instead? How many times has Olivier

Besancenot been asked these questions? They are questions that flow from the depth of the crisis and the feeling that exists in the country against austerity policies. This poses the question of government, without giving us a concrete formula.

Trotsky discusses this question in his writings on France in the 1920s. "The workers' government is an algebraic formula, in other words a formula to whose terms no numeric values are fixed. Hence its advantages and also its disadvantages". And he goes on: "advantages as a unitary political perspective of the whole workers' movement. Disadvantages in a purely parliamentary interpretation of this slogan". We must therefore be careful, but this does not lead Trotsky to rule out the perspective. On the contrary.

All the formulas of "workers' government", "popular government" or more specifically "government against austerity" are therefore general - algebraic - formulas which give a first response to the question of power. We define them by their tasks. In this case the implementation of emergency measures, which are vital for the population (employment, wages, public services), policies of funding of these emergency programmes by the cancellation of the illegitimate debt, an anti-capitalist taxation policy and a first reorganization of property by taking over banks and key sectors of the economy. To begin to implement this programme, we must put an end to the present "austerity governments" and rely on the mobilization of the peoples. It is the situation and policy of each left organization or social movement that will determine what organizations will be likely to participate in or support a government in the service of the workers.

This general propaganda prepares the ground for intervention in major crises, where the governmental formula will take on a concrete meaning.

Once again on Syriza's government of the Lefts

This is where the Greek situation has a particular dimension. Because, to our knowledge, this is the only country where the perspective of government

is no longer just general and where it is not only a question of propaganda. In Greece, the acuteness of the crisis, as a national crisis, is such that the question of government can be posed, concretely, "in fixed terms" as Trotsky put it. This is the only case in Europe where a party/coalition of the radical Left has achieved an electoral result of more than 25 per cent, where the Left as a whole has more than 35 per cent, which can make it possible for it to win a parliamentary majority and therefore pose the question of government. The next elections are due in 2015, but the crisis is such that we cannot rule out early elections.

It is in this context that the proposal for a "government of the Lefts" takes on its full importance. Of course, there are issues around the definition of this government and its programme. The points of equilibrium are under discussion between the different currents of Syriza. The formulations vary depending on this or that declaration. But, at this stage, Syriza continues to advocate "a government of the Lefts who are opposed to the memoranda of austerity policies of the government and the Troika". This proposal should be made clearer in the following directions, which is what the left of Syriza is trying to do:

- * A government of the Lefts, that is to say of Syriza, the KKE, Antarsya and left personalities and not a government of national salvation or of class alliances.
- * An anti-austerity government, which refuses any sacrifice for the euro, defends all the vital demands of the population and begins an anti-capitalist transition: nationalization of the banks and key sectors of the economy under social control.
- * A government which comes from a mass mobilization to overthrow the present Samaras government and which creates the conditions for a social relationship of forces in favour of the popular movement.
- * This "government of the Lefts", is only a moment in a strategy of struggle against austerity.

To satisfy the vital demands, a confrontation with the ruling classes and the EU will be necessary.

Such a government must deepen measures for an anti-capitalist break and lay the foundations of social control and of elements of popular power in towns, cities and workplaces.

These issues are under debate in Syriza. At this stage, the left reformist currents remain on an anti-austerity line, which creates the conditions for the joint action of all the forces of Syriza. But their horizon remains limited to a left government in the existing institutions and a return to the equilibrium of before the crisis. Once again, a "government of the Lefts" may have, on the basis of an electoral victory, a parliamentary beginning, but it can only seriously combat austerity by starting a radical transformation of the economy and of politics, by creating the conditions for a new power. This is a possible transition; it is not the point of arrival. This is the meaning of our support to this proposal. The problems of an anti-capitalist break, of a dismantling of the old state institutions and of the creation of the conditions for a new power are not only theoretical issues. They can quickly become critical issues. They remain the blind spot of the leadership of Syriza. They remind us that, beyond lack of foresight and unexplored trails, there is a definite functionality to the strategic debate between reform and revolution.

There is and there will be discussion on all these issues. All hypotheses are open: the continuation of the current parliamentary and governmental combination; but also a sudden worsening of the crisis with a polarization between, on the one hand, the

fascist offensive and/or an authoritarian regime under the pressure of the military, and on the other, a social and political radicalization.

In this situation, the leadership of Syriza may yield to the pressures of the ruling classes and the European Union.

But another hypothesis can also be retained: a fierce resistance of the Greek people and of Syriza which finds the forces for an anti-austerity government. Of course, such a government will be "in dispute" between forces which express the pressures of the dominant classes and other forces which reflect the pressures of the movement from below; such forces exist in Syriza, in its left but also in sectors of its leadership. Let us not forget that "in exceptional circumstances - crisis, crash, war - all the political forces of the Left can go further than they originally envisaged", (Trotsky, in the *Transitional Programme* of 1938). Above all, and this is a big difference, bureaucratic crystallization is not as strong in Syriza as it is in the leaderships of the Communist parties of Europe.

In any case, a victory, even partial, in Greece will be, at this stage, the combination of a radicalization and of a consistent anti-austerity policy of Syriza. Defeat is also possible, but the role of revolutionaries is not to denounce Syriza, in anticipation of possible betrayals tomorrow. On the contrary, it is to support it against the austerity policies and to do everything possible to strengthen the anti-capitalist dimension of its struggle. Because, let us say it clearly: a defeat of Syriza would also be our defeat.

VENEZUELA

The challenge after Chavez

GUILLERMO ALMEYRA ·

The official campaign was very poor: a great deployment of nationalist rhetoric, no ideas on the deepening of the social process, and still less on socialism, repeated appeals to loyalty (directed partly to the internal struggle inside the state apparatus), no encouragement to popular initiative and self organization, silence on the organs of popular power and a mix of religiosity and mysticism. The campaign of Capriles, insidious and mendacious, was more subtle by its insistence in differentiating Chávez from his successors and attaching the latter by continually stressing the privileges, corruption and scandals of the Boli-bourgeoisie and maintaining silence on his own plans and his links with imperialism . The Chavista votes that he won and the votes lost by those who abstained in no way represent a vote of confidence but a protest against inflation of 20% which eats up wages and the negative effects of the devaluation on the popular sectors. A protest also against delinquency, violence and corruption.

Capriles is now demanding a recount of the votes despite the fact that the theft of ballot papers is impossible in Venezuela. The US government, which remained silent on the scandalous electoral manipulations of 1988 and 2006 in Mexico, backs Capriles and prepares a coup disguised as a campaign for democracy. Washington and the anti-Chavistas are now linking up with the right wing of Chavismo and with the most conservative sector of the armed forces. The following stage will be a campaign combining sabotage, capital flights, press campaigns, employers' lock outs, student demonstrations intended to create victims and attempts to

corrupt civilian and military personalities in the official circles.

The immediate danger resides in the Chavista right which will interpret the slim margin of votes which allow continued government as a signal to slow the rhythm of the process and to negotiate with the opposition and make concessions to it. But if the 1,600 expropriated companies function badly, it is not necessary to privatise them but rather to administer them correctly under workers' control. If the organs of popular power only half function, they should not be eliminated, but freed from asphyxiation by the state apparatus and given more responsibility. If there is widespread delinquency, control and organization in the neighbourhoods should fight it by all means necessary rather than relying on a corrupt and corruptible police force.

Democratic rights are assured by the recall referendum but to give a positive outcome to the discontent, and hold back the "democratic" momentum towards a coup, it is necessary to extend all the public offices. Instead of banning strikes and repressing unions and workers it is necessary to discuss with them on a basis of equality. Instead of transforming socialism into a propagandistic word devoid of meaning, it is necessary to discuss publicly with everyone and without restriction, what should be the measures to take to aid its realization, and how to avoid bureaucracy and corruption, with the conscious and organised participation of workers, students and intellectuals.

Instead of embellishing reality, it is necessary to identify difficulties so as to correct them. Instead of paternalism and loyalty, what is needed is room for initiative, creativity, innovation, criticism, the construction of citizenship. Maduro has promised massive and immediate wage increases and he will pay a heavy political price if they do not come. But with

very high inflation and food shortages, a black market, and real wage reductions these increases can only at best compensate for the loss of purchasing power. Venezuela cannot exclusively depend on the price of oil; it should produce and increase productivity.

Measures are needed to put an end to inefficiency and corruption inside the administrative bodies which favour big importers and it is necessary to urgently train young administrators and technicians who are effective and innovative.

It is also necessary to learn from the past and instead of being guided by a deformed and mythical image of the Peronist experience, understand seri-

ously why Péron in the 1950s led the Argentine economy into a cul-de-sac before being overthrown and why he repeated this course in the 1970s opening the door to a ferocious rightist dictatorship. It is fundamental that Latin American history and socialist history are discussed without limits to learn from the past or it will be impossible to prepare the future. Faced with a pro-coup press we need to stimulate the creation of a press for the left, unions, groups and organisations: if it criticizes some government measures it will be necessary to correct them or convince the critics they are wrong. In a word to reduce the influence of pro-coup sentiments, it is necessary to appeal to the workers and deepen the process.

FRANCE

The vote on gay marriage

GABRIEL GIRARD ·

On Tuesday 12 February, a little before 5pm, the French National Assembly voted by a large majority for the so-called "marriage for all" law, which gives same sex couples the right to civil marriage and to adopt children. Although this is a first reading, with the law yet having to be examined and voted on by the Senate, there is no doubt that the text will be definitively adopted before the summer, since the left holds the majority in both chambers.

This vote comes after several months of intense debates within French society between supporters and opponents of equal rights. The satisfaction of an old demand of the LGBT movement is an undeniable success. However, the formal equality thus acquired does not end the fight against homophobia and transphobia. The adoption of the law, an indispensable stage on the road to equality, could however accentuate the process of differentiation developing among gays and lesbians. For the better off, a homosexual lifestyle is becoming increasingly one option among others. A banalisation barely detectable in the more precarious fringes of the community (youth, transgender, women, ethnic minorities, the HIV positive and so on), while the economic crisis strengthens dependency on the family, undermining the material conditions of emancipation. Awkwardly, some critical actors in "homo-nationalism" have in recent weeks wished to stress the existence of these fractures, in particular in the popular neighbourhoods and among young people of immigrant origin. [1] Some dangerous positions which have revived controversies on racism and imperialism in the LGBT communities, which run through the movement at an international level. Not a very good climate for a constructive debate on these issues

Developing an approach of critical emancipation of hetero-normality, which is however attentive to the rhythms of mobilisation and politicisation of the majority of LGBT persons is the challenge for radical activists and the left of the LGBT movement.

The context

Contained in the manifesto of the candidate of the Parti Socialiste, François Hollande, during the presidential campaign of 2012, the demand for the right to same sex marriage has been raised for 15 years by the French LGBT movements.

In 1999, the left government had established the PaCS, a contract of civil union offering a legal framework to same sex couples, but without granting them all the associated rights of marriage. At the time, this first advance, however timid, had raised heated debates on the left, some fearing that the recognition of same sex unions threatened the "symbolic order" of the family. As an illustration of this, the adoption of the PaCS had been delayed for several months by the weak mobilisation of left deputies, who were in the minority in the Assembly during the first vote on the text. For the LGBT movements, the PaCS was a protective gain notably for couples including an HIV positive partner. But it was immediately challenged as a discriminatory law, because it established a legal inequality between homosexuals and heterosexuals.

From 2000 onwards, in a context where the right was in power, equality of rights rapidly became the main demand of the LGBT movements. In 2004, as Spain legalised the right to same sex marriage, a Green deputy, N. Mamère, participated in a marriage between two men, taking advantage of a loophole in the law: the sex of the married couple was not specified in the Civil Code. This symbolic action of disobedience had a high media profile, but re-

mained isolated, with no other elected representative following. In subsequent years, the demand for marriage remained a priority on the agenda of LGBT struggles. But the perception that a victory would not be possible while the right was in power led most organisations to await a left electoral victory. Hence, while equality remained the main theme of Gay Pride Marches, no significant political campaign was waged on the subject.

The weakening of a perspective in terms of construction of a relationship of forces on these issues explains to a great extent the relative disorganisation of activist groups at the time where the right and Catholic Church entered the debate in September 2012.

The forces on the ground

During the debate on the PaCS in the late 1990s, the right and its fringes close to the Catholic Church had already led a heated opposition to the project, organising a demonstration of nearly 100,000 persons in Paris. The emblem of this anti-PaCS right, the deputy Christine Boutin, had not hesitated to brandish the Bible in the National Assembly to support her arguments. In a general manner, debate gave way to a deluge of homophobia. Meanwhile the left and the LGBT movements remained barely audible, and the Socialist Party was divided on the subject.

In 2012, the context was very different. The Socialists had just won the elections; the right was defeated, weakened by an internal leadership race and electorally rivalled by the Front National. The UMP leaders thus sought subjects to oppose the left, since the austerity policies pursued by Hollande left it with little room to differentiate itself. The draft law on "marriage for all" gave it an opportunity. In contrast to the debate on the PaCS, opponents advanced an apparently more "subtle" approach.

Openly homophobic discourse was abandoned, at least publicly, and the arguments centred above all on issues of parenting (adoption, medically assisted

procreation, surrogate parenting). The figureheads of the "anti-equality" movement – two gays against marriage and a second rate singer/humorist – sought to offer a less political face to this combat. The critique of the "right to the child" and the defence of family values provided the rhetorical framework for the right. However, without surprise, opposition to the draft law rested on a highly reactionary movement very much anchored to the right and the Catholic networks. And during the demonstrations, homophobic slogans dominated. Two big demonstrations were organised, on November 17, 2012 and January 13, 2013, which attracted hundreds of thousands of people, supported by the UMP and the Front National, as well as the main representatives of Catholicism and other monotheistic religions. The Catholic Church put all its strength into the battle, massively organising the transport of demonstrators to Paris.

Occupying the media terrain, the anti equality forces adopted an essentialist and sexist discourse on gender and the heterosexual family order. They succeeded in polarising the debate around parenting and mobilised deputies opposed to the draft. The confusion reached its target, when Hollande wobbled, evoking a "conscience clause" for mayors hostile to the law. This, coupled with the massive demonstration of November 17, had the effect of an electric shock for LGBT activists and their supports. All the more in that the discourse of the right gave new life to everyday homophobia. On December 16, at the call of associations, trade unions and left political parties, nearly 150,000 people demonstrated throughout France in support of equal rights. The political left as a whole (NPA, Front de Gauche, Socialist Party, Greens) gave its support to the draft law. This demonstration, followed by a new, still bigger, march on January 27, was an unexpected event. They marked the most significant mobilisation for the LGBT movement in the past 40 years, apart from the Gay Pride Marches (which in recent years have attracted nearly 500,000 people in Paris).

However the government continued to send contradictory signals. While stating its determination, it retreated on the issues of parenting, explaining that access to assisted fertilisation for female couples would not be part of the draft law. Meanwhile Hollande personally received the organisers of the anti-marriage demonstrations, and the government unambiguously denounced surrogacy. The law voted for on February 12 satisfied some of the major demands of the LGBT movement but remained short of hopes.

Even if it is still too soon to draw the balance sheet, the mobilisation in favour of equal rights in autumn and winter constituted an important vector of politicisation in the LGBT communities. During these demonstrations, poles of radicalism appeared: the Pink block, articulating anti-capitalism, anti-racism and the fight against hetero normality; or the collective "Oui, oui, oui", notably around the Panthères Roses, defending a clear demand for equality faced with the hesitations of the socialist government. More broadly, hundreds of thousands of gays and lesbians have gone onto the street, taken part in social networks, in their places of study or work, expressing the force of a daily resistance to the homophobic discourse of the right.

The strategic issues for the LGBT movement

The limits to this mobilisation should be noted however.

Strategically, it has at first rapidly appeared indispensable to agree on unifying demands. But with the pro equality movement being established above all in reaction to the right wing mobilisation, and according to the legislative calendar, demobilisation could be strong once the law is definitively adopted. The institutional bodies of the movement (the inter-LGBT in particular) bear a great share of the responsibility for this. At a time when the recrudescence of homophobic discourse and acts observed during recent months has cruelly underlined the need to continue a basic struggle on this terrain.

On the "content" of equality, the recent mobilisation has not allowed deeper debates to emerge. Hence, the feminist critiques of the institution of marriage or the necessary debates on surrogacy have been inaudible. For the left activists of the LGBT movement, a "progressive" strategy has been imposed: to win first on marriage and adoption so as then to push forward debates on family and conjugal norms. However, in the absence of democratic structuring, the potential political space for these debates could be significantly reduced in the coming weeks.

KOREA

The spiral of provocation

PIERRE ROUSSET ·

Washington, Seoul and Tokyo all have an interest in the rise in tension. The US justifies the consolidation of their military bases (South Korea, Okinawa) and the re-inforcement of the Seventh Fleet. The Japanese right pushes for increased militarization and prepares public opinion for the idea that the country should equip itself with nuclear weapons. Seoul and Tokyo profit from this "state of emergency" to marginalize (and severely repress) the social résistance to austerity policies, the pacifist movements or the democratic opposition post-Fukushima to nuclear energy.

The Chinese regime will regret North Korean "excesses" but cannot accept the perspective of a reunification of the peninsula under the control of Seoul or remain indifferent to the rise in power of the USA in this part of the world. It has engaged on a very significant programme of development of its military fleet both in the South China seas and the oceans: Beijing disputes influence over the Maldives with India, participates in international operations of "securing" of seaways in the Indian Ocean, and has symbolically sent a flotilla to the Mediterranean.

North Korean weaponry is too rudimentary to threaten Japan or the US. Nobody believes that we will see the start of a new war in Korea. But, given the provocations and counter provocations (deployment of B52s or missiles), we cannot rule out still more violent military "incidents" than those we have seen in recent years, which could get out of control. Whatever happens, the Korean crisis is already feeding the militarisation of East Asia as a whole, together with the nuclear proliferation and authoritarianism of a good number of political regimes.

As conceived by the powers (or by the authoritarian states), the policy of "security" leads to a very worrying militarist spiral, whose consequences for the populations are increasingly felt. Security from the viewpoint of the peoples is on the other hand borne by democratic and social movements independent of the established powers; by the fight for universal nuclear disarmament and its corollary, the end of nuclear energy; by anti war mobilizations and opposition to right wing nationalism.

International solidarity is built by the meeting of these progressive movements. With internationalism as their crucible.

CATALONIA

Catalan "national transition" process

JOSEP MARÍA ANTENTAS ·

The right nationalist CiU (Convergence and Union) party has to manage a situation in which the Catalan financial establishment is alarmed at the dynamic of institutional instability opened and wishes to reverse the momentum, while the social base has shifted towards the option of independence in the absence of other credible alternatives. Its political future will depend to a great extent on its capacity to resolve these tensions, in a context which is far too turbulent for a formation of conservatism and order.

The weakness of the Mas government, the fruit of an unstable pact between the CiU and the ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, a moderate left pro-independence party), offers social and political forces opposed to austerity policies a greater opportunity to influence this process of "national transition" than that initially envisaged, although the relationship of forces and the point of departure are still very unfavourable.

In this volatile context, there are two challenges: firstly, to guarantee that the exercise of the right to decide will go to the limit and that the referendum on independence takes place while maintaining the social pressure on the CiU not to backtrack and neutralizing the repressive manoeuvres of the Rajoy government, with the complicity of the PSOE.

Secondly, to ensure that the CiU and ERC do not capitalize on the process to their own profit. The social and popular movements and the Catalan social and political left must not leave the initiative in the hands of Mas and Junqueras. They should attempt to articulate a broad social pole favourable to

the exercise of the right to decide and opposed to austerity policies.

We defend the right to self-determination without making independence an "a priori" and we consider that the concrete option to defend should be determined according to what will be most favourable to the interests of the majority, we should stress that a "yes" to independence in a future referendum appears now as the option with the greatest democratic content and the greatest potential for rupture. It should be done based on a firm internationalist conviction and the defence of a horizon of a free federation of the peoples of Europe. It should also be done on the basis of the defence of an idea of nation or culture combining the firm defence of the Catalan language with that of a Catalonia which is multilingual and multiethnic, and with a vision of Catalan culture which is not reduced to the popular indigenous traditions.

The main strategic political question is to benefit from the democratic potential opened by the debate on independence so as not only to generate a democratic rupture with the current institutional framework, but also to go beyond the derisory framework fixed by the CiU and ERC and enlarge the "right to decide" to other spheres of society. Faced with independence as a miracle recipe the debate to be posed is what Catalonia we want, what model of country and society.

Catalonia is not a homogenous entity but a society traversed by social contradictions. We are not all in the same boat and even if we were, some travel first class while the others are in the holds. Why can the Catalan people decide on independence and not on austerity? Why can Catalan women decide on what relation they wish to have with Spain when they cannot make decisions concerning their own body? Sovereignty? And what about food sovereignty

against agro-business? Controlling our destiny? Fine, why not begin in the workplace?

What is the point of demanding "independence" in relation to the Spanish state if we remain trapped by the policies of the European Union? The acceptance of the diktats of the EU by the Mas government empties the right to decide of its content. Independence under the supervision of the Troika and Merkel would be sovereignty without content. A contradiction in terms, Real sovereignty involves a break with the policies of austerity and neo-colonial submission to the Troika. To do this, the referendum on independence cannot be associated with the acceptance of an EU policy which instead of giving more freedom to the people robs them of this freedom in the interests of a financial minority.

Starting from the official discourse on the "national transition" it is necessary to develop an alternative proposal which demonstrates the contradictions and limits of this discourse so as to use the democratic momentum of the independence drive and avoid it being diverted against the social struggles opposing austerity and the process of legitimating of the regime opened after the rebellion of the indignant.

The debate on independence and a state should serve to stress the need for a constituent process for Catalonia in which the new institutional framework and model of society can be defined. That is the

central question. There are a series of strategic battles to prepare to fix the new rules of the game. What electoral system? What model of work relations? What citizenship rights for immigrants? What defence policy? And many other questions.

At the same time the pro-independence dynamic should be linked with the need for a break at the scale of the Spanish state with the decrepit regime born from the Transition so as to avoid the respective rights capitalizing on the current situation. That involves, outside of Catalonia, an effort of political explanation of the process underway on the part of the Catalan democratic and pro-sovereignty forces and above all the strategic comprehension by the indignant and anti-austerity forces that the democratic resolution of the national question is a fundamental element for breaking the edifice forged by the false "consensus" of the Transition.

It is about making sure that the Catalan people decide their future freely and that an act of sovereignty for Catalonia, far from contributing to legitimate an ever more discredited political and institutional model, serves as a decisive element to unleash a deep crisis of the regime throughout the Spanish state and opens the way to a dynamic of specific national constituent processes, independent but coordinated and feeding off each other in their common search for a new order which is just, democratic and solidarity-based.

THE ARAB SPRING

"The People Want - A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising"

GILBERT ACHCAR ·

Why have you entitled your book simply "The People Want"?

This formula, "the people want", has been used in recent movements to express all kinds of demands, from the most basic to the famous "the people want to overthrow the regime", the best-known slogan of the general uprising. Originally, this comes from two verses of a very famous Tunisian poet, which are in the conditional tense, whereas the affirmation is in the present tense. What the slogan reveals is the emergence of the people as a collective will on the public stage, the people as a political subject. A large mass of individuals who for decades lived under conditions of despotism is now entering into a revolutionary era which - as I constantly stress - is in its infancy. It is a long-term revolutionary process.

You deal extensively with "the particular modalities of capitalism in the Arab region".

We are witnessing a revolutionary shock wave which covers a particular region. This indicates that there are common specific factors in the region concerned, which have to be analyzed. In a Marxist approach, we are not going to settle for the explanations that refer to cultural factors or to the fact that there are uprisings against despotic regimes. These factors exist, certainly, but they do not explain why this explosion has become general in this way and at this moment of history.

In a Marxist approach, you explore the physical roots of the explosion, the socio-economic factors underpinning what is happening. This is the approach that I have taken and I show that there is common to the region a dismal socio-economic sit-

uation, with world record unemployment rates held for several decades.

This is not the conjunctural crisis that we have in Europe, due in particular to German economic policy. This has been going on for a long time and testifies to a blockage of development which is particular to the region, even when you compare it to other regions of the Afro-Asian ensemble, as I do in the book. The question that arises is: what are the reasons for this blockage? They do not reside in capitalism in general: by explaining everything, this explains nothing. The reasons for the blockage are to be found in the particular modalities of capitalism, of the mode of production, of the relationship between the economic and the political in this part of the world. In any case, this is what I try to show.

You speak about the rentier and clientelist regimes that have stifled these societies...

It is a question of rentier and patrimonial states and of a crony capitalism, politically determined, where the dominant share does not depend on the "laws of the market" as the ideal model of capitalism would have it, but rather on collusion and connections with the regime. All this produces a blockage which has been becoming steadily worse for decades.

For quite some time now we could feel the explosion coming and see a social agitation manifesting itself wherever it could, wherever repression did not make it impossible. We have seen a rise in social struggles, especially in the two countries where everything started: Tunisia and Egypt are countries which experienced in the decades that preceded the current explosion an obvious rise of social struggles, and especially struggles that reflected this explosive potential, which eventually exploded. The

self-immolation of the young Bouazizi was the spark that detonated a situation which was very obviously highly explosive in the whole of the region.

A widespread idea asserts that the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions have been suffocated by the reactionary Islamic forces...

This is a perception that prevailed after the elections, in Tunisia and then in Egypt, resulted in the coming to power of fundamentalist forces, forces which had made religion their stock in trade. But I believe that today many of those who let themselves be seduced by the religious discourse are disappointed. This is shown by the scale of resistance to the new governments that have come from the fundamentalist movement, and even the continuation, indeed the rise of the social movement in the two countries concerned: Tunisia and Egypt. Moreover, do not lose sight of Libya, where the elections were proportionally much more massive, and resulted in a defeat of the fundamentalists.

In Egypt and Tunisia, where there were victories of fundamentalists which obviously have to be put into perspective, especially in the Tunisian case, the populations are very quickly realizing the inability of these governments to manage the situation, to provide even the beginning of a solution to the social crisis that is the fundamental problem. People have overthrown regimes not only because they wanted democracy and freedom, as is claimed: the movement started off, both in Tunisia and Egypt, on social grounds, with clear social demands, on employment, on social justice, on the high cost of living.

The demands were very clear, and it is on this level, which is the basic driving force of the explosion in the region, that the fundamentalists have no solution, no response. They just continue the economic policies and perpetuate the socio-economic structures that existed previously. They just continue the same relationships with international financial institutions. They accept the conditions of the IMF, with as much zeal as the regimes that were overthrown. This produces what we can see: after this

first stage of the regional revolutionary process, we are already seeing emerge the contours of their failure. The crucial question that arises, therefore, is what type of alternative can emerge.

On Libya and the Syria, many people say that these uprisings have been taken over by imperialism and are only leading to chaos and despair.

Let's talk first about Libya. We heard a lot, after the intervention of NATO, that the uprising had changed its nature. And some people even drew the conclusion that Gaddafi should be supported. However, the Libyan uprising demonstrated an acute awareness of its sovereignty by refusing, early on, any intervention of international troops on the ground. What overthrew the Gaddafi regime was the civil war in the country, the insurrection in Tripoli. NATO certainly contributed to the military victory of the insurrection, but it was the insurrection that won.

When there is the overthrow of a dictatorship of the totalitarian kind that has been in place for more than forty years, of an autocracy with a pronounced grotesque aspect, when such a regime is crumbling under the blows of a mass uprising, there is always an anarchic and chaotic situation created. Every revolution experiences that. You can handle the situation if there is a centralized leadership of the revolutionary uprising, or if the regime has been brought down by a disciplined revolutionary army. This was obviously not the case in Libya.

In the absence of leaderships that correspond to what we would wish from a progressive point of view, so much the better in the present conditions of political underdevelopment of Libyan society, because of what it lived through for forty years. Today, there is a tremendous effervescence in the country, in which the media are absolutely not interested. Over and above the chaotic situation created by the armed militias - but this has been experienced in many situations, particularly in Lebanon in 1976, when the army collapsed in the first phase of the civil war - the security situation is remark-

ably moderate compared with what might have been feared. It was being said "This will be another Somalia", and that is far from being the case.

There is a social movement that is emerging, continuous political demands, political protests, including against the armed groups, a veritable explosion of newspapers, of means of expression, of public discussion. There is even a movement of women, and a federation of independent unions that has arisen, linked with the one in Egypt. The balance sheet is really interesting. Having said that, it is difficult to say how things will evolve. What is certain is that there has been a major opening up of the situation in Libya.

And Syria?

The attitude of the Western powers in the Syrian case is very different. You only have to compare the posturing of Sarkozy on Libya, full of hypocrisy, and the absence of posturing on the part of Holland on Syria. And this is not a question of a fundamental difference between their policies. The issues at stake are not the same, nor are the risks and costs. In both cases there is a desire of the Western powers to reach an agreement with the regime. They tried to do that until the final days in Libya, by negotiating with Gaddafi's son. This is what they have been trying to do for two years in Syria.

That is why they refuse to deliver weapons. Washington has refused so far any delivery of weapons. Recently, there is apparently the beginning of an American green light for the allies of Washington in the region to send weapons, in response to the obstinacy of Bashar al Assad, who persists in refusing a negotiated solution whose first condition would be his own resignation. We can see the result.

This attitude of the Western powers, faced with Russia and Iran which fully support the regime, has helped that regime massacre quietly for two years. The figure of 70,000 dead is cited. Many people say that there are many more. The number of refugees is extraordinary. The situation is absolutely terrible. When we say 70,000 dead, this means that the

number of injured is much greater. This is an absolutely tragic situation and there is a criminal complicity of Western powers dictated by their own interests, their own strategic considerations.

The same mistrust that they had towards the Libyan uprising, they have towards the Syrian uprising, and even more so, considering the geographical situation of the country. It is this criminal attitude of imperialism that should be denounced if you want to be anti-imperialist, and not the insurgency, as some people are doing.

So what hopes are there for this process in the long term?

From the analysis that I make of the uprising, the logical conclusion is that the only positive outcome would be the emergence of leaderships based on the workers' and popular movement, with a programme of a progressive nature, centred on the satisfaction of social needs and able to engage the countries of the region on the path of development, taking into account the multiple dimensions that this term has acquired, a development in which the state plays a central role, in absolute contradiction with the neo-liberal dogmas that dominate throughout the world. The situation differs from one country to the other.

Tunisia is probably the country where this type of alternative is the most likely, potentially at least, considering the role of the UGTT and its combination with the Popular Front, the coalition of the Left in Tunisia which is today at the head of the UGTT. This combination has the potential to be the dominant force in what happens in the country. The Left must work to involve the workers' movement in the political battle and understand the need for the affirmation of an independent left pole, on its social programme, without mixing the banners with oppositions, whether they are liberal or, worse, composed of members of the overthrown regimes. With such allies, you cannot define a programme for a break with neoliberal policies.

The same problem is posed in Egypt, where there is a potential represented by the Popular Current that

is led by Sabbahi, the Nasserite candidate who came third in the first round of the presidential election, and the new workers' movement, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions. The same problem is posed, the assertion of a left alternative, which fights on the social terrain, without that being inconsistent with broader alliances for the defence of democratic conquests. It is important to put forward a different socio-economic identity from the liberal oppositions or those linked to the former regime, which all have in common with the fundamentalists in the government to have no alternatives to the socio-economic policies that previously existed. Unless there is the emergence of

progressive alternatives, there is a risk that the crisis can lead to reactionary regressions.

In Europe, do we have responsibilities in this regard?

Indeed, the workers' movement, the radical Left in any case, the one that defends an alternative to the system, must forge links with the corresponding forces in the regional uprising. This is not only an internationalist and altruistic duty, it is in the best interest of the European Left itself that what is happening on the other side of the Mediterranean should lead to a social radicalization. Synergies can be established today with the crisis that is shaking Europe and the radicalization that is under way in such countries as Greece and Spain.

ITALY

'Politics' stalled but austerity continues... and kills

DAVE KELLAWAY ·

Romeo was a bricklayer who was unemployed and also was finding it difficult to get paid for work he had done. Annamaria had a small pension of about 500 euros a month. They had debts and a mortgage to pay, a little time before he had gone to the local council seeking work. Due to recent austerity measures he was not able yet to take a pension. The police have no doubt that economic difficulties were the reasons for these terrible events. They lived in what is considered a more prosperous region of Italy – the Marches which has always been governed by the centre left. They were ashamed to go the social services which anyway would not have changed their material circumstances. Of course there has been a chorus of moral handwringing by all the leading politicians but nearly all have supported austerity policies that have led to this sort of situation.

You may think this is exceptional but as soon as friends talked about this they added that somebody did the same thing a few weeks ago here in Salerno. We know that the same thing is happening in Greece and there is an increase in the suicide rate in Britain too.

A close relative, we can call him Arturo, owns a small clothes shop with a partner, and he tells me that they have not paid themselves a salary for at least two years and have a significant debt. They tell me also that 60 shops have had to close since Xmas in a small town of 60,000. Nearly everyone I meet during this short stay has a story to tell about how the crisis is affecting them. Many friends or relatives' children in their late twenties and early

thirties have never had a proper job with a permanent contract and have had to leave for the north or another country to find some sort of work. A son put in long hours working for a company connected to the local authority but is still trying to get paid – this is a common problem since my niece has experienced the same problem in Florence. Another young man thinks he is lucky because he can get some free work experience with an estate agent. All my teacher or public sector friends have seen their salaries frozen for years and their pensionable ages disappearing across the horizon. Pensioners like my father-in-law now pay more and more for their medicine. Only 17% of new labour contracts are permanent with reasonable conditions and just as in Britain more and more are obliged to become self-employed without rights or protection but are actually working for a company. I could go on and on.

Family structures

Remember this is in a country where there is hardly any housing benefit and no income support. Without the continued resilience of extended family structures and the charities – particularly the Catholic Church – there would be an even worst crisis of basic living conditions. Like the mushrooming of foodbanks in Britain we have 'poor people's canteens' which are overwhelmed with demand. Hundreds of thousands of young people are leaving Italy to search for work in London, Paris, Berlin or elsewhere. They will have to squat, share rooms or work in the informal economy. But anything is better than endless years reliant on their parents chasing the fewer and fewer unregistered jobs in bars or babysitting that they are overqualified for. Another looming problem if this crisis continues for years to come is that the grandparents/parents' 'safety net', which subsidise

the younger generation, will be used up or disappear as they pass on – the pension dies with them.

On the television yesterday there was another of those interminable political discussion programmes where politicians, professors and journalists pontificate for considerably longer than on *Newsnight*. However, at least this one had a live link with a group of workers from the Merloni factory in Umbria which had been closed down. One of the workers, who had been on a special unemployment benefit (*cassa integrazione*) of 500 euros a month for 5 years, which was now ending, exploded in rage at all the empty talk in the studio about the constitution and the 57 ways the next government could be stitched together. He basically said that the politicians and the commentators had no idea of what was actually happening on the ground. It is precisely this anger and at times despair that explains what happened in the last elections with the extraordinary breakthrough of Beppe Grillo's 5 Star Movement (M5S).

All my friends and most of my relatives (apart from a small Berlusconi wing) have always voted moderate or more radical left. This time many had voted Grillo. Why? As several said not because they particularly approve of Grillo's occasional vulgarity or every denunciation but because they believe that the political system needs a huge shake up. Some pundits in Italy (or Britain) say that his mantra that the M5S is neither right nor left and it wants to clear out the whole political caste is a sign of incipient fascism, but they are mistaken and are not listening to ordinary people. For most people their direct experience at least for over 20 years is that the centre left and the centre right parties (and that includes the ex-communists now in the PD – Democratic Party) have mostly done the same thing. These parties have cut their wages, reduced their pensions, made them work longer, cut social spending, failed to create jobs and have obeyed the Troika. If you add to that the way the political caste (PD included) have paid themselves huge salaries and incredible privileges not just in parliament but in all the other levels of government then you can under-

stand the anger. Worse of all these super-remunerated representatives have for decades failed to create public sector organisations that function efficiently at even the most basic level. Renewing a license or official document can take for ever and people regularly travel hundreds of miles to avoid having operations in their local hospital. The politicians have used the public institutions as a means of raising more funds through bribes or contracts with their own companies or placing their supporters at every level. People are also angry that their taxes then also publicly finance these corrupt parties.

M5S

Consequently the M5S focus a lot on policies that attack what they call the 'partocracy' head on. They say all politicians should by law only be able to have two terms of office, that nobody who is being charged or is guilty of crimes should be allowed to take office (in recent years 25 or more MPs were in this category), that public funding of political parties should end and that there should a law on conflicts of interests. The latter obviously deals with Berlusconi or others that own huge areas of the media and can still be involved in a political system that regulates such matters. Many of M5S's other policies such as ecological opposition to mega projects like the high speed train link in the Val de Susa as well as the idea of a basic citizens income also attracted voters and were to the left of the PD coalition.

Where are we now forty days after the vote? People have joked here that even the Church has managed to elect a pope more quickly than the politicians have formed a government. Essentially the February elections produced three more or less equal minorities:

the PD who have a relative majority in the lower house and hence get a bonus guaranteeing that, the PDL/Lega (Berlusconi and the Northern League) whose votes in the Senate elections got a bonus due to the infamous Porcellum electoral mechanism that Berlusconi had introduced which

blocks a PD majority in the Upper house and the M5S who are a whisker behind the PD as the second party with 163 MPs in both houses.

You need a clear working majority in both houses to govern. Although Berlusconi did far better than expected his party still lost millions of votes compared to the previous elections. The M5S has gone up in the three years since its foundation from scores of around 3% to 25% plus today and is the main factor for what everyone is called the 'stallo' or the stalled political situation today. The president, who operates more or less like the British Queen, in that he/she dissolves parliament and calls on party leaders to form a government, first gave Bersani, as the relative majority party leader, the chance to form a government.

Bersani for a week desperately tried to work a deal, primarily with the M5S. Moving smartly away from the PD's previous attacks on the movement as anti-political, crypto-fascist or rightwing populists he drew up an 8 point plan that basically included a number of Grillo's key policies on the political caste e.g. reducing politicians pay, cutting the number of MPs, limiting the number of mandates, changing the electoral system etc. Despite some wavering from a few of his MPs and petitions by over a hundred thousand of his voters on the web calling for a deal with the PD, Grillo resisted any conciliation. Most of my friends who had voted M5S criticised this position and said that a deal for a short term government to carry out some of the key demands would have been a step forward. However Grillo has reiterated that if people voted for his movement thinking he would do a deal with a part of this 'partocracy' then they were not listening to what he was saying. Consequently Napolitano had to recognise that Bersani did not have the numbers needed to govern and made his next move.

This week the president has established two commissions, one on the economy and one on the political system made up of ten 'wise' men or sages. Indeed they are all men and are mostly aligned with the main political groupings although excluding the M5S. The latter is far too maverick for the

Troika or the Italian oligarchy. They have to come up with proposals within eight to ten days that the parties can discuss as a basis of a new government. In the meantime Monti's government continues on an operational basis particularly in terms of reassuring the European Troika. Napolitano had to deny that Draghi (European Bank boss) had telephoned him to entreat him to stay in post and to come up with a holding measure to reassure the markets. The president's spokesperson said that it was Napolitano that called Draghi – so no pressure there then! Faced with an explosion of anger in the press from women who felt that wisdom was not limited to men Napolitano apologised for this. Just yesterday one of the wise men, Valerio Onida, was tricked into talking to a radio show and admitted that the whole thing was just a delaying measure that probably would not produce much. He also added that they just needed a way to allow Berlusconi to enjoy his old age in peace and that would help them move forward. As usual these days Grillo came up with the best one liner – *i saggi sono le badanti della democrazia* =these sages are the terminal care nurses for democracy.

Berlusconi has repeatedly called for Bersani and the PD to form a government with the PDL – accepting Bersani as the prime minister. Bersani up to now has refused. On the one hand he thought a reform government might attract Grillo or enough M5S MPs to work and on the other hand a deal with Berlusconi would cause huge problems in the PD. Berlusconi of course is also keen to be in government since it makes it more difficult for the judges to finally nail him. He has gone along with the wise men manoeuvre without much enthusiasm and has said either there is a deal with the PD or Italy should return to the polls as early as June. Bersani (and Napolitano) have both said it would be bad for Italy (i.e. the markets would not like it) if the uncertain political situation continued with new elections.

Napolitano unlike Queen Elizabeth

A complicating factor in all this is that Napolitano, unlike Queen Elizabeth, has a limited term of office which ends in May so there has to be a new election for his post. This post has not always been so important but where you have a complex electoral outcome the president is more important. Hence it is now likely that the president will be elected before the government is formed. Berlusconi has sworn total war if the centre left get one of their people as president. Already contacts are underway between the PD and PDL on this question and there might be a subsequent movement on a government agreement. In the meantime Renzi, the leader of a current in the PD that got 40% in the primary elections for the leadership of the left coalition, has made his move. He has criticised the week long negotiations Bersani led to form a government and has said there should be a deal with the PDL or new elections. Although careful not to call directly for a deal with the PDL at this time Renzi represents the 'modernising' neo-liberal right wing inside the PD and along with D'Alema, Veltroni and others he has always been more favourable to that. Renzi knows that if Bersani can do a deal it delays his possibility of taking over the leadership. Berlusconi and the PDL are happy for the Renzi people to cause havoc in the PD but are aware that in any new elections if Renzi were to be the new PD leader he could take more votes from them.

So where does all this byzantine political manoeuvring leave those Italians whose small businesses are going under, who are losing their jobs or any unemployment benefit?

In an earlier article before the elections we said that whatever happened Monti would win. The paradox is that although his slate did badly (just around 10% or less) and people largely voted against his austerity measures he is still the current prime minister. He might even feature in some new Bersani or grand coalition government. In another sense he also wins because his austerity policies are still firmly in place and the competing parties either endorse them (PD/PDL) or have weak or incoher-

ent alternatives (M5S). Grillo's people have many correct positions on the political caste and some of the reforms can be supported by the radical left but at the end of the day there is an illusion that if political representation can be cleansed and democratised with the help of the internet then the economic questions can be resolved. The centres of real power over the economy are not challenged in Grillo's world. True, there is talk a soft exit from the euro, of the state helping small and medium businesses, of a citizen's income but there is no plan to really deal with the deficit, with the troika or with the bosses who run the key pillars of the economy. The M5S does have many activists who are involved in social or ecological movements like the NO-TAV campaign or the successful anti-water privatisation referendum but it does not have any orientation to the workplace or to working people as a class with potential political leadership. It relates to citizens, or the people or to the idea that each person is equal on the internet. It is essentially an inter-class approach to politics.

Another serious weakness in the M5S movement is the lack of internal democracy or structures which allow activists to express different views to the leadership. In its rejection of all parties it has substituted a web based structure where individuals can express opinions but mostly it is used to relay the line or policies from Grillo or Casaleggio (the internet entrepreneur and other key leader). So the candidates were voted for and selected online. The political brand is owned by Grillo and where there is any dissidence it can be removed. The problem arises when the movement becomes as big as it is now and there are 160 MPs and likely to be many more at local or regional level. Probably Grillo never thought that at this election they would be big enough to be a player in government negotiations so there would not have been pressure to work with the PD. The M5S would have been a straightforward opposition. Already with the discussions on forming a government there have been strains and disputes. Up to thirty MPs have expressed a desire for some debate with the PD on a government for-

mula. Yesterday all 160 odd MPs were bussed in 3 coaches to a location outside Rome for a heart to heart with the leader. Reports suggest that things have been smoothed over. It is hard to see how it can maintain such a monolithic structure.

Stalemate

It seems clear that Grillo's strategy is to be the opposition to a PD/PDL stitched up government. He is not necessarily opposed to new elections, he believes his refusal to deal will not lose him votes on his left. Some polls suggest he may be right but there are some risks. He thinks that the stalemate will encourage more people to vote for the M5S so they can form a government on their own to carry their big reform.

Today's situation reminds us of one of the great lessons from Ed Miliband's dad's book – *The State in Capitalist Society* (Ralph Miliband). There has been a stalemate in the political system for over a month but the ruling class is still in full control of the levers of power in the economy or other apparatuses of the state. Of course it is a problem for the ruling class if their political system is not working, particularly if people become angry or oppositional to it. Who knows where it might lead? It is a problem that has become more acute not just in Italy but in many countries faced with the deepest economic crisis since the 1930s. Even Britain is experiencing at a lower level the same alienation of people from the mainstream parties and the establishment's political leadership is more complex than in the past – see the coalition.

The class struggle left in Italy is in some disarray. Indeed the break-up of the Rifondazione project – a left-wing split from the old PCI (part predecessor of the PD) as a result of participation with the PDS in the Prodi government left a big space for the M5S to grow. A significant number of Grillo activists were involved in the social anti-global movements that saw huge mobilisations at Genova among other places. The failure of the Ingroia slate in the recent elections where it failed to reach the quorum necessary for MPs was certainly in part

due to the way the mini apparatuses of the radical left like Ferrero's PRC or Di Pietro's Italy of Values party took over a promising coalition around the Cambiare Se Puo appeal. Their main concern was not to build an independently organised electoral coalition linked to a longer term process of building resistance to austerity but rather to do everything to save or regain their representation in parliament. During the election campaign Ingroia spent a lot of time complaining that Bersani was not responding to his offer of collaboration. Predictably its component parts are no longer together.

Vendola's SEL party (Sinistra, Ecologia e Libertà = Left, Ecology and for Liberty), through its alliance with the PD in the elections, now has MPs, indeed the speaker in the lower chamber is a member, and has thus emerged relatively reinforced as a part of the radical left. However its willingness to support a PD that backed all of Monti's austerity policies and to provisionally to have ministers in a new PD led government that Bersani had publicly committed to remain within the Troika framework, means that it is difficult to define it as alternative to the PD. It remains a pressure group from the left to condition somewhat the PD line. Nevertheless it is well placed to recompose with any left wing split from the PD if Renzi were to win the leadership. Then the Vendola leadership would be in a position to build a party with greater influence. Vendola has also been much more active in trying to reach out to the M5S MPs and in trying to find some common ground to work with them on particular issues. It is important to recognise the progressive tendencies in this movement particularly among the local activists. Those who label M5S as fascist or rightwing populist (some in Britain have likened them to UKIP or even talked about Grillosconi) are not just wrong but create a barrier to winning a sector of their base to more class based progressive positions.

Sinistra Critica

It is clearly a time for reflection, rebuilding and perhaps recomposition on the radical left. There is

an interesting debate that has been publicly aired by the comrades in Sinistra Critica. It revolves around how you judge the situation in the labour movement. Some are arguing that defeats have been so great and the apparatuses of the movement have become so removed from defending the basic interests of working people that we have to talk about a reconstruction of the labour movement. The task of left activists is to take part in all the independent movements and to build up their space and strength. Putting forward the need to build a revolutionary party is less important at this time than these basic tasks. Other comrades say that although the situation is not great it is not as bad as to talk about rebuilding the structures and that as well as building the campaigning movements there are still opportunities to work in trade union oppositions, to develop membership of an openly revolutionary party and to relate actively to other radical left groups.

We can see how the M5S phenomenon, the break up of the Rifondazione project and the experience of the Ingroia campaign provide the framework for

this discussion. What is admirable about this debate is that the group has not split and the different positions are openly discussed and arrangements are made for common work and for different perspectives to be tested out. Some lessons for the British left here.

Despite the despair and resignation that exists there is still an abundance of anger reflected in the spectacular growth of the M5S. Organised resistance has not disappeared, there was a very big demonstration in the Val de Susa after the elections, student struggles were extensive last year and the political instability may lead to further openings. One thing is clear, none of the political parties are preparing any sort of break with Monti's austerity policies. For this reason the troika and the Italian oligarchy will work for a PDL/PD government – most of Napolitano's efforts are being made in this direction. A lot depends on whether the Bersani wing of the PD holds out against this and if it does (that is not certain) whether it can win a majority in the party for going back to the polls.

Salerno, Italy, Saturday April 6 2013

Upon contact with reality at boiling point: positive chemical reaction

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

Sergio Ferrari: What were the most important aspects of this new edition of the WSF?

Eric Toussaint: There was a strong Tunisian presence in many activities. For example, we observed this in the workshops and activities on the debt. Also in the Social Movements Assembly on Friday the 29th. The great interest youth and social movements showed towards this initiative was obvious. This is a very positive aspect of our evaluation.

Q: Does this mean that the WSF comes out of this Maghrebi session strengthened?

E.T: No doubt about it. WSF has been going through an obvious crisis for some years now. In particular, its International Piloting Committee, as a facilitating body, has faced huge difficulties finding a new dynamic. At the same time, the Social Forum indisputably remains the only worldwide arena and framework where social movements can meet. In this sense, in the absence of an alternative, the WSF remains very important. Since Tunisian and the region's civil society remain actively mobilized, this is a breath of fresh air and renewal for this international occasion. The Social forum, in coming into contact with a society in movement, in ebullition, has produced a chemical reaction; a very interesting interaction that we have observed during this edition.

Q: According to your assessment, holding the WSF in a country and region in turmoil could also be a future antidote against any risk of institutionalizing this global occasion...

E.T: Precisely. We could imagine an upcoming edition of the WSF in Egypt if a group of organiza-

tions there proposed to host it. In fact, Egypt is experiencing a completely electric situation with a trade union movement proportionally stronger in the industrial sector than in Tunisia, with a peasantry hard-hit by the World Bank's neoliberal policies and land privatization; but social explosions could take place in other parts of the world and different scenarios are imaginable.

Q: How can the difficulties and the sort of paralysis faced by the WSF International piloting committee be unblocked?

E.T: I don't have these solutions. I see that a series of forces on the committee want to continue to play this role. Tunis teaches us that a certain point we have to free the terrain and make way for new forces. The CADTM will continue to be a member of the International committee, there are very interesting and dynamic players within it, with whom we collaborate closely. We also know that there is a series of very institutionalized forces that manage the Social Forum "Brand" according to their interests.

Q: Despite all this, you think that we should continue to strengthen it?

E.T: Without a doubt the WSF is useful. We can see, as happened here, that a very positive dynamic is developing independently of operational problems.

Q: Within this optimistic assessment, what are the negative aspects that emerge from this edition?

E.T: USAID was among the organizations that set up stands. It is a US cooperation agency present in all destabilization operations around the planet. It is an instrument of US government international

policy. This organization has no reason to be at the Forum. This is cause for concern, all the more so as it involves a violation of the 2001 Charter of Principles. So I understand the participants who ejected this organization from the perimeter of the El Manar university campus where the Forum was taking place.

We have also seen – just as happened during the earlier 2011 Social Forum in Dakar – that the Moroccan monarchy sent a hundred or so individuals paid to pose as members of non-governmental and social organizations. Some of these were police, whose mission was to prevent anyone from raising the demand for an independent Sahrawian State

We saw that in Dakar, and it happened once again on Friday the 29th at the social movements assembly... Provocateurs linked to the Moroccan regime swarmed the floor in an attempt to prevent any reference being made, in the Social Movements declaration, to the necessary solidarity with the Sahrawian people. This was another negative aspect, though it was not the WSF's responsibility. In particular, we have to find ways of defending Moroccan activists who have the courage to speak out for the democratic right to national sovereignty.

From Tunis, 30 March 2013

Translated by Marie Lagatta and Mike Krolikowski.

EUROPEAN CRISIS

Even the IMF agrees... IMF declarations that do not please European leaders

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

Meanwhile, if IMF Managing Director Christine Lagarde hinted that the beginning of some austerity measures should be spread over a longer period of time, and that it might be possible to increase some public spending in order to stimulate the economy, this is because she is under pressure from IMF members from emerging countries (especially the Brics, led by China and Brazil), which are fearful of the boomerang effect of the drop in European imports, and criticise the importance of the IMF's financial engagement in Europe. The IMF's Managing Director expressed this point of view in Tokyo, at the annual assembly of the IMF and World Bank in October 2012. The IMF document and Christine Lagarde's recommendations made European leaders react with discontent. For example, in Tokyo, Wolfgang Schäuble, the Finance Minister of Merkel's government, publicly criticised Christine Lagarde for her untimely remarks. [3]

Wolfgang Münchau considers that the reservations expressed by the IMF on the depth of the austerity measures will in no way modify the attitude of European leaders who are sticking to a hard line position: "European policy makers are paranoid about their credibility, and I expect them to hold on to austerity until the bitter end, when the policy implodes" [4]

The tension between the IMF and the European Commission was expressed publicly again on 14 November 2012. Christine Lagarde contradicted the optimism expressed by Jean-Claude Juncker

(Luxembourg), who is President of the Eurogroup, concerning the outlooks for Greece. The IMF seems to want to put pressure on the Commission in order to increase its influence on the direction that should be taken in Europe. Emerging countries and the United States have been taking action within the IMF to influence the solutions adopted concerning the European crisis, especially since they are being asked to make a financial contribution.

The IMF looks back on the historical failures of brutal austerity policies

Much has been written about another IMF study, a chapter in its World Economic Outlook report, which was published just before its annual assembly in October 2012. In this chapter, the IMF studies 26 public debt crisis episodes since 1875, in which public debt was greater than 100% of GDP. It analyses the policies that were applied to resolve these crises. One of the episodes analysed was that of the United Kingdom after the First World War. British public debt stood at 140% of GDP. The British government applied a radical policy of fiscal austerity combined with a stringent monetary policy. By making large cuts to expenditures, the government achieved a primary fiscal surplus of nearly 7% of GDP (before the payment of interest) throughout the 1920s, in order to reduce British debt by strictly paying it back. However, public debt did not decrease: in 1930, it was 170% of GDP, and three years later in 1933, it was more than 190% of GDP.

Martin Wolf, the chief economics commentator at the Financial Times, states that the real objective of the British government policy "was to break organised labour. These policies resulted in the general

strike of 1926. They spread a bitterness that lasted decades after the second world war." [5] This is exactly what is being done in Europe today. [6] Wolf suggests that European policymakers and the Spanish government of Mariano Rajoy want to push down wages drastically by using unemployment as a weapon. He states that: "Meanwhile, Spain's real GDP is shrinking. Efforts to tighten fiscal policy are sure to reduce it further." He continues his analysis by stating that the Italian government has been inspired by the same policy. He concludes with a statement that may seem unusual coming from a star journalist at one of the principal financial dailies on the planet: "But fiscal austerity and efforts to lower wages in countries suffering from monetary strangulation could break societies, governments and even states." In fact, as Martin Wolf has been insisting for months, it is because of austerity measures that countries are heading straight for disaster. As proof of his analysis, he points to the overwhelming electoral defeat of Mario Monti in March 2013 in Italy.

As Wolfgang Münchau writes, European policymakers are going to continue pursuing and aggravating these policies.

Why are European policymakers pushing for such harsh austerity policies?

It would be a mistake to believe that European policymakers have become blind. Their motivation is neither to return to economic growth, nor to balance the asymmetric relationships within the euro-zone and the EU, so as to create a more coherent whole in which prosperity would reign. Corporate leaders, who shape government action, would like to push forward their great offensive against the hard-won social rights obtained in Europe after the Second World War. From this point of view, the policies pursued recently have been very successful. With the austerity policies that have increased unemployment, workers find themselves in an increasingly precarious position, their capacity to resist and fight has been radically decreased, wages and the various social benefits have been reduced

while the tremendous disparities between workers within the EU have been maintained so as to increase the competition between them. One of the objectives pursued by European policymakers is to improve the capacity of European companies to increase their market share throughout the world. To accomplish this goal, the "cost of labour must be radically cut", as they would say. That would imply inflicting a major defeat on European workers. Other objectives are also being pursued: pushing even further the offensive against public services, avoiding as much as possible a new crash in the banking sector, further strengthening the executive powers (the European Commission and national governments) over the legislative powers, imposing tighter constraints through treaties that set in stone policies that favour the Capitalist agenda...

The political and electoral price to pay may be high, but generally speaking the major political families that dominate European politics have made the bet that even if they lose in the current elections, they will win in the next ones and return to power. In any case, moving over to the opposition does not mean losing a whole set of privileges already acquired in the central State government apparatus, and European institutions, not to mention the local powers they may have (in big cities, regional governments, and so on).

What is complicating the European policymakers' project is the Obama administration's decision to pursue radical austerity policies in the footsteps of the Bush administration. In particular, fiscal cuts in public and social spending are going to be even deeper in the United States. These reductions will not help European companies win market share there. Only Japan seems to be willing to adopt what is only a half-hearted stimulus policy, but this must still be confirmed.

Conclusion: In light of the objectives described above, there is a total convergence between the IMF and European policymakers. Furthermore, since December 2012, when the Obama administration announced that it intended to tighten austerity measures in the United States, we have no

longer heard any critical declarations by Christine Lagarde or other leaders aimed at the IMF concerning the policies pursued in Europe.

We must not misjudge the deeper meaning of the IMF's declarations: if it has taken a bit of distance with respect to European policymakers, it is not to convince them to abandon the structural adjustment policies that are favourable to privatisations and a more intense offensive against the social rights won after the Second World War. It would

like to have more influence on the decisions made, and impose its own. We shall see in the upcoming months whether or not it continues asserting that it would be a good idea to slow down the rhythm at which European policymakers want to balance their budgets. While the research produced by some IMF departments contains arguments that contradict dominant policies more or less clearly, the IMF's actions throughout the world have not changed an iota. These are the actions against which we must combat with all our force.

CANADIAN STATE:

Ecosocialist Network ready for action

BERNARD RIOUX ·

They included members of existing collectives in QS such as Masse critique, Gauche socialiste, Alternative socialiste and Socialisme international. But the majority by far were members independent of any collective. The meeting adopted a statement of principles (base de regroupement) and some statutes, and elected an executive.

By no means merely an ideological coalition, the Réseau hopes to be a center for action-oriented initiatives.

The meeting was opened by four panelists who discussed the bases for ecosocialism, the major ecology concepts, the role of social movements in the process of social transformation, and the ecosocialist experiences in a number of "left of the left" parties, especially in Europe.

What is the basis for coalition and action of the Réseau écosocialiste?

Following a presentation on the draft statement of founding principles, the meeting then discussed it along with a series of proposed amendments.

Here is a summary of the major propositions adopted. They point to a triple crisis in the period opened by the Great Recession of 2008: an economic crisis; an environmental crisis arising out of an unsustainable mode of production and consumption; and a crisis of democracy, which is emptied of any content by an all-powerful financial oligarchy. In short, we are experiencing a global systemic crisis that demonstrates the impasse of contemporary capitalism, increasingly incapable of meeting the fundamental needs of humanity.

Ecosocialism is a new political project developed in response to this impasse. To overcome the present crises, we need to end the search for maximum profit, consumerism and productivism. While ecosocialism undertakes to deepen and renew the emancipatory project of socialism in 21st century conditions, it differs from the "20th century socialisms" which failed in terms of ecology, democracy, and social equity.

That is why ecosocialism values democracy, self-management and egalitarianism and rejects the green capitalism defended by Social Democracy, which claims we can overcome the present ecological crisis without challenging capitalism, the system responsible for this crisis. Ecosocialism proposes instead a democratically administered economy that breaks from the consumerism, commodification and privatization of all aspects of life. Ecosocialism poses the need to participate in social and environmental struggles alongside all those who are resisting.

This essentially entails reorganizing the economy on a radically democratic foundation, renewing democracy at all levels, and promoting the convergence of social and political struggles. Instead of domination by the private sector, it means establishing ecological and participatory planning oriented to meeting the real needs of people in a way that is respectful of ecosystems. We need to break with the production priorities of the major energy, mining or industrial proprietors and the banks, which profit only them.

The founding principles of the Réseau écosocialiste emphasize in particular the need to link Québec solidaire to the social movements, not only by demonstrating the needed solidarity with them but by participating in their debates, to help define together some common perspectives for resistance to

the plans of Big Business. In order to contribute to this process, Québec solidaire must be attentive to those of its members who are active in the various social movements.

Some tasks for the Réseau écosocialiste...

These tasks will be organized around the following themes:

Establish a center for the development of ecosocialist perspectives, in order to be able to participate in the programmatic and tactical debates of Québec solidaire;

Propose campaigns and activities in opposition to the austerity, anti-ecology and patriarchal policies of the ruling classes;

Defend democracy within the party and help to deepen it;

Build and consolidate the presence of Québec solidaire in the various social movements and adopt structures that can facilitate this task;

Organize and lead debates and educationals on ecosocialist perspectives; and

Build links with ecosocialist organizations on a global scale.

The discussion at the Montréal meeting revealed a broad unity of views around the proposed orientation. Participants were explicit in their recognition that the ecosocialist current worldwide is characterized by varying sensibilities, but they felt that the proposed founding principles were sufficiently flexible to welcome these differing approaches. Much of the discussion focused on how to strengthen the anti-patriarchal dimension of the ecosocialism that we defend. It was felt that ecosocialism must also include the abolition of patriarchy among its objectives. The establishment of an ecosocialist society must take into account the demands of women and the fundamental nature of the fight against patriarchy.

Important debate on the statutes

The statutes define the terms of membership, the role and powers of the general assembly as the highest body in the network, and the status of the

regional assemblies and the inter-regional coordinating body. They also define the tasks of the executive committee and the division of labour within it.

The debates focused mainly around two issues: the conditions for membership in the Réseau and the statutory creation of working committees in which the members can be involved.

The first debate was over the proposal that "the members of the network are members of Québec solidaire who adhere to the basis of unity and contribute to the financing and activity of the Réseau."

Questions were raised about the degree of openness of the Réseau. If it was to set its task as one of working in particular to develop Québec solidaire as a party of the streets, it followed — according to the supporters of this option — that participation in the Réseau should be limited to members of Québec solidaire. Others, however, argued that the ecosocialist perspective could have a broader appeal, and it seemed desirable that anyone defining himself or herself as an ecosocialist should be able to join the Réseau. The debate produced a compromise solution: anyone who is a member of Québec solidaire or in political solidarity with the party could join the Réseau. This proposal was adopted.

As for the working committees, this founding meeting agreed to establish the following committees: a women's committee, a communications committee, an educational committee, and a committee for "a party of the streets." These choices demonstrated the members' desire to engage in action as rapidly as possible. As it happens, these committees, which are formed on a volunteer basis, recruited a fair number of members — especially the committee for "a party of the streets."

Election of the executive

The draft statutes proposed to elect an executive committee "composed of six persons, including at least three women" and "representative of the regions." In order to guarantee better representation of the diversity of members, the meeting decided to

increase the number of members of this committee and to include at least four women. The elections produced a very welcome surprise; the executive will be composed of five women and three men. Unfortunately, some very valuable nominees were eliminated, but there is no lack of outlets for involvement in the Réseau.

The Réseau écosocialiste: an achievement for the left of the left, an achievement for Québec solidaire

The founding of the Réseau écosocialiste is an important moment in the consolidation of the left of

the left in Quebec. It is part of the process of unifying the political left in Quebec that began more than a decade ago. It will constitute an achievement because it will strengthen the capacity of Québec solidaire to enter into the essential debates and struggles to come in response to the ecological crisis of the capitalist system, and will help to attract to the party some sectors of the youth who radicalized during the printemps érable, the Maple Spring.

From Climate and Capitalism

FEATURES

In-depth analysis from International Viewpoint's Features section



SYRIA

Sectarianism and the Assad regime in Syria

29 April 2013

The Syrian revolutionary process is still ongoing and has now taken both a peaceful and armed nature to confront the violent repression of the regime. The popular movement in Syria, despite its messages, statements and chants of unity and solidarity of the Syrian people, has had to face continuous accusations by the regime by and some specific groups on the left regionally and internationally of being dominated by extremist Islamists controlled by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, while supporters of the regime have portrayed the Assad regime as secular and as a protector of religious minorities.

This does not mean however that sectarianism does not exist in Syria within the popular movement, it does and we should not deny its existence. In a revolutionary process, different ideologies are present and battle each other, and some groups in Syria resort to sectarian propaganda in their struggle against the regime.

What is therefore the role of the revolutionary left in this situation? Do we expect to leave the battle and wait for the perfect social revolution, as some do and did on the traditional left? Or do we decide to be a full part of this revolutionary process and throw our forces completely into this struggle to overthrow the regime and in the same time to work for the radicalization of the different elements of the revolution?

Lenin answered this question a while ago:

"To imagine that social revolution is conceivable ... without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without a movement of the politically non-conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against op-

pression by the landowners, the church, and the monarchy, against national oppression, etc.-to imagine all this is to repudiate social revolution. So one army lines up in one place and says, "We are for socialism", and another, somewhere else and says, "We are for imperialism", and that will be a social revolution!...

"Whoever expects a "pure" social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is."

A revolutionary process is not of a single colour and will never be so; otherwise it would not be a revolution. On the other hand, the role of the revolutionary left is crystal clear: struggle against the regime and radicalize the popular movement!

We have nevertheless shown and demonstrated in many articles how the great majority of the Syrian popular movement has repeatedly rejected sectarianism since the beginning of the uprising, despite the regime's attempts to ignite this dangerous fire. The slogans of the demonstrators such as "We are all Syrians, we are united" are repeated constantly. In many demonstrations we have seen banners saying "No to sectarianism". The Local Coordination Committees last June organized a campaign under the banner, "Freedom is My Sect", in which it raised signs indicating its rejection of the abominable sectarian discourse, the regime's sectarian practices, and the regime's deadly attempts to drag the Syrian Revolution into a sectarian trap [1]

In the Saraqeb Committee, LCC demonstrators raised signs bearing the symbols of all the Syrian sects [2], while demonstrators in Dael raised a sign saying "In the future Syria, the exclusion policy will end". In the past few months we also saw placards

on which was written "sectarianism is the grave of the revolution".

The popular movement has reaffirmed its struggle for the unity of the Syrian people and against these divisions, developing a sense of national solidarity that transcends ethnic and sectarian divisions.

What is less well known is the use of sectarianism by the regime as a weapon to divide the Syrians both on a religious and ethnic basis, which has been used since Hafez Al Assad came to power. This does not mean that the regime is sectarian or composed of one sect as some in the Syrian opposition or so-called analysts present it.

It is an authoritarian and clientelist regime that has found support among the predominantly Sunni and Christian bourgeoisie in Aleppo and Damascus, who have benefited from the neoliberal policies of recent years, especially since the launch of the social market economy in 2005. This sits alongside the security service apparatus, mostly dominated by Alawis personalities, and networks of bureaucrats and crony capitalists consolidated around public sector patronage, which increasingly developed in the 1990s in the private sector after the implementation of the investment law Decree No. 10 of 1991. [3]

We should not forget that in 1970, the urban merchants of Aleppo and Damascus had praised the arrival of Hafez Al Assad to power and the beginning of the "the Corrective Movement" (*harakat tashiyya*) he launched, which put an end to the radical policies of the 1960s that challenged their capital and political power. The urban merchants, who had been very active against the left wing of the Ba'ath at this period, sent demonstrators into the streets of big cities with banners that read "We implored God for Aid – Al Madad. He sent us Hafiz Al Assad" [4]. Since that period the regime has built a network of loyalties through various ties, mainly economic, with individuals from different communities.

It is nevertheless true that the security apparatus is composed in its majority of Alawis, linked very of-

ten by kinship, tribal or family ties to the Assad family.

The use of sectarianism as a weapon was developed in the following ways, in conjunction with repression of oppositional popular secular and civil organization and political parties, while promoting sectarian and primary identities, such as tribal links, among Syrians.

This policy was deployed by the authoritarian capitalist regime to divide Syrians and divert any criticism of its corruption, social inequalities, repression and absence of democracy.

Sectarianism – a weapon of the ruling class to divide the people

Sectarianism is very often explained as the revival of primordial passions, or the immemorial hatred between two communities, for example between Shias and Sunnis in Iraq, Bahrain and Lebanon; Alawis and Sunnis in Syria; or even Christians and Sunnis in Egypt. In this case, sectarianism is therefore understood as a hangover of past history preventing the modernization of these countries, or as something that is essential to the people of the region.

We disagree strongly with this understanding of sectarianism and on the contrary believe it to be, unfortunately we might say, a product of modernity. Dr Ussama Makdissi explained well this dilemma around the analysis of sectarianism and wrote this in his book:

"Among the greatest red herrings of the history of the Middle East has been the characterization of sectarianism as an obstacle to modernity and as a symptom of a so-called arc of crisis. This interpretation has led to an increasingly frustrated path of historical inquiry, with some scholars earnestly searching backward in time for answers while the problem of sectarianism marches forward, growing ever more entrenched and even more complex. The beginning of sectarianism did not imply a reversion. It marked a rupture, a birth of a new culture that singled out religious affiliation as the

defining public and political characteristic of a modern subject and citizen. " [5]

Yes, sectarianism is a product of modernity and it has been one of the preferred weapons of the authoritarian and capitalist countries of the region to divide the people and repress popular movements. In Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, despite calls and statements against sectarianism and for the unity of the people against the dictatorship made by the opposition, which brought together Sunni and Shia citizens of the countries, the authorities have accused them of being sectarian movements supported by Iran.

A Saudi comrade explained the situation well by saying that:

"Sectarianism is a product of the regime which creates discrimination between workers and state employees and creates myths for each section of workers, in order to break all efforts to unify and act directly by confronting the class which exploits and oppresses. That's why we created a struggle between the Shiite and Sunni sects – while in reality there is no relationship of exploitation between the poor Sunnis and the poor Shias." [6]

In Lebanon, sectarianism emerged as the result of two primordial elements, which developed together on the one hand in the context of Ottoman reforms in the nineteenth century in Mount Lebanon and on the other hand the development and expansion of European capitalism in the Middle East. Usama Makdissi's book [7] perfectly explains its development in the culture of Lebanon and dates its appearance as well: "When the old regime in Mount Lebanon, dominated by a hierarchy in which the secular rather than rank religious affiliation defined politics, was discredited in the mid-nineteenth century."

These changes were a reflection of social transformations, specifically related to the development of silk industry, concentrated in the Maronite villages of Mount Lebanon, which began in the eighteenth century. Until today, the various political forces of Lebanon, both from March 8 and March 14, [8] use

sectarianism and the sectarian political system to establish and develop their power, while in the same time pursuing policies aimed at dividing the people, in addition to impoverishing them by promoting neoliberal policies, to prevent any popular mobilization uniting the Lebanese citizens against their rule.

In Egypt the military regime has used sectarian policies on many occasions in the past; notably in repressing demonstrations led by Coptic demonstrators as in Maspero in November 2011, or by the attempt to divide and create fear among Muslims and Christians. The best example was the 2010 New Year's Eve bombing of al-Qiddissin Church in Alexandria in which 21 people were killed, and where former Interior Minister Habib el-Adly's was accused of being behind this terrorist act.

As we can observe, sectarianism is a weapon in the hand of the ruling class to oppress and divide the people and especially the downtrodden of all societies. In all these cases we are not facing sectarian regimes guided by sectarian interests, but authoritarian, bourgeois and clientelist states using sectarian policies as one of their instruments to repress and divide the people.

The Syrian regime has not lagged behind in this kind of policy. It has developed a dual policy of repressing independent popular civic and secular organizations and political parties, leaving as the only alternatives organizations from the regime, while reinforcing sectarian including tribal, identities through the ages in different ways.

We will look at the policies of the regime aimed at deepening sectarian policies in the last 40 years without forgetting that the regime has used them in the current uprising, for example using intense propaganda of a sectarian and fundamentalist Sunni uprising to describe the revolutionary process, or arming some minority religious groups for example Christians in Damascus, but not only, including tribes and others, to involve them in their struggle against the so called "terrorists".

The repression of secular and civil political organizations and political parties

The coming of Hafez Al Assad to power marked a new era in Syria where independent popular organizations – from trade unions, professional associations and civic associations – came under the regime's authority after harsh repression. Professional unions of doctors, lawyers, engineers and pharmacists were dissolved in 1980. They were the main organizations to have led the struggle for the return of democratic freedoms and the lifting of the emergency rule in the years before. They were later re-established and their leaders were replaced by state appointees. [9]

In the school system, the regime targeted principally leftist teachers from different tendencies in the 1970s, at the same time letting religious fundamentalists currents develop. [10] Independent intellectuals, such as Michel Kilo and Wadi Iskandar, and university teachers critical of the regime, including Rif'at Sioufi and Asef Shahine, were also the targets. [11]

No immunity was granted to university campuses in any way, neither to teacher nor students. Security agencies could arrest students inside lecture halls or on campus.

In a similar manner the regime imposed its domination on the trade union bureaucracy, which prevented and hindered the labour struggle against the neo-liberal policies pursued by the authoritarian regime since 2000. This caused a decline in the standard of living of the majority of people, as well as political repression, and these were the main causes of the wave of protests, which in the past years were turning around the economic question. For example, in May 2006, hundreds of workers protested at the public construction company in Damascus, and clashed with security forces, and at the same period taxi drivers went on strike in Aleppo.

Just as in the past, the workers' trade unions are completely silent in the face of the repression of the

Syrian people, and more specifically against workers. These latter have also been target of the repression. Successful campaigns of general strikes and civil disobedience in Syria during December 2011, paralyzing large parts of the country also shows the activism of the working class and the exploited who are indeed the heart of the Syrian revolution.

For this reason, the dictatorship laid off more than 85,000 workers and closed 187 factories between January 2011 and February 2012 (according to official figures) in order to break the dynamics of protest.

Repression also included all political parties who refused to submit to the diktat of Hafez Al Assad and to enter the umbrella of the National Progressive Front, where they had almost no rights for political activities other than those approved by the regime. It is not only the Muslim Brotherhood that has suffered from the harsh repression since the regime came to power.

At the beginning of the Seventies, various secular political parties, especially from leftist tendencies, were targeted by the regime, including the movement of February 23 (the radical tendency of the Ba'ath close to Salah Jadid), the League of Communist Action (Rabita al amal al shuyu'i), whose members mostly came from the Alawi sect, and to a lesser extent the Communist Party Political Bureau (CPPB) of Ryad Turk. [12] The National gathering, which included various leftist parties, was also severely repressed at the beginning of the 1980s.

This trend has continued in the 2000s with Bashar Al Assad's coming to power. From 2000 to 2006 an opposition movement bringing together intellectuals, artists, writers, scholars and even politicians demanding reforms and democratization of the state was accompanied by the opening of forums to debate and, between 2004 and 2006 by the multiplication of sit-ins, a new political phenomenon in Syria. Calls for sit-ins came from political parties and civil organizations at the same time. The government of Bashar Al Assad cracked down on this

movement; forums were actually closed, sit-ins were severely repressed and many intellectuals who launched this call for civil society and democratization were imprisoned. At the same time the Kurdish Intifada of 2004 was severely repressed.

Syrian society fell increasingly under the control of the regime in its various components. The Ba'ath Party was the only political organization that had the right to organize events, lectures and public demonstrations on a university campus or military barracks or to publish and distribute a newspaper in such places. Even the political parties allied to the regime in the National Progressive Front did not have the right to organize, to make propaganda or to have a small official presence in these institutions. The Ba'ath also controlled an array of corporatist associations through which various sectors of society were brought under the tutelage of the regime. They were called popular organizations and incorporated peasants, youth and women.

Regarding the role of the Ba'ath in society, it should be said that the party lost all its ideological credentials and dynamics when Hafez Al Assad came to power. He transformed it into an instrument of control of society. The party organization was modified with an end to internal elections, replacing them with a top down system of designation decided by the regime and the security services, while elements opposing the regime policies were repressed.

Rifaat Al Assad summed up his political conception of the Ba'ath party by referring to its model at the VII Regional Congress : "the leader designates, the party approves and the people cheer. This is how socialism functions in the Soviet Union. Who does not cheer goes to Siberia..." [13]

The post 1970s party elite has tended to take on the traits of functionaries, while their former comrades of the 1950s and 1960s were often dedicated militants and/ or enthusiastic activists. [14]

The period from the 1970s was characterized by mass enrolment in the party with the objective of broadening the popular base, as far as far possible

to use the party as the main instrument for extending the regime's control of society. From a total membership of the party of 65 398 in 1971, it rose to 374 332 in 1981 and 1,008,243 by June 30, 1992. [15]

The sectarian composition of the Ba'ath was also used on some occasions by the regime to alter the public perception of the "sectarian" character of the regime or more precisely to respond to some attacks from particular parts of the opposition. In January 1980, he induced changes in the makeup of the Ba'ath regional command raising the proportions of Sunnis from 57.1 to 66.7%, while the numbers of Alawis decreased from 33.3 to 19%. [16] Tribal links also played an important role in the composition of the Ba'ath during these past few years.

The sectarian play in the regime in different institutions, Ba'ath, Parliament (People assembly) and army

The repression of popular organizations went in hand in hand with the increased connection and collaboration with predominantly Sunni urban business community through policies of economic rapprochement and controlled liberalization, as well as with conservative elements of society. This was reflected in the various institutions of the regime. Significant numbers of urban Sunnis, mainly from Damascus, were co-opted into the top ranks of the party and many non-party technocrats brought into the government. [17]

In the People's Assembly, greater voice and space was given to members of the professions or businessmen or religious Shaykhs and even some traditional tribal leaders among the non-party and independent elements. They occupied 33.2% of the seats in Parliament in 1994. [18]

Hafez Al Assad's objective was to assure the stability of the regime, play secure capital accumulation and appease powerful segments of the business community. [19] Private businesses were given an increasing role under Hafez Al Assad's rule, as well as religious conservatives' elements.

The Muslim Brotherhood was severely repressed in the 1970s and 1980s, but this did not prevent the regime developing a religious conservative discourse in total contradiction with the picture conveyed by a so-called secular regime. The regime built numbers of mosques and made large contributions to Shariah or Islamic schools, patronized ulama, raised the pay of the country's Sunnis religious establishment from Imams, mudarris, khatibs, etc. several times in the 1970s and propagated Islam in the mass media, while trying to encourage a conservative Islamic establishment to channel Islamic currents and legitimate the regime. [20]

In 1973, following protests and criticism from certain Sunni religious personalities such as Shaykh Hassan Habannakah, Hafez Al Assad introduced an amendment to the new constitution adopted by the People's Assembly the same year, which declared that "the religion of the president is Islam" [21]. This article has actually been kept in the "new" Constitution adopted by the current regime in March 2012, and "Islamic jurisprudence doctrine is a primary source of all legislation" was added to reinforce the Islamic credentials of the regime.

The regime of Bachar Al Assad has continued these kinds of policies and has increased the collaboration with religious associations and conservative segments of the society in conjunction with the new Social market economy and the implementation of accelerated neo liberal policies. This meant the withdrawal of the state from social subventions and many essential public areas.

Prior to the beginning of the revolution 30.1% of the population lived below the poverty line and almost two million people – or 11.4% of the population – had not the means to meet their basic needs. [22] Real GDP growth and real per capita income has been decreasing since the beginning of the 90s. This has pushed the regime to continue its neo liberal policies and search for more private capital. [23]

In the area of health, the regime withdrew considerably, leaving increasing space to charitable asso-

ciations, and especially religious ones. In 2004, around 300 associations were providing a total of 842 millions of Syrian Pounds (SP) to more than 72000 families. [24] The most successful and notorious of these is the Jama'at Zayd, which has deep and rooted relations with the Damascus Sunni bourgeoisie, conducted by Rifa'i brothers, despite their well-known opposition of the religious association to the regime in the past.

Although it has a rather oppositional tone to the regime nowadays, the association did not hesitate to have relations and collaborate with it in the past, notably by obtaining the control of new mosques at expense of others, and some of their members were able also to reach important posts in various religious official institutions. [25] Neo-liberal policies have reinforced religious associations, both Islamic and Christian, in Syria and their network of diffusion, increasing their role in society at the expense of the state.

Around 10 000 mosques and hundreds of religious schools were built and more than 200 conferences headed by clerics were held in cultural centres of important towns during the year 2007. At the same time, the high religious establishments of all the sects were used by the regime as actors of "Syrian civil society" to present a modern and consensual image of the country to foreign delegations visiting the country.

Bachar Al Assad did not hesitate to meet Yusuf Al Qardawi, currently "supporting" the revolution against the regime, who visited Damascus in 2009 at the head of the World Union of Ulemas.

The regime has continued a policy of détente started at the beginning of the 1990s towards opposition Islamists through the release of thousands of political prisoners in 1992, tolerance of Islamist publications and some movements as long as they refrained from political involvement.

In 2001 for example, Shaykh Abu Al fath Al Bayanuni, the brother of the ex-head of the Muslim Brotherhood, was authorized to come back after 30 years of exile and his son, a rich businessman, par-

ticipated in the creation in 2010 of the first sexually segregated mall in Syria. [26] These policies were also part of a strategy to create and deepen the rapprochement with economic elites of Aleppo.

These governmental measures were also accompanied by censorship of literary and artistic works, while promoting a religious literature that was filling the shelves of libraries more and more and Islamizing the field of higher education. This is true particularly in the humanities and expresses itself in rather systematic referral to religious references in any scientific, social and cultural phenomenon. In 2007 the government also withdrew authorizations from two feminist organizations (the Social Initiative and one organization affiliated to the Communist Party linked to the regime) following pressure from various religious groups and personalities. [27]

At the beginning of the uprising in April 2011, the regime actually sought to reach to the conservative sectors of the society by closing the country's only casino and scrapping a ruling that banned teachers from wearing the niqab. The regime had banned the niqab from the classroom in July 2010, forcing hundreds of women from teaching roles into administrative positions. The regime also met with a number of religious dignitaries from different towns to try to appease the protest movement.

The Alawis, or the will to build a political sect submitted to the leadership of the Assad family

In the 1960s, the Ba'ath's access to power improved the standard of living of the population in rural areas considerably. This included Alawis — who used to be in their majority but not exclusively from rural areas — giving them more social and economic opportunities. There has been a political strategy by the Assad regime since Hafez's arrival to power to link the Alawi community not only to the regime but more precisely to the Assad clan. The regime has developed different policies in trying to reach this objective, trying to eliminate any dissent voice inside the Alawi community and to transform it

into a political sect linked to the Assad clan. They have, however, never realized this objective.

Firstly Hafez Al Assad eliminated possible Alawi military alternatives to his rule, who had relations with the Sunni Damascene bourgeoisie, including the general Muhammad Omran, assassinated in Lebanon in 1971. Through his position as historical chief of the Ba'ath military committee and close relations to the civil wing of the Ba'ath Party of Salaheddin Bitar he was a threat to Hafez Al Assad. Hafez Al Assad also imprisoned Salah Jdid, who was in power from 1966 to 1970, from his arrival to power until 1993.

The regime was behind the formation of the Imam Ali al Murtada association in 1981, which had the objective to weld the Alawi community together and to increase the power of Jamil Assad's, the President's brother in the region of Lattakia where he resided. This latter actually said the objective of the association was to develop an Alawi "personality" (Shakhsiyya). [28] Jamil Assad particularly used the association against the local Ba'ath party, presenting candidates of the association against it in the elections to the People's Assembly in 1980, to build a network of patronage in the city and its outskirts. The Ali Murtadas association was nevertheless short-lived and ended in 1983, following increasing criticisms and protests from the Ba'ath party and members of the regime.

Except for the Ali al Murtada association, the regime did not allow the development of any charitable sectarian organization in the Alawi community, unlike other sects. The Assad family did not want any alternative source of power inside the community. Most of the relationships were established on a clientelist basis between the Alawi community and officials on a personal level following a variety of forms derived from mutual interests and loyalties to the family or of narrow clan. Many in the Alawi community complained that most of the officials of this community were helping other communities more than them because these latter paid more, or because of an unwillingness to engage in

issues of bribery with relatives and acquaintances, who might criticize them. [29]

In the same vein of preventing any other source of power among the community, the Assad regime did not allow any form of civil representation to form a higher Alawi Supreme Council, such as the Shiite Supreme Council or the Ismaeli Supreme Council, there are no public religious references for the Alawi community. This was not due to the so-called secularism of the regime, but in order to link the community to the regime and the total domination of the Assad family. The regime also encouraged tribal division within the Alawi community, allowing the emergence of narrow tribal loyalties within the community. [30] There are no private chambers or lawscourts for the Alawi community; they follow the same laws as the Sunni community regarding the law of personal status (marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc...).

The Alawi community on the other hand did not benefit from any specific economic policies favouring them against other communities from the regime. In the 1990s, the scholar Hanna Batatu wrote that complaints were made by the Alawis from the highlands that the bulk of peasants in their areas were destitute of comforts and were still dependent for tillage on erratic weather conditions. In addition to this, their real earnings from agriculture diminished and many had to seek additional sources of revenue. [31]

A recent report stated that "the Alawi countryside remains strikingly underdeveloped; many join the army for lack of an alternative; members of the security services typically are overworked and underpaid. Young members of the community for the most part joined the security apparatus solely because the regime offered them no other prospects. Ordinary Alawis rarely benefited, from high-level corruption, least of all under Bashar". [32]

These trends were common to other regions in Syria and show the similar conditions of all Syrians regardless of their community.

The Alawi Mountain is the second most impoverished region after the North Eastern ones populated in majority by the Kurdish people. The region and the Alawi community suffered just like others in the country of the liberalization of the economy, the end of subventions and high inflations.

These policies of the regime were not totally successful in homogenizing the community around the leadership of the Assad leadership and linked its destiny to it, as many in the community have been and are struggling against the regime.

Alawi activists such as the feminist Hanady Zahlout and long-time dissidents Habib Saleh, Samar Yazbeck, Louai Hussein and Fadwa Soleiman are all figures of the opposition, without forgetting prominent economist and opposition member Aref Dalila, who has spent many years in prison for his activities against the regime. An Alawi brigade was also formed in the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in the province of Idlib, while numbers of officers and soldiers of the community have defected as well. [33]

Facebook pages have appeared showing the involvement of the community in the uprising, such as "Alawi Coalition Against the Assad Family Regime," "Committee of anti-Bashar Assad Alawi Youth – Homs". There has also been a profusion of like-minded public statements, with titles like "Statement by Members of the Alawi Sect," or following the Houla massacre as well.

Anti-Kurdish discrimination

Since 1970 the Assad regime has increased the discrimination against Kurdish people and raised tensions between the different populations (Kurdish, Arabs, Assyrians, Turkmen) living in the North East of Syria to hide the corruption and social and economic problems of this most impoverished region – despite the oil reserves present there. In this case it was the ethnic divide that was used to separate the people.

Under the Assad regime, the Kurds – who constitute more than 10 per cent of the population and are the largest minority in the country – have al-

ways had second-class status. They are neither allowed to teach their own language nor cultivate their traditions. Behaviour violating these rules could result in a 10-year prison sentence.

The Kurdish population has been deliberately kept impoverished. Land was leased to Arab landowners, oil fields were taken from them by the state and roads were left in disrepair.

Between 1972 and 1977, a policy of colonization was implemented in specific regions with a large Kurdish population. Around 25 000 "Arab" peasants, whose lands were flooded by the construction of the Tabqa dam, were sent in the High Djezireh and established in "modern villages" close to Kurdish villages. [34] The new "modern villages" were well equipped in water, electricity, hospitals, schools, roads, police stations, etc... while their Kurdish neighbours were lacking nearly everything. The Kurdish population in these regions faced daily discrimination including the dismissal of teachers, under the pretext they were foreigners, layoffs of workers, destruction of houses, and arrests of political leaders etc... [35]

The Syrian government has changed Kurdish place names to Arabic, banned shop signs in Kurmanji and prevented parents from registering their children with Kurdish names.

This policy of the "Arab Belt" was a plan for a cordon sanitaire between Syrian and neighbouring Kurds around the northern and northeastern rim of the Jazira, along the borders with Turkey and Iraq. Kurdish land was confiscated and Kurds told to re-settle in the Syrian interior to make way for Arabs. There was also a strong military presence in this cordon and Arab settlements were provided with superior facilities and state benefits to encourage greater economic prosperity. [36]

There were periodic protests, confrontations and arrests in the 1980s and 1990s, often on significant days such as Newruz (Kurdish New Year) or the anniversary of the al-Hasaka census, the 1962 census in east Syria, which resulted in around 150 000 Kurdish being denied nationality. It left them, and

subsequently their children, denied basic civil rights and condemned to poverty and discrimination. They number today more than 300 000.

In 2004, the Kurdish uprising that started in the city of Qamichlo and spread to in Kurdish areas across Syria – the Jazira, Afrin, Aleppo and Damascus – was severely repressed by security forces and the use of Arab tribes by the regime in the North East region. Many Kurdish activists and protesters were killed and arrested, more than 2000, while others were forced to leave the country.

At the beginning of the revolutionary process, Bachar Al Assad issued a decree in April, following meetings with Kurdish representatives, granting to persons registered as foreigners in the governorate of Hassake Syrian Arab citizenship, while 48 prisoners, mainly Kurds, were also released. Many stateless Kurds are nevertheless still awaiting for citizenship until now.

The celebration of the Kurdish New Year festival of Newruz was also allowed by the regime in 2011, while before security forces would always intervene and repress any citizen celebrating it. These decisions were made to appease to Kurdish population feelings especially.

Kurdish activists have been playing a leading role in the uprising and are very present in the revolutionary process, though the press underplays their role. Many Kurdish activists have actually been the targets of Syrian security forces during the current uprising.

Conclusion

As we have seen throughout this article the regime is the main force responsible for the creation and perpetuation of sectarian feelings and relationships. For the past 40 years, the Assad regime has encouraged and implemented policies dividing the people along sectarian and ethnic lines in order to rule the country. All these elements, together the repression of popular and civic secular organizations, the lack of secular voices, which are normally

filled up by the working class which has suffered various forms of repression and cooptation of the union bureaucracy, have allowed space for a rhetoric of sectarianism that manifests itself among the most conservative elements of the Syrian revolution. The regime is therefore responsible for the division created among the Syrian people rather than, as they claim, a conspiracy supported by foreign actors to divide the country. Our task as revolutionary socialists is to smash the main source of sectarianism, in other words the regime, and its perpetuators who are the reactionary and opportunist elements within the revolution.

Ussama Makdissi wrote that "to overcome sectarianism, if it is at all possible, requires yet another rupture, a break as radical for the body politic as the advent of sectarianism was for the old regime, It requires another vision of modernity". [37]

The struggle against sectarianism is part of the struggle to overthrow this criminal regime, and to establish a radical break with the past. This break with the sectarian policies of the regime also opposes the section of the oppositions using a sectarian discourse and backed by the Arab Gulf states in their sectarian propaganda. Sectarianism can only be defeated by struggling in conjunction for democracy, social justice, secularism and real independence.

The secularism we call for is not separated from our struggle for democracy, socialism and anti-imperialism. Our secularism is part of our revolutionary struggle to liberate religion from political parties and to let people live freely their religion without the oppression of the state. Our revolutionary secu-

larism does not differentiate from the different sects and ethnicities, and oppose any discrimination. In addition, our secularism calls as well for social equality and not only equality before the law, in other words, struggle against social inequalities and injustices created and increased by the capitalist system, while we also oppose all forms of imperialism and act in solidarity with people in struggle, and firstly and mostly with the Palestinian people.

This means that we are in a full and total class struggle. These words in the struggle against sectarianism of a Lebanese Comrade make full sense for the case of Syria as well: "It's not a struggle for a more tolerant society. This is a class struggle – that is both a struggle against the dominant ideas and a struggle of the oppressed against the oppressors. This struggle can't be waged by the bourgeoisie; on the contrary, it can only be conducted by a fight against the ruling bourgeoisie. This is where the centrality of the working class is no longer a theoretical question. Indeed, the only line of defence of the Lebanese people against the sectarian divisions and the brutal attacks of the ruling class is the class unity." [38]

The struggle against sectarianism is part of the struggle against the capitalist system and to unite the oppressed of Syria, be they Arab, Kurdish, Assyrian, Sunni, Christians or Alawi to overthrow the regime and build a new Syria. As chanted by the protesters, the Syrian people are one and freedom is my sect! Long live the Syrian revolution!

*This article was first published in Arabic in the magazine **Thawra Dai'ma** The link to the article in Arabic.*

FEATURES

US Imperialism's pivot to Asia

ASHLEY SMITH · 16 April 2013

Obama is just as committed as his predecessor George W. Bush to the grand strategy of global domination that has aimed to incorporate all the world's states into a US-managed unipolar world order. Bush had hoped to lock in US supremacy by using 9/11 as an alibi to invade Afghanistan and Iraq on the way to further regime changes in Syria and Iran. His goal was to control what foreign policy wonks call the Greater Middle East, its energy reserves, and shipping and pipeline routes. The United States could thereby control potential peer competitors, like China, which rely heavily on fuel imports from that region. Bush also intended to establish permanent bases throughout Central Asia in order to encircle both China and Russia. The insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan wrecked these plans. Instead of securing US hegemony, the occupations backfired and in turn precipitated an imperial crisis. The Great Recession further accelerated the decline of US power.

In the wake of these strategic and economic disasters, the unipolar world order is being replaced by an asymmetric, multipolar world order. The United States stands out as the world's only superpower, but it now faces a major imperial rival in China and a host of regional ones including Russia, India, and Brazil among others. [1]

To address this predicament, Obama issued a new Defense Strategic Guidance in January 2012 entitled "Sustaining US Leadership: Priorities for the 21st Century Defense" that announced his "Pivot to Asia." With this new policy, he is dramatically re-orienting American imperialism on the region most

experts predict will be the hub of twentyfirst century capitalism—the Asia Pacific. Obama continues to promise engagement with China to lure it into an international order under American hegemony, but his actual policies demonstrate an unmistakable shift toward containment of China as its principal imperial rival.

The rise of China

In the late 1970s, Deng Xiaoping led the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to abandon autarkic state capitalism and instead adopt state-led capitalist development to produce for the world market. The CCP offered their state capitalist monopolies as well as foreign and domestic private capital boundless supplies of cheap Chinese labor. The success of this new development strategy has transformed China from an economic backwater into the new workshop of the world. On that basis, it has built itself into a new imperialist power. Thirty years ago, China's economy was smaller than the Netherlands'. Now it has surpassed Japan as the second largest in the world, and is projected to eclipse the United States in the next couple of decades. It has now supplanted Germany as the largest exporter in the world system. While many multinational corporations use China as an export-processing platform, China has maintained and expanded its state monopolies, particularly its energy companies like Sinopec, to compete on an international scale. It has also required multinationals to share their technology with Chinese state and private corporations. As Jeffrey Bader argues, China has "provided a range of subsidies to domestic companies in order to build them into national champions. At the same time, it forced foreign investors to transfer technology, thereby reducing or eliminating their competitive advantage." [2]

The CCP has thus developed Chinese capitalism into an exporting powerhouse. It now runs a trade surplus with most of the advanced capitalist world. It sustains, for example, an annual \$200 billion trade surplus with the United States. In the process, it has acquired an astonishing \$3 trillion in foreign currency reserves, including \$1 trillion in US Treasury holdings. In short, China has become the banker for the US government.

China has also become an economic hub for the world economy that now rivals the United States and the European Union. As the center of the Asian economy it is the principal trading partner for most of the region from Japan to South Korea and even its mortal enemy Taiwan. Its massive industrial expansion has driven it abroad in search of raw materials, oil, and natural gas to fuel its economy, as well as diversified markets for its products. It has thus created what it calls its "Go Out" strategy to increase its economic interconnections with nearly every corner of the world system. "

All over the world," writes Jack Chang, "from Latin America to the South Pacific, a cash-flush China is funding projects that others won't, seemingly less concerned by the conventional wisdom of credit rating and institutions such as the World Bank." [3] It has become the main trading partner of Latin America, as well as a principal source of capital investment in infrastructure to transport raw materials back to China.

Dambisa Moyo notes that China has also "become Africa's single largest trading partner, unseating the United States, which did US\$86 billion in Africa in 2009. According to Chris Alden, author of *China in Africa*, two-way trade between China and Africa grew from US\$10 billion in 2000, to US\$55 billion in 2006, to US\$90 billion in 2009." [4]

China has built a military to back up its newfound political and economic power. It has transformed the People's Liberation Army (PLA), which had suffered an ignominious defeat at the hands of Vietnam in 1979, into an increasingly modern army, air force, and navy capable of policing Asia.

Edward Luttwak estimates that Chinese defense spending has been increasing at more than 9 percent a year for over a decade—"a phenomenal rate of growth," he notes, "when military expenditures worldwide, including that of the United States, but for immediate war costs, have been mostly stagnating or declining." [5] In a study commissioned by the US Department of Defense, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) predicts that "China's defense spending is projected to be on par with the United States at some point over the next 15 to 20 years." [6]

China's economic expansion and growing militarism serve an important ideological function to win consent from a restive working class and peasantry. China averages around 180,000 mass "incidents," a term that includes meetings, protests, and strikes each year over sundry grievances against employers and the state. To contain and divert this growing class anger and resistance, the CCP promises, like Ronald Reagan did, that economic growth will trickle down to the benefit of the masses. It also has turned to nationalism to deflect popular grievances on to rivals like the United States and Japan. "

The Chinese government pursued a two-prong strategy of economic growth and patriotism, argues Stratfor's Rodger Baker. "Economic growth required Beijing to expand its sourcing of commodities, moving China naturally onto the sea. Meanwhile patriotism tinged with anti-Japanese teaching, has come to pervade the education system and society." [7]

The competitive drive of capitalist development has forced the Chinese ruling class to become increasingly assertive in Asia and internationally. This is not the result of ideology but of the economic compulsion for the state to secure resources, develop markets, and open sites for investment for Chinese capital. China's new imperial assertiveness is a significant departure from its traditional strategy of pursuing a "peaceful rise."

Just like the rise of the United States, Japan, and Germany at the end of the nineteenth century produced conflicts with established imperial powers like Britain and France, China's rise has set it on a collision course with the United States and with regional powers in Asia. Despite their economic integration, the United States and China are at loggerheads over everything from the strength of the Chinese currency, the yuan, to violations of intellectual property rights, cyber security, and climate change, as well as over policies in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

Contradictions of the United States's China policy

US strategy toward China has undergone dramatic shifts from the Cold War to today. After Nixon's famous engagement with China in the early 1970s, Washington treated it as an ally against Russia. Once the Cold War ended and US-China relations resumed after the Tiananmen Square massacre, the United States celebrated a neoliberal honeymoon with China, using it as an export-processing platform for American multinationals. But that very policy has ironically helped turn China into a competitive rival.

US strategy has thus become plagued by a fundamental contradiction—it is economically integrated with its main international competitor, relying on Chinese credit to sustain the deficit and cheap labor to boost the bottom lines of US corporations. The American state has facilitated US corporations like Apple offshoring production to China, for example. On the other hand, the United States and its corporations are now increasingly coming into conflict with the Chinese state and capital. Expressing this conundrum, Hillary Clinton famously asked, "How can you get tough with your banker?" [8]

For a while the United States managed this contradiction with a policy of engagement, which it still verbally declares, but always paired it with a subordinate policy of containment. Aaron Friedberg has coined the neologism "conengagement" to capture the contradictory nature of US strategy toward China. [9]

During the Clinton administration, when American engagement with China was at its height and his state department called it a "strategic partner," the United States still sustained its military power throughout Asia as a deterrent to Beijing. It also staged the single largest military action since the Vietnam War in 1996 to block China's threat against Taiwan.

In reaction to China's increasing power, the Bush administration re-termed China a "strategic competitor." It also found itself locked in a harsh stand-off with Beijing over a collision between a Chinese fighter jet and an American spy plane over China. But after 9/11, Bush backed off his confrontational approach to seek China's support in the "war on terror." He also advocated its entry into the WTO as a means to incorporate it into the world system.

China takes advantage of US decline

"Conengagement" was viable as long as the United States was able to dominate a unipolar world order. Once the imperial and economic crisis led to the relative decline of American power, space opened up for China and other powers to become increasingly assertive throughout the world system. This development threw US-China policy into crisis. Sensing this moment, China has become increasingly assertive in Asia and around the world. The Washington Post's John Pomfret described China's leaders as expressing a "new triumphalist attitude." [10]

While the US and European economies found themselves mired in a long slump, China's enormous stimulus package sustained its ongoing double-digit annual growth rates. Its continuing boom also propped the tributary economies that export raw materials to China like Brazil, Argentina, Australia, and other Asian economies. With it seemingly becoming an alternative hub for the world economy, China escalated its "Go Out" campaign. It struck all sorts of trade and investment deals in Africa and even in the United States's own "backyard," Latin America.

China positioned itself as the self-proclaimed

leader of the developing world in the Doha Round trade talks that began in 2001, and in various climate summits. This was always quite cynical, since China by this point was a major power in its own right, and in fact was already involved in numerous conflicts with other rising powers like Brazil, whose manufacturing base has been increasingly undermined by Chinese exports. Nevertheless, China hoped to expand alliances beyond those with nations outside the US orbit like Russia, Venezuela, Iran, Syria, and Sudan to include those with which it was economically integrated, like Japan among many others.

Japan for one flirted with shifting from its primary alliance with the United States to a balanced alliance with both the United States and China. In 2009, after the Democratic Party of Japan supplanted the country's main party of power, the Liberal Democratic Party, the new prime minister Yukio Hatoyama suggested this new balanced alliance. He broke with the ruling-class consensus to demand that the United States close its base on Okinawa and end its long-standing policy of using nuclear weapons in response to any attack on Japan. He even proposed a formation called the East Asian Community that specifically excluded the United States. [11]

The Obama administration did everything it could in response to prevent Hatoyama from implementing this drift into China's orbit. It blocked with the Japanese establishment against Hatoyama and used North Korea's submarine attack on the South Korean naval frigate Cheonan to pressure Japan to block with the United States and South Korea against China and North Korea. Hatoyama then resigned amidst a catastrophic drop in approval ratings, and his successor Naoto Kan returned Japanese policy to its traditional allegiance to Washington.

China's conflict with Asian states

In reaction to this failure of Chinese soft power in Asia, the CCP turned to hard power confrontations with various Asian states to assert China's control

over strategic islands in the South China and East China Seas. Edward Luttwak identifies a

"veritable behavioral shift that became manifest in 2009–2010. There was a sudden change in tone and content of the Chinese declarations, which became sharply assertive on many different issues from monetary policy to the relevance of Western democracy. More strikingly, mostly dormant territorial disputes were loudly revived with India, Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam—and all more or less at the same time, amplifying the effect. Actual incidents duly followed with the vessels or island outposts of Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam, with successive episodes that have continued till the present." [12]

China asserted its territorial right to the Diaoyou islands against the Japanese claim to the islands, which they call the Senkakus. Driven by resource hunger and security concerns, China has asserted sovereignty over the islands and the surrounding waters. It wants to control shipping lanes, expand fishing territory to make up for the destruction of their coastal fisheries by overfishing and pollution, and claim rights to deep-sea drilling for oil and natural gas in waters around the islands. Japan for the very same reasons claims ownership over the islands.

Identical motives have driven China into conflict with Vietnam, the Philippines, and other nations over the Spratly and Paracel Islands as well as the Scarborough Shoal. In each case there have been semi-military clashes between China and the other nations. The logic behind the Chinese aggressiveness was to drive Asia's lesser powers into bilateral negotiations in which China would have the upper hand and be able to resolve the disputes on its terms.

Instead, most of these Asian states have tried to link with others states like Lilliputians to build a counterhegemonic alliance against the Chinese Gulliver. They have then appealed to their historically, the United States, to intercede on their behalf. Australia and Japan have played the vanguard role

in this effort. Despite their economic integration with China, they fear that China is parlaying its economic power to assert its control over the region economically, politically, and militarily.

Australia, for example, issued a White Paper in 2009, *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific Century: Force 2030*, that set out a strategy of increased military spending and alliance building in the region. It also called for the United States to counterbalance China's imperial assertiveness. It reached out to Japan to join it in this initiative. As a result, not only China but nations throughout the region are increasing their defense spending. As Bloomberg News points out, "Defense spending by China, India, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan accelerated sharply in the second half of the last decade, and at \$225 billion in 2012 was almost double the amount of a decade earlier." [13]

The various Asian states and their capitalists are also beginning to organize what Edward Luttwak calls geo-economic resistance to China. Since they are dwarfed by China's military, especially its nuclear weaponry, these smaller states are beginning to resist China economically. For example, Japanese capital is becoming more nationalistic and beginning to rethink its integration with China. As Luttwak notes, "of all the Japanese, those most active in doing business in China are the least likely to support Japan's national subordination to the CCP." [14]

Japan's new prime minister Shinzo Abe has threatened to encourage Japanese capital to shift its investments out of China. Already, as Rodger Baker documents, in 2012 "total trade between China and Japan fell 3.9 per cent year on year, the first drop since the major financial crisis of 2009, with exports falling more than 10 per cent. Japanese foreign direct investment, although rising slightly for the year, saw a major falloff in the summer when tensions between the countries ran high." [15]

In another stunning example, Foxconn, which is owned by Taiwanese magnate Terry Gou, is recon-

sidering the wisdom of basing most of its factories in China. As Forbes reports,

"The big factor today—and the one no one thought about three years ago—is political. Beijing wants territory controlled by its neighbors and, as a result, China is getting itself into nasty scrapes, especially with Japan. Moreover, the Chinese have designs on the sovereign state of Taiwan, which they consider their province. For IT companies, China's friction with these two countries is a problem because many of their products rely on Japanese and Taiwanese components. [16]

What's at stake in the pivot?

The rise of China as an imperial power is thus becoming a threat to US dominion in Asia and globally, stoking conflicts between China and various Asian states, and even beginning to disrupt the economic integration of the region. Though the United States is by no means abandoning its efforts to secure its dominance in the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and elsewhere, it is shifting the balance of its strategy toward the containment of China.

The stakes for US imperialism are high. One study argues the Asia-Pacific

"stands poised to become the centerpiece of the 21st-century global economy. In 2010, 61 percent of US goods exports and 72 percent of US agricultural exports worldwide went to the Asia-Pacific. By 2015, East Asian countries are expected to surpass NAFTA and the euro zone to become the world's largest trading bloc. Market opportunities will only increase as the region swells by an additional 175 million people by 2030. With their economies maturing and populations expanding, the countries of the Asia-Pacific will thirst for more oil and natural resources—most transported by sea. Today, about 15 percent of oil traded worldwide and more than half of the globe's merchant fleet tonnage flow through the Straits of Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok, which funnel the raw materials of the Middle East and Africa into the booming East Asian economies. [17]

It is also becoming the center of growing military conflict. As the CSIS documents,

"The region is home to five of the eight states recognized as being in possession of nuclear weapons, three of the world's top six defense budgets, six of the world's largest militaries (i.e., United States, China, Vietnam, North Korea, South Korea, India), two conflict areas from the Cold War era (i.e., Taiwan Strait, Korea), continuing tensions between India and Pakistan, and territorial disputes stretching from the Northern Territories of Japan through the East and South China Seas and into South Asia. For four centuries, Asia has been the object of Western influence; now events in Asia are defining the security and prosperity of the world as a whole." [18]

Imperial strength begins at home

There are several components to Obama's new strategy to restore American power against China. One key realization is that the United States can no longer allow its manufacturing base to dwindle. That has weakened the United States and strengthened China. Therefore Obama is attempting to "on-shore" production (that is, entice manufacturing facilities back onto US soil) to restore America's competitive position in the world economy in general and specifically against China.

Obama is finding allies among American capitalists who are increasingly frustrated with China's repressive labor movement, spiraling wage increases, persistent violations of intellectual property rights, and increasing cyber piracy. As the New York Times reports, "'America's biggest global firms have been ballast in the relationship' with China, said Kurt M. Campbell, who recently resigned as Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia to start a consulting firm, the Asia Group, to manage commercial relationships. 'And now they are the ones telling the Chinese that these pernicious attacks are undermining what has been built up over decades.'" [19]

Obama is offering cheap, unorganized, and skilled American labor as a pivotal incentive for American

reindustrialization. After three decades of class war on the US working class, wages and benefits are now the lowest in the advanced capitalist world. Obama's bailouts and austerity measures have further driven down the cost of labor. As a result, the Economist reports, "real wages in American manufacturing have declined by 2.2 percent since 2005." [20]

By contrast, China's militant working class has driven up wages. Chinese workers are making five times what they were in 2000 and their wages are rising at 18 percent a year. American workers' wages, adjusted for productivity, are now only 2.3 times Chinese levels, down from 4.6 times in 2005. [21] As a result, America's workers are now actually competitive with workers in China when the cost of transporting goods across the Pacific is subtracted.

Obama has bent over backwards to offer further incentives for capital. Global warming be damned, he is implementing what the Brookings Institution calls a "Black, Gold and Green" energy policy [22] It argues for Obama to increase the extreme extraction of natural gas and oil, permit the construction of the Keystone XL and other pipelines, tax this new energy industry, and invest in developing green technologies so that US capital in that area can defeat their competitors in China and Germany. American capital will benefit with cheap and plentiful energy for new manufacturing plants.

Obama's onshoring policy is beginning to bear fruit. Surprisingly GE has led the way. Its former CEO Jack Welch had famously dreamed about putting factories on barges to escape any and all countries' unions and regulations. Now GE has opted to return much of its appliance manufacturing to the United States, investing nearly \$1 billion dollars in its Appliance Park facilities in Louisville, Kentucky.

GE CEO Jeff Immelt told the Financial Times that "three factors persuaded [GE] to bring production back to the US—the adoption of 'lean' manufacturing and design techniques that made the plant more efficient and took labor content out of pro-

duction; the move to a two-tier workforce that means new employees are paid \$13 per hour compared to \$22 per hour for those employed before 2005; and \$17 million of government incentives." He also noted that by leaving China, GE could better protect its intellectual property rights on design and engineering, which Chinese capital has violated for decades. [23]

"GE is not alone in moving the manufacture of many of its products back to the US," writes Charles Fishman in the *Atlantic Monthly*. "The transformation under way at Appliance Park is mirrored in dozens of other places, with Whirlpool bringing mixer-making back from China to Ohio, Otis bringing elevator production back from Mexico to South Carolina, even Whamo-O bringing Frisbee-molding back from China to California." [24]

Ford, the *Economist* reports, "has brought back production from China and Mexico to Ohio and Michigan thanks to a new agreement with the UAW" for a two-tier wage structure. [25] Even Apple, perhaps the most outsourced company in the United States, has promised to onshore production of a line of its Mac Mini computers. Although in its earliest stages, Obama is intent on rebuilding America's industrial base. Combined with a weak dollar policy, Obama hopes to use this new manufacturing to increase US exports, cut into its trade deficit and debt, and thereby reassert its competitive economic position.

US builds an alliance against China

As it refurbishes its industrial base, Obama is welding several Asian powers together in a political bloc to contain China. America's key allies remain Australia, Japan, and South Korea, despite their economic integration with China. Since issuing its 2009 White Paper, Australia has worked hand in glove with Washington. Similarly, especially since the 2012 election that returned the Liberal Democratic Party to power and installed its leader Shinzo Abe as prime minister, Japan has struck a bellicose tone against China, and has called for the

United States to back up its claims to the Senkaku/Diaoyou islands.

South Korea had until recently adopted a more balanced posture, drawn to China economically but dependent on the US militarily in its conflict with North Korea. After several North Korean nuclear and ballistic missile tests, however, South Korea has shifted decisively back to the United States. This new posture was solidified when right-wing nationalist Park Geun-hye, daughter of South Korea's last dictator, narrowly won the recent 2012 presidential election. She promises to be a loyal ally of the United States in its confrontation with China.

Beyond these states the United States possesses other traditional supporters. Thailand remains a steadfast ally as well as the Philippines. The United States has expanded its relations with Indonesia under the cover of the war on terror. It has also managed to pull India into its orbit. For much of the Cold War, India was nonaligned and if anything leaned toward the Soviet Union. With India's rising economic power, the United States has tilted away from its historic relationship with Pakistan, which it shares with China, to embrace India as its key political ally in South Asia.

Most surprising of all the new alliances Obama has forged is the one with Vietnam. The country had successfully liberated itself from the United States, went on to defeat China in 1979, and was an ally of Russia during the Cold War. It only normalized relations with the United States in 1996, and has warmly received Obama's overtures because it needs a great power ally in its ongoing confrontation with China over the Spratly and Paracel islands.

The United States also wants to weaken China's hold on its own camp. For example, the United States dramatically ended its policy of isolating Myanmar (Burma) for decades. It established diplomatic relations and has encouraged the country to shift its economic and political allegiance to the United States and away from China. In response, Myanmar has already suspended its con-

tract with Beijing to build a \$3.6 billion hydroelectric project on the Irrawaddy River that would have supplied power to China. [26]

Similarly, Washington is attempting to woo Cambodia into the US camp. China has bought Cambodia's loyalty with \$2.1 billion in aid over the last three decades. To disrupt this bond, the United States has begun to funnel money into Cambodia. In 2012, it distributed \$70 million in aid to improve health, education, governance, and economic growth. [27] In a sign of the importance of winning over the regimes in Burma and Cambodia, Obama visited them along with Thailand immediately after his victory in the 2012 presidential elections.

The United States also hopes to manipulate political schisms between various Asian states to further disrupt China's attempt to dominate Asia. In the conflicts between China and various Asian states over disputed islands, the United States wants to interpose itself as a mediator in the situation, establish itself as an ally of the lesser powers, and subject China to multilateral negotiations.

It is not doing this for any benevolent reason. As Robert Kaplan writes, "Nationalism in the South China Sea countries such as Vietnam and Indonesia—as well as countries further afield like India, Japan and Korea—may be the best basis for stitching together common interests in a loose, almost invisible network of like-minded and increasingly capable maritime states that are willing to deflect Chinese hegemony." [28]

The United States wants to manipulate the ongoing conflict with North Korea over its nuclear program, ballistic missile tests, and military skirmishes to retain allies like South Korea, which might drift out of the American camp given its primary economic relationship with China.

Finally, the United States aims to participate in all the multilateral bodies in the region like the Association of South East Nations (ASEAN), the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the East Asia Summit to build a multilateral system. The Chinese prefer to deal with each nation sepa-

rately in bilateral negotiations; the United States aims to push in the opposite direction and tie China down in complex multilateral negotiations.

As a result of all these political overtures, the CSIS argues, "US alliance relations with Japan, South Korea, and Australia are at historic highs in terms of public opinion and government support; Singapore, Vietnam, and the Republic of the Philippines are all expanding defense cooperation and access arrangements with the United States; defense cooperation with India is increasing, though not in terms of access or presence. All of this is in part a response to recent Chinese assertiveness." [29]

An Asian NAFTA

Washington, however, knows that it cannot just use political alliances to disrupt the Chinese economic integration of Asia. It must also flex its own economic muscle to make its economy an alternative hub. It has already struck the US Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS) finally ratified in 2011. The Office of the Trade Representative of the United States declared that this trade deal "is a model for trade agreements for the rest of the region, and underscores the US commitment to, and engagement in, the Asia-Pacific region." [30]

The United States has been hard at work to expand on this precedent with a region-wide trade deal—the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP). Right now the TPP includes eleven countries—the United States, Australia, Peru, Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, Vietnam, Mexico, and Canada. The TPP excludes China. Japan's newly elected prime minister Shinzo Abe is expected to announce that his country will soon join negotiations for the TPP.

The United States has of course pushed for traditional neoliberal terms in the pact that are designed to benefit American capital and shred all sorts of social welfare protections among its Asian signatories. A new study of TPP negotiations by Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières reports

the United States is pushing to "enhance patent and data protections for pharmaceutical companies, dismantle public health safeguards enshrined in international law and obstruct price-lowering generic competition for medicines." The result could be restrictions on access to affordable generic medicines for millions of people. [31]

The CSIS underscores the imperialist nature of these negotiations when it declares that the TPP "could form a sustainable trans-Pacific trade architecture that sustains US access and influence in the region. The US hopes eventually to transform this into its own trade block, the Asia Pacific Free Trade Agreement. If it secures this, it would be the biggest trade deal since NAFTA." [32]

Military encirclement of China

To buttress American political and economic initiatives, the Obama administration is engaged in a dramatic increase in the US military presence in Asia and the Pacific. Until recently, the US Pacific Command (PACOM) had based its force deployment on templates left over from the Cold War. The United States now wants to disperse these forces throughout the region, establish bases and military relationships with as many countries as possible, increase arms sales to allies, and increase its naval presence in the strategic shipping lanes that connect Asia to the rest of the world economy. The United States thus intends nothing less than the military encirclement of China.

There are already 320,000 US military personnel stationed on bases throughout Asia from its "unsinkable aircraft carrier," Japan, to Korea and Guam, among others. In the Philippines, the United States has deployed thousands of trainers (a.k.a., soldiers) from the Joint Special Operation Task Force as part of the war on terror against Abu Sayyaf. It has also sent two new cutter ships to the country to aid it in patrolling the islands it contests with China.

And Washington wants to increase the number of bases in the region. It plans to relocate significant

numbers of troops now based in Okinawa, Japan, to Guam, Hawaii, and Australia. The proposed redeployment of eight thousand marines to Guam is particularly significant. It will add a major new base that is only three hours' flight time from the Asian coastline.

The United States has also established new military rights in Singapore. This city-state is strategically situated in the Strait of Malacca, through which 90 percent of China's seaborne energy is shipped. "Singapore has emerged as the fulcrum for US defense engagement in Southeast Asia," notes a CSIS report. "In early 2012, Singapore agreed to host four US littoral combat ships at Changhi Naval Base where naval facilities already are in place to berth a US aircraft carrier. . . . The US Navy has come to rely heavily on Singapore as a logistics hub in Southeast Asia, particularly for fuel." [33]

The United States has also opened a new base in Darwin, Australia, that will eventually host twenty-five hundred marines. "This is all about the rise of China, the modernization of the People's Liberation Army and, particularly, it's about the increased vulnerability of US forces in Japan and Guam to the new generation of Chinese missiles," argues Alan DuPont, the Michael Hintze Professor of International Security at Sydney University. "The new Chinese missiles could threaten them in a way they've never been able to before, so the US is starting to reposition them to make them less vulnerable. Australia's 'tyranny of distance' is now a distinct strategic advantage." [34]

The United States will now deploy 60 percent of its naval ships in the region. As Michael Klare argues,

"For China, all this spells potential strategic impairment. Although some of China's imported oil will travel overland through pipelines from Kazakhstan and Russia, the great majority of it will still come by tanker from the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America over sea lanes policed by the US Navy. Indeed, almost every tanker bringing oil to China travels across the South China Sea, a body of water

the Obama administration is now seeking to place under effective naval control." [35]

The United States is also increasing weapons sales to its allies in the region. Various Asian states alarmed by China's assertiveness and North Korea's nuclear missile capacity have sought to purchase weapon systems from the United States, which is happy for the business, and which fits neatly in its plans to encircle China. In just one example in 2012, Washington approved the \$421 million upgrade of Japan's Aegis missile defense system, which is nominally designed to neutralize any launches from North Korea, but it can also do the same toward any Chinese missiles. [36]

In 2012 alone, Reuters reports, "sales agreements with countries in the US Pacific Command's area of activity rose to \$13.7 billion in fiscal 2012, up 5.4 percent from a year before." They predict "US sales of warplanes, anti-missile systems and other costly weapons to China's and North Korea's neighbors appear set for significant growth amid regional security jitters." [37]

The United States intends these recipients of US arms to take up more responsibility in containing China. Thus the United States is encouraging Japan under Abe to end its constitutional ban on collective self-defense. The American military is also dramatically increasing its military-to-military relationships throughout the region. Obama terminated the ban on US forces engaging with the dreaded Indonesian special operations forces (Kopassus), which was responsible for sundry crimes against the people of East Timor. Washington has also established relations with the Vietnamese military, including engaging in joint naval exercises in the South China Sea. [38]

These exercises with Vietnam are only the tip of the iceberg. In 2012, the United States conducted the massive Cobra Gold military exercise with Thailand, Korea, Japan, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, and observers from more than twenty other nations, including Myanmar. The exercise included more than twenty thousand soldiers. [39] It

conducted similar naval exercises with Japan and South Korea. And now, astonishingly, India conducts more exercises with the United States than any other nation. [40] These exercises effectively integrate the region's militaries with the United States, ensure interoperability, and bring them into America's military encirclement of China.

China resists containment

Unsurprisingly, Obama's pivot has triggered a hostile reaction from China. "If you are a strategic thinker in China," states Simon Tay of the Singapore Institute of International Affairs, "you do not have to be a paranoid conspiracy theorist to think that the US is trying to bandwagon Asia against China." [41] In response, as the CSIS documents, China has developed "counter-containment strategies aimed at weakening US alignments with other states in the region and involve instruments that range from trade agreements and diplomacy to bribery and individual coercion." [42]

China's incoming president, Xi Jinping, is particularly close to the nationalist wing of the Chinese military. As Michael Klare reports, "Xi has made several publicized visits to assorted Chinese military units, all clearly intended to demonstrate the Communist Party's determination, under his leadership, to boost the capabilities and prestige of the country's army, navy, and air force. He has already linked this drive to his belief that his country should play a more vigorous and assertive role in the region and the world." [43]

China is working hard to solidify its allies and attempt to draw others into its camp. It hosted the Shanghai Cooperation Summit in 2012 to consolidate relations with existing members of the group that include Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. While it is oriented on consolidating relationships among China, Russia, and Central Asia, China went out of its way to invite Iran as well as India and representatives from ASEAN. Obviously China continues to deny the United States either membership or observer status.

China also wants to stop the United States from using North Korea as an alibi to justify its pivot. Thus China joined the United States to support new sanctions against Kim Jung-un's regime in the United Nations. Far from signaling some new spirit of political cooperation, this move is intended to undercut one of the key justifications for the military encirclement of China.

China has countered Obama's pursuit of TPP with various bilateral trade and multilateral trade deals to ensure that it and not the United States continues to be the economic axis of the Asia-Pacific. It is currently pressuring South Korea and Japan to enter into bilateral and potentially trilateral trade negotiations. [44] It has also proposed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) as an alternative to Obama's TPP. It includes China, Australia, Japan, India, South Korea, New Zealand, and the ten ASEAN member countries. Not by accident, the RCEP excludes the United States. [45]

In response to Obama's military escalation, China has expanded its military budget and increased its capacities, and has announced that it will be continuing its doubledigit annual increases in its defense budget, promising a 10.7 percent rise in 2013. [46] China has also acquired its first aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, and further expanded its stealth fighter program as well its anti-satellite capabilities.

According to the CSIS, China's military strategy and investment focuses "on capabilities that now pose potential threat to the United States and its allies and partners: submarines and anti-ship cruise or ballistic missiles to deter US aircraft carriers, modern fighter aircraft and surface-to-air missiles to counter US air superiority, electronic warfare to weaken US information superiority, and theater-range weapons (medium-range ballistic missiles and land attack cruise missiles), all in response to US bases and alliances in the region." [47]

The scramble for Asia

China's increasing imperial assertiveness has triggered growing conflicts throughout Asia that Obama's pivot has in turn exacerbated. Three conflicts in the region could precipitate military confrontations in the region. First, the United States continues to use its standoff with North Korea over its nuclear and ballistic missile program as an alibi for its aggression in the region. But its sanctions and belligerence has only served to provoke Kim Jung-un's regime to conduct more tests. This has enabled the United States to pressure China to endorse UN sanctions on the North's banks, a mortal economic threat to an already destitute regime.

In response, Kim Jung-un has threatened nuclear strikes on the American forces on the peninsula and has suspended its non-aggression pact with South Korea, whose officials in turn threatened, that "If Pyongyang attacks the South with a nuclear weapon, the regime of the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, 'will be erased from the earth.'" [48]

The disputes between China and various powers over islands in the South and East China Seas could similarly provoke escalating hostilities. Despite their almost complete economic interpenetration, China and Taiwan continue their hostile relations. China claims the island as a renegade province. In turn, Taiwan has flirted with declarations of independence. The United States meanwhile continues to arm its ally Taiwan. The Taipei Times warns that the conflict between China and Taiwan "could throw US-China relations into a tailspin this year." [49]

The scramble between the United States and China over Asia is thus bringing a growing number of conflicts to a fever pitch. The danger is that even a small military skirmish could detonate larger clashes with states invoking mutual self-defense treaties that require their allies, including the United States, to join the fray. As former Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd contends, "The region increasingly resembles a 21st-century maritime redux of the Balkans a century ago—a tinderbox on water. Nationalist sentiment is surging across the region, reducing the domestic political space for less con-

frontational approaches. . . . In security terms, the region is more brittle than at any time since the fall of Saigon in 1975." [50]

Interimperial rivalry in the twenty-first century

Contrary to neoliberal fantasies, globalization has not brought an end to conflicts between nation-states. While the United States remains the world's preeminent power, it is in relative decline against its rising and potential peer competitor, China. Thus, capitalism continues to stoke interimperial rivalries over dominance in the world system. But this growing rivalry is unlikely to produce any large-scale war for two key reasons. First, the extreme degree of economic integration among the United States, China, and the entire Asia-Pacific tends to pull the powers back from confrontation. Second, because many of the powers involved in the scramble for Asia have nuclear weapons it deters conflicts from degenerating into shooting wars. Nuclear warfare threatens the respective countries in war with annihilation.

This nuclear deterrent will tend to lead states to avoid military confrontation and instead engage in geo-economic struggle. They will punish each other through political and economic means, thereby pulling apart the economic integration globalization has wrought. Despite these two countervailing forces, it is easy to imagine the sharp tensions exacerbated by Obama's pivot producing at least small-scale clashes. The extreme nationalism being fostered by ruling classes from one end of the region to the other, including the United States, where China-bashing has become de rigueur in the political establishment, will exacerbate the drift toward such increasing conflict. The hope amidst this horror is the potential for the working classes and peasantry already in struggle across the region to develop the organization and consciousness to build international solidarity in the fight against imperialism and the capitalist system that breeds it.

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