

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV470 March 2014

EGYPT

The people want – but do they have a chance ?

ECONOMY:

Banks speculate on raw materials and food

DOSSIER

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Syria
Chile
Ukraine**

France

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Arab revolutions

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Women's Day

International Women's

Day

Russia/Ukraine

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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FRANCE

Punishment of the SP, rise of the FN... A leftwing response is urgent!

ROSELINE VACCHETTA ·

The first round of municipal elections in France on 23 March was marked by record abstention, massive rejection of the SP government, and a rise of the far-right FN. All significant indicators of a deep crisis.

This is a historic victory... for abstention. It increased from 30% in 1995 to 38.62% in 2014, which is a lot for an election that traditionally mobilizes voters. This massive abstention is not homogeneous, and affects working-class and popular areas most: it is 62 % for example in Roubaix or Vaulx-en-Velin.

It confirms the radical break between a sector of citizens and government at all levels. It is a deep resentment against institutions that do not provide answers to concrete problems of the majority of the population (employment, housing, equal rights, quality of life...). This reflects the views of all those who do not hope for any improvement in their situation in the act of voting right or left.

Sordid affairs, scheming, lies did the rest and many voters no longer want to participate in this charade of democracy. The Leftist particularly disappointed, is the one who has the most boycotted the election.

Crushing defeat of the government

The NPA explained in this campaign that local and national issues were related because government decisions to reduce grants to municipalities, cut public services, disengage the national government from policy from policies for which it is responsible, for example education, weigh heavily on people. Distrust of an SP government carrying out rightwing policies was total.

On the evening of the first round, that's what the results reflect : 6 mayors elected for the left in government 16 for the right and 1 for the FN! [1] There was a political collapse of the SP, which fell by 5 to 20 points depending on the city.

Popular disgust with politics is also reflected in good results for non-party lists, not only in small towns but also in medium-sized cities. They may play an important role as arbiter for the second round. They suggest that for voters, it is better to choose managers who seem honest and do not display ambitions other than "good governance " of their community. It is the very idea of politics that is receding !

In the vast majority of large cities, the SP has to face a second round even where its list won in the first round in 2008, or it is even in third place behind the National Front, as in Marseilles.

Dangerous thrust of the National Front

Its strategy of rooting itself in localities has paid off : it has risen from 118 lists in 2008 to 597 lists presented in 2014. In the first round, it came first in 7 cities and can already boast of having won 473 members of municipal councils, from the first round alone.

It has created strongholds in the North, to some extent in the East and the South East, in cities and localities where residents are particularly hard hit by the social crisis and political despair. It took the city of Henin-Beaumont in the North, and improved its score in Lille by 11%.

Riding on the popular rejection of corruption scandals that have affected both the SP and the UMP, it now wants to be a respectable party, close to the

people, capable and efficient in responding to people's needs. Its success is built on the defeats of institutional parties and no "republican front" [2] will prevent it.

And now back on the street!

The NPA was present on 87 lists, including 54 as a united lists, with different parties (sometimes the PG (Left Party of Jean-Luc Mélenchon), the PCF (French Communist Party), the Alternatifs, Ensemble (an organization member of the Front de Gauche (Left Front) created by the fusion of several small organizations including Gauche Anticapitaliste), MOC, local associations...). In all cases, these lists have gathered far more than the

party members. If we have not been able to capture the popular discontent, we were present to offer a clear anti-capitalist political alternative; to build a left opposition to this government; and to give a clear alternative discourse to that of the National Front, that of the right and of the "left" government is only leftwing in name.

This struggle for another society free of profit in the service of many, will be won by our struggles and mobilizations. To do this, we must take the streets, coordinate our struggles to unite all those who come in resistance. This is the meaning that we want to give the united-front initiative on 12 April : "Maintenant, ça suffit" (Enough is enough).

PAKISTAN

Can the Awami Workers' Party imagine a new and more concrete basis for struggle in the cause of women's liberation?

AIMA KHOSA ·

The statement came a week after the party held its first convention on issues central to the liberation of women. The communiqué issued at the end of the convention carried 11 points that will serve as guiding principles of the party's position on women.

The document was drafted by AWP federal committee members Farzana Bari and Ismat Shahjahan. Sixty delegates from all over the country approved the communiqué to be presented to the AWP leadership at the party's first congress to be held later in March. It was also unanimously adopted by 400 party members who attended the open session of the convention.

In the communiqué, the party demands elimination of all social, economic and administrative structures that have led to gender-based exploitation. It promises 33 percent representation of women in all units of the party, and calls for laws against forced marriage and verbal divorce etc. It demands that the state play a positive role in cases of violation of rights of women. The communiqué, says Farooq Tariq, is the AWP's way of celebrating Women's Day.

"These principles enable better mobilization," Tariq says. "They serve not only as a way of encouraging women to come forward in the party, but also challenging the unfortunate sexist trends in the Left."

Asked why the party had chosen 33 percent representation specifically, he says the party wanted even more. "But we have to start somewhere. Starting with 25 per cent itself would be a feat."

Nighat Said Khan, founder of the Women Action Forum, however, has reservations about the document. She believes the party is not addressing some fundamental problems of women's empowerment.

"[The AWP] still has a confused and simplistic understanding of what is called the woman's question in Marxism and socialist thought. They put the blame on what they call patriarchy of the feudal and capitalist elite. But Marxist and socialist feminists who identify and understand patriarchy would include all men since all men have power over women," she says.

She feels that by not questioning traditional marriage and patriarchal family, and by retaining the "NGO mantra" of 33 percent representation, the AWP communiqué leaves room for a lot of improvement.

The General Secretary of the leftist National Students Federation (NSF), Aliya Khan, does not share Miss Khan's views. "The communiqué brings women closer to political training," she says. "The party, from the start, will encourage women within its ranks and must create spaces for women to develop its positions."

She says that while the old Left had worked with women, there had been gap of nearly 30 years since spaces were actively created for women to come forward for political mobilization.

Neelum Hussain, founder of Simorgh Women's Resource Centre and also a member of WAF, too, is excited about the communiqué.

"The kind of affirmative action AWP is calling for, mainstream political parties do not demand it," she

says.

She says the communiqué is against regressive laws, checks sexual violence and touches on various aspects of WAF's charter on women's rights, education and segregation in schools.

Hussain recalls that Pakistan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1995.

"A non-bureaucratic, post-Beijing process was set in place during Benazir's tenure. This fell by the wayside under the Sharif government, for which it was not an issue," she said.

Many questions, however, still remain unanswered. There is a critique of the AWP's attitude towards gender politics, which is as such a wider critique of contemporary left-wing thought on women's liberation. The critique attacks the traditional statist-socialist assumption that patriarchy exists only due to capitalist relations of production in society, and can therefore be abolished automatically when capitalist relations of production are overthrown in a revolutionary upheaval. As a con-

sequence of such analysis, traditional statist-socialist movements and regimes tended to focus on "purely class-based" struggles as their main strategy for mass mobilization. The understanding was that patriarchy would disappear easily once the capitalist state was overthrown.

Historical experience shows that not only did this approach weaken the Left's mass appeal by losing it potential support from the radicalization of women's struggles, it also hindered the otherwise considerable efforts for gender equality in 20th century socialist regimes.

The AWP as a political organization of the Left has still to sort out debates arising from this critique, both within the ranks of the party and among intellectual and popular circles in broader Pakistani society. It remains to be seen how far they can carry out the principles laid out in the AWP Women's Convention. Even more importantly, it remains to be seen how far the party's activists can imagine a new and more concrete basis for struggle in the cause of women's liberation.

PAKISTAN

Cabinets sans women – "the space is shrinking for the women"

ADNAN AAMIR ·

Taking a glimpse at political history of Pakistan, women had managed to get some role. Pakistan had the first ever female prime minister in the Muslim world, Speaker National Assembly and Deputy Speaker National Assembly. Benazir Bhutto the became prime minister after 41 years of the independence of Pakistan. There was considerable progress in representation of women in the parliament under the Musharraf dictatorship and the Zardari government. However, current regime of Nawaz Sharif and the provincial governments have rolled-back all progress made in this field. This is very unfortunate because Pakistan is moving backwards in terms of being progressive, by not empowering women.

Analysis of the women representation in federal and provincial cabinets reveals that there is almost no representation of women. Women constitute 48% of the population in Pakistan and they should get 40%-50% representation. However, they only have token representation in the current government. There is not a single woman Federal Minister and there are only two women state ministers. One of them is SairaAfzalTarar who has been given the Health portfolio which holds negligible power after the Health portfolio was transferred to provincial governments following the 18th Amendment. Under the PPP government, women had considerable representation in the parliament and the Speaker National assembly was also a women. However, women parliamentarians could not draw luck this time from a women unfriendly government of Sharifs.

Shifting focus on provincial cabinets will make the case even worse as there is even lesser woman representation. The so-called revolutionary government of the PTI in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa doesn't have a single woman minister. In the Punjab cabinet, there are only two women ministers and that's insignificant considering the fact that Punjab makes up 56% population of Pakistan. The case of Sindh is not much different: Qaim Ali Shah has only one women minister in his cabinet. The restive province of Balochistan doesn't have any women minister. In the last government, there were quite a few women ministers and also a woman as the deputy speaker (during the last few months of the provincial assembly). This sums up the case that women have been marginalized everywhere in Pakistan in this political setup.

A positive development in empowering women was made in 2002 when 60 reserved seats were allocated for women the parliamentarians. Women are elected on these seats on the basis of proportional representation of political parties on the general seats of National and provincial assemblies. Similarly, seats were also allocated under same principle in the Senate. However, most of the women who are elected on these seats are wives, daughters, sisters and daughters-in-law of top politicians. In a way, the political elite fills up these seats and women don't get to elect their own representatives directly. At the moment, for the 60 reserved seats for women in the Punjab Assembly, 34 were elected from Lahore. In other words, not merely on the class basis, also on regional basis, deprivileged women are marginalized.

13 March 2014

Viewpoint

SYRIA

March 2011- March 2014, the essential solidarity

JACQUES BABEL ·

Many popular demonstrations took place throughout Syria on March 14, while various events were organized in the liberated areas to celebrate the third anniversary of the revolution.

Three years of revolution

Activists in Aleppo distributed flyers in areas under the control of the regime that stated that the revolution continues until victory, until the downfall of the regime. This was part of the campaign "we resist despite the violence of the regime." The activists of this campaign also stated that peaceful means of resistance continue to be a tool of resistance in this revolution. An exhibition of pictures and of drawings by children in memories of the martyrs of the revolution was also organised in the free territories of Aleppo, in addition to a theater play telling the development of the years of the revolution. Other actions for the third anniversary of the revolution were also organised in free Aleppo, like covering a square of the pictures of the martyrs of the revolution and a campaign "the wall tells the story of the revolution" in which drawings were made on walls in various neighborhoods. "

In the region of Idlib, a campaign has been launched by various groups of activists to commemorate the third year of the revolution. The campaign includes a variety of different events, including a demonstration with the songs of the beginning of the beginning of the revolution, painting walls in cities and villages with slogans of the revolution and the reasons why the revolution started, and a theater performance.

The Union of Free Syrian Students (UFSS) launched a new campaign called: "Pain and Hope: The Revolution Continues". For the commemoration of the ten years of Kurdish Intifada on March

12 2014, many demonstrations also occurred in various cities, including Amouda, Efrin, and Qamichlo. On March 8, the group "Syrian women initiative," launched a campaign calling for a democratic and pluralist state in which the rights of women are guaranteed.

The murderous regime and its allies

The Syrian revolution is not dead, but its enemies grow stronger. The first is undoubtedly the killing machine of the regime, whose crimes against humanity continue to be highlighted: recently horrific images of 11,000 tortured prisoners in Damascus prisons before August 2013 were made public, and who died under torture and hunger... We should remember that only the political, military and economic assistance of its allies – Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and other sectarian militias – allow the Assad's regime to maintain itself and to regain ground military such as recently with the strategic city of Yabroud.

The second enemy is the reactionary Islamist forces that are increasing their influence and want an Islamic state, and which are financially supported by the Gulf monarchical regimes in total opposition to the goals of the revolution. They also attack revolutionary activists and use, just as the Assad regime, sectarianism to divide Syrians.

Meanwhile, the last conference in Geneva 2 showed that the will of the imperialist and regional powers, having re-included Assad as an interlocutor for the control of chemical weapons, is to reach an agreement on a negotiated political transition (a "Yemeni" solution) that maintain the structure of the regime as it is in the best interests of the so called "War against terrorism".

But the Syrian revolutionaries know that the regime will not accept anything else than its total victory, and they refuse to submit, as symbolized with a banner held on March 14 2014, which reads: " 3 years of hunger and suffering, but 3 years of pride and dignity ".

"For an internationalist solidarity"!

Faced with this situation, international popular mobilization is more essential than ever. So, on Saturday March 15 2014, initiatives of solidarity with the uprising and against the repression of the Syrian people were held in many cities of France, Europe and the world. Essential but still too low, these initiatives must absolutely be consolidated.

In this context, the Revolutionary Left Current in Syria, despite its limited resources, continues its struggle alongside the revolutionary people both on a civil and military level. It established the " People's Liberation Faction" to join the military resistance, and launched a "call to all the leftist and socialist forces in the region and in the world to affirm clearly and firmly their highest degree of international solidarity, because the fate of our popular revolution will decide the fate of the revolutionary processes in the region, and even beyond its borders ».

*First published in the NPA's (Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (France) newspaper***L'Anticapitaliste**.

Translation by Syria Freedom Forever.

CHILE

Neoliberalism and class struggle today

FRANCK GAUDICHAUD ·

How would you characterise Bachelet's economic programme, its main axes and her relations with the employers?

So far as content is concerned, the centre of gravity is located in what have been called "deep reforms": reform of education and taxes and the new Constitution. As for the first, and solely because of the student mobilisations, the new ruling bloc has been obliged to give way and broaden the social framework of the consensus. For the two others, disagreements continue.

If the governments of the Concertation practiced an opportunist policy — remember the constitutional reform of 2005 which was at the origin of the "Lagos-Pinochet Constitution" or the new general law on education of 2009 which replaced that of the dictatorship — this time the manoeuvres will be on less solid bases. For two reasons: first because after 40 years the model imposed by the neoliberal counter-revolution has developed new contradictions specific to a mature model of accumulation. Second because the neoliberal project has not succeeded in generating a political institutionalisation, complementary to the market, capable of dealing with the contradictions, whose scale exceeds the possibilities of arbitration between the main actors of the market.

The social composition of the recent struggles as well as the character of the demands shows that there are fissures in the existing model. The social explosion of recent years in Chile is different from the mass explosion in Argentina in 2001, nor does it resemble the massive struggles of workers in Greece subject to the structural adjustments of the

current crisis. The extreme neoliberal utopia applied in Chile supposes the dissolution of the political, of the collective, and has thus disarmed and rendered illegitimate the system of representative political parties, capable of anticipating and treating social malaises before they are transformed into collective demands; it is the market which is supposed to play this role. The most remarkable aspect of the current situation is that while the two main political parties of the right are going through a very serious crisis, the employers, the "economic right" continue to function without problems, working both with the outgoing government and with Bachelet's coalition.

At the same time, although still embryonic, ever broader layers of workers and popular sectors directly confront capital, without the mediation of political parties or the state. And the government — when it interrupts its function as repressive policeman — plays more of an ideological role and is not capable of realizing agreements according to the rules of a conventional political system. The real de facto policy both for the bourgeoisie and for the popular sectors and organised workers — strangers to classic trades unionism — seems to avoid the institutions and rely on direct negotiation.

These two characteristics of an over ripe neoliberal model create a context of uncertainty, which the intelligentsia of the ruling bloc have still to explain and structurally respond to. There is no project of a post-neoliberal or neo-neoliberal Chile. It is then necessary to adjust to the policy of "everything must change in order to remain the same": a son et lumière with bread and circuses for the masses while a strategy is defined for the new cycle which is opening up. The decoration will be provided by the leadership of the CP, which has entered the new coalition government.

What is the situation of the workers today in Chile, in particular in the CUT and the trade union movement?

Classic trades unionism, which was created and developed under the developmentalist model preceding the neoliberal counter-revolution, has for some years faced the reality of a very different industrial organization and labour market.

Productive fragmentation due to the extension of the maquila free trade zones and subcontracting, as well as increased labour market flexibility (employment, wages, skills), have generated a great mass of the labour force which circulates without fixed employment between jobs, skills, enterprises, branches and even territories as never before. This high mobility is reflected by precarious employment very different from the classic employment around which classic trades unionism under the form of company-based unions developed in the last century. One of the notable differences is that the legal work relationship has been separated from the economic relationship of exploitation, so the guarantees of employment law are virtually useless. Subcontracting means that those exploiting labour power are not the same as those who recruit it or those who draw up the contractual relationship, making employment law practically useless. The same goes for the fragmentation of enterprises into dozens of legal units which nonetheless act in a centralized manner under the same economic directorate. Thus the right to unionise and negotiate collectively no longer means much to subcontracted or contractual workers.

Classic trades unionism, whether in the CUT or other federations has difficulty in fitting its organisational forms with the new structural conditions of Chilean capitalism. Thus the CUT has lost its influence in the world of labour and paradoxically it maintains itself through associations of branches in the public sector with a weak presence in the private sector where jobs are concentrated. In the private sector, the most active layers of workers, generally outside the CUT, adopt innovative organisa-

tional forms, in their tactics of struggle and are also characterised by a significant involvement of youth.

There is an exemplary case, that of the dockers organised in a federation who by overcoming all the objective difficulties posed by illegal strikes and appeals for negotiation have forced big capital which uses port services without being the direct employer to participate in the negotiation of wages and work conditions. Big capital, subject to the intelligent and decisive action of workers' organisations, has given the order to the enterprises to negotiate and resolve conflicts. The government as administrative entity was only able to ratify the agreements signed. These practices — even if they were favoured by a whole series of specific conditions — tend to be reproduced in other sectors and have above all become an example for many sectors of workers, especially the most precarious.

Classic Chilean trades unionism is also characterised by a virtually total influence of political parties over its internal life. Such relations between parties and unions were based on a radical separation between demands and politics, it being understood that the parties are the representatives of trade union demands in the political sphere. However this separation has been slowly overcome by the practice of certain layers of workers who assume their own representation and avoid mediation.

Thus we can say that the current situation of the workers' movement is generally weak as a result of forty years of neoliberalism and the persistence of an erroneous vision of the leadership of classic trades unionism. In this general context there begin however to emerge sectors of organised workers who test out new forms of organisation, tactics of direct action and negotiation which could open the road to a new movement of workers adapted to the conditions of a mature neoliberal counter revolution. In this process, the leaderships of the CUT have played a secondary role when they have not played a restraining role. That is why — with the exception of the tireless struggle of the Mapuche people — it is not astounding that it is the students,

the collectives of struggle and not the working class who have opened this new cycle of social mobilization.

What are the notable social struggles from your viewpoint which could herald a new cycle of conflict under the new government?

First of all the struggles of secondary level students expresses a very deep fissure. Whereas the university students demand better conditions of financing and access to higher education, the secondary school students demand free education and better material conditions, and their real demand is against community schooling, against the school, because every day in their institutions, they face authoritarianism, mediocrity and a good number of teachers who are past it; here, there is the permanent pressure for success, and individual competition. Thus it is this movement and not the student movement which has been the basis of this explosion, which has broken the consensus of the dominant classes and the social peace which was projected to the world as the Chilean model.

There is a deep contradiction here: these are the children of a mature neoliberalism, a model which has generated a deep crisis of the school against which they have reacted spontaneously and systematically since the "mochilazo" of 2001 and the "revolucion pinguina" of 2006. This fissure will grow because the new government lacks any educational project which could resolve this crisis.

Also we should follow closely the emergence of a new workers' movement, as we have already indicated. This will be on bases totally different from those of classical trades unionism. One of these will be taking into account that the workers' movement is not limited to the trade union movement. Trades unionism, with branch or enterprise unions has

been a specific form of organisation typical of developmentalism. Before there were mutualist and other forms which in the absence of any employment legislation organised great masses of workers and confronted capital by establishing the bases of the rights which have been incorporated into employment legislation after the development of classic trades unionism.

Another important basis is that faced with an 'extended capital', that is which has penetrated and subjected to its rationality activities previously outside of capitalist production, there appears the necessity of conceiving an "extended working class". That means that neither the wage form nor the contract form — direct or indirect, part time or full time, temporary or permanent — or the material or immaterial character of the work or its result can be a criterion for defining the working class. What matters is the social relation. If capital has transformed previously public services into productive activities, or subjected other activities to the logic of accumulation, then all those who sell their labour to capital in its activities are part of the working class.

This was rejected by classic trades unionism gripped by the aesthetic of the mining and industrial workers of the 20th century. However the practices of organisation and struggle of the precarious layers of whom we have spoken have advanced by breaking down discriminatory barriers inside the working class. We know that this is a long process, but this trend towards the objective and subjective reconstitution of a new workers' movement on these bases will continue and maybe accelerate, either through success in struggles or by the aggravation of the conditions of precariousness of an economic model which must meet increased costs to maintain its expansive dynamic.

CHILE

After Bachelet's election

FRANCK GAUDICHAUD ·

Can you tell us something about Libres del Sur and its history?

Libres del Sur is a revolutionary organisation which appeared publicly in the first week of April 2012. It is an anti-capitalist tool in construction with a horizon of socialist revolution. In its short existence it has participated in the ecosocialist, feminist and internationalist struggle. It is located within the fight for popular power, working for "the other education" to forge another society from below. In less than two years Libres del Sur has grown at the national level to be present in most regions of the country. Today it is preparing its first national congress.

What is the significance of the rate of electoral abstention?

The high rates of abstention in the elections of 2012 and 2013 are yet another expression of the crisis of legitimacy of the current model of society and its neoliberal democracy. More than 56% of Chileans did not participate, this being in part a passive and silent abstention which is very difficult to interpret beyond the obvious discontent of society with our discredited national political class.

In this context, I have spoken of "turbulent abstention" on two occasions, just before the primary elections of June 30, 2013 and during the second round of the presidential elections on December 15, 2013. The common denominator of these two elections was the exclusive participation of the two faces of the Chilean political tandem: the right and the New Majority (ex-Concertación).

Abstention in itself is a simple reflection of the current crisis in Chile which finally becomes one statistic among others. However the call for a "turbulent abstention" at elections where there are only candidates who support the neoliberal model is a political act of proposal-protest. It is about not waiting for the results at home, and using this moment to increase the levels of illegitimacy of our "democracy" through turbulent direct actions with a high media profile.

How do you analyse the integration of the CP in the New Majority and its long and short term political effects?

The integration of the oldest political organization in Chile in "the new majority" can be analyzed from three viewpoints. A historic viewpoint: at different moments in history the Chilean Communists have participated in broad coalitions cohabiting with sectors outside of the left. That corresponded to their classical "bourgeois democratic revolution" and "stagiest" policy. Another viewpoint is that of the "pragmatic solution" given the institutional political ostracism they have suffered for 36 years. For the Communists parliamentary action is fundamental and they have relied on the negotiation with the Concertación and the New Majority in 2013 to ensure they had seats in Parliament. Now they have six deputies. The third viewpoint is the real affinity they have with the programmatic progressivism of the new Bachelet government, which fits in quite well with their left conservative style.

In the short term, the effect has been to abandon a space in the left at the last elections. Another effect has been a loss of prestige in the social world, with as main example the fact that the Communist Youth have lost nearly all the federations they had in 2011. The most significant effect in my opinion is that the integration of the CP in the new government has removed its monopoly of the left and we are beginning to see anti-capitalist alternatives more clearly.

Its long term effects will depend on its action inside the Bachelet government. What is certain is that its turn to the right will bring it negative consequences in the sectors it claims to represent.

What are the perspectives for the reorganization of a broad anti-capitalist left in Chile?

The reconstruction of the popular movement and the construction of serious anti-capitalist alternatives is the big challenge for the left committed to radical transformations for Chile. This challenge is not easy given the level of atomization inside the Chilean left. In the specific case of the anti-capitalist left, that is increased by the transmission of "resentments" from generation to generation.

The perspectives should consist in finding points of convergence to articulate the multi-sectoral struggles. The more there is organization of anti-capitalist left activists, the more there is a possibility of

going beyond the current atomization of our sector. This unity should be forged outside of the electoral period from concrete struggles.

Another big task inside the anti-capitalist left is to revive theoretical debate between the organizations and their activists. A fraternal debate around strategic questions. A debate of ideas which has been lacking over the past two decades. A debate which in the future opens the possibility of collective deliberation.

Fragmentation and political marginality are the heritage of the left of the 20th century. The big task is the construction of an anti-capitalist left for the 21st century with the aim of unity in diversity, building a majority and exercising real power, not only in words, but in an intelligent and committed way to bring down capitalism and its underpinnings.

UKRAINE

The springtime of the peoples arrives in Europe

ZBIGNIEW MARCIN KOWALEWSKI ·

A springtime of the peoples is always surprising. It happens in a country in a totally unexpected manner, like a clap of thunder in a serene sky. However, after the event it proves that there is nothing surprising about why it has happened there and not elsewhere. The same is true now. On the world political map, Ukraine is a gigantic historic anomaly, a deviation in relation to a certain very significant "typical value", at least at the European scale. The biggest country in Europe in terms of area, after Russia, and one of the biggest in terms of population, it has been an independent state for barely 23 years. This on a continent where for a long time the "typical value" corresponds to national states for all the big nations, even those much smaller than the Ukrainian nation. The historical anomalies have the following specificity: the most diverse contradictions accumulate, explode and combine around them and thus they are transformed into powder kegs much more easily than elsewhere.

The weight of long term oppression

Ukraine bears an extraordinary burden of several centuries of national oppression, mainly Polish and Russian [1]. In Soviet Ukraine, after several years of intense positive discrimination known as Ukrainisation, a return to the policy of Russification came with the advent of the Stalinist regime, behind which Russian imperialism was hidden. The intelligentsia was massacred and several million peasants, that is to say the basis of national identity, were exterminated by famine. After the Second World War, Russification affected all

the Ukrainian lands, now reunited; although in western Ukraine, previously under the Polish colonial yoke, a vigorous anti-Soviet resistance of Ukrainian nationalists was maintained until the mid 1950s. Outside the period of the government of Petro Shelest (1963-1972), Russification was pursued virtually until the fall of the USSR. On the eve of the proclamation of independence by Ukraine, I wrote in the review "Nouvelle Europe", published in the European Parliament: "what makes the Ukrainian process vulnerable is the fact that as a nation without a state, subject to a long term oppression, it has not yet completed its national formation" [2]. And this is still the case. Barely two decades of existence as a state is too short a time to overcome the legacy this oppression has left behind it inside Ukrainian society.

Hence the great disparities in the uprising of the masses – the second now, after the "Orange revolution" – according to the different regions of the country. Directed against a regime whose main rearguard was in the east of the country, it has spread in the regions of the west and centre, the cradles of the pro-independence movements after the First World War. Hence also a paradoxical contradiction between this national movement, very delayed historically, but aspiring to consolidate an independent state, and its desire to join the EU, which – being the instrument of capitalist globalisation – weakens national states and restrains their sovereignty.

Noting this contradiction does not at all indicate agreement with those who enjoy the privileges linked to membership of this prosperous and select fortress Europe advising Ukraine to stay out of it. It is a mark of chauvinism of the privileged. Access to the EU labour market has saved millions of Poles from poverty and hunger, and many Ukrainians

know this well. In the countries of the EU, the left has the duty of solidarity with the excluded peoples of the East and South. The argument that socially catastrophic neoliberal reforms await them in the EU is totally false. Not only will they not avoid them by remaining outside, but they will be hit still harder by not being able to enjoy the benefits linked to belonging to an integrated Europe. On the contrary, inside the EU, they will have the possibility of resisting the neoliberal capitalist transformations together with other peoples. This is not to ignore the concerns of all those, of whom there are many also in Ukraine, who rightly fear that membership of a free trade zone with the EU will have dramatic consequences for their jobs and standard of living. However the right of nations to self-determination also means defending the democratic right of Ukraine to join the EU.

A mass democratic movement

No less paradoxical is another contradiction of the recent mass uprising in Ukraine. It is a democratic movement in its very essence, against a regime representing the interests of the powerful oligarchy of eastern Ukraine, known for its electoral frauds; an authoritarian regime, characterised by corruption and the pillage of the national wealth. This movement found its second breath and showed great élan and extraordinary determination in struggle when, on January 16, the docile parliament voted for radical restrictions on democratic liberties. Throughout the uprising it has maintained a very marked independence in relation to the main opposition parties, which it considered discredited.

The masses gathered in Kiev's Maidan never recognised the memorable trio of bluffers and posers as their leadership. It is the latter who have erected themselves as leaders, and it is in this capacity that they were vigorously hailed by the political élites of the EU and the international media. They led the movement nowhere; they would have led it only to defeat. They promised vague "measures which will be definitely effective this time", like for example a parliamentary vote limiting presidential power. All

this to maintain the movement in a state of inertia, or at least to muzzle it, so that Yanukovich stayed in power. Without success. The masses at the Maidan would not follow them, and they were several times ridiculed and heckled. What dominated on the Maidan was self-organisation and an irreducible will to fight until victory: until the overthrow of the regime.

In the not so distant past, the nightmare of the global justice movement and numerous mass protests in Europe was combat groups which acted without their agreement, outside of any democratic control but on behalf of these movements. Whatever the banner under which they acted, they unconsciously reproduced in their practices far right ideologies which promote violence. Not surprising that they were very open to provocations leading to police repression against mass movements or provided the state with precious pretexts to repress them. Faced with extremely brutal police aggression, the Maidan had desperate need of self defence forces. It was however too weakly structured and consolidated to impose on any combat organisation subordination to its sovereign social power, avoiding thus the appearance of uncontrolled militias. The result of this weakness was the appearance around the strategic barricade of Hrushevsky street, near Maidan, of an armed force dominated by a coalition of far right commandos, the Right Sector.

A number of strange affairs surround this coalition, whose permeability led to provocations. For example the completely stupefying fact is that on Thursday February 20, as blood flowed in Maidan, Dmytro Yarosh, commander in chief of the Right Sector, met secretly with Yanukovich, something discovered by journalists after the fall of the latter. What did they talk about? Being put against the wall, Yarosh explained: "It concerned the agreement, like that signed later. I refused to sign. I told him we were not marionettes. And Viktor Fedorovich, withdraw the army, or there will be a guerrilla war throughout Ukraine. It was about saying that we would not give in, we would not lay

down our arms, we would hold out until the end..." [3]. We know nothing more of this astonishing meeting, but it is a bombshell – maybe a time bomb.

A paradoxical alliance

The very important role played by this ultra-nationalist formation in the combats with the police threw a brown shadow over Maidan. Just like the presence among the three bluffers mentioned above of the leader of the radical right-wing nationalist party, Svoboda. Because of Svoboda's behaviour during these events it was called a "marauder of the revolution" by a Ukrainian observer. [4]. Russian propaganda tried to use this shadow to discredit Maidan as a fascist or neo-Nazi movement [5]. To the extent that 40 Ukrainian and foreign historians specializing in Ukrainian nationalism deemed it necessary to react. Maidan, they said "is a liberationist and not extremist mass action of civic disobedience" Conscious of the risks that far right participation entailed for the Maidan, they called on the world's media not to suggest that the latter "is being infiltrated, driven or taken over by radically ethnocentrist groups of the lunatic fringe" asking them to take account of the fact that such suggestions were grist to the mill of Russian imperialism, which "is a far more serious threat to social justice, minority rights and political equality than all Ukrainian ethnocentrists taken together" [6]

It is a fact that the Maidan was the theatre of an astonishing alliance of the mass democratic movement with the far right militias. That is its second big contradiction. For this movement, it is a mortal danger. But big mass movements are never inoculated by History against dangers of any kind. Even movements already configured from the class viewpoint, let alone those which haven't been, like that in Ukraine, essentially learn from their own painstakingly accumulated experiences. They move forward cautiously on the political terrain, confirming their social nature and politically differentiating themselves through winding and entangled processes, following paths where dead ends and traps

lie in wait for them. They are condemned to this fate for at least as long as they have not created their own organic political forces, able to propose action programmes and strategies.

Inside a people which – exposed to imperialist oppression, pressure or aggression – can still not resolve its own national question, such paradoxical combinations, like the above mentioned alliance, are in fact inevitable. The reasons for this were explained by Mykola Khvylovy – Communist, writer and director of the Free Academy of Proletarian Literature – who killed himself in 1933 to protest against the massacre of his people perpetrated by Stalin; as, virtually at the same time, did the historic leader of the Ukrainian Communists, Mykola Skrypnyk. Some years previously, Khvylovy wrote these significant words: "If any nation (as has been stated a long time ago and repeated on more than one occasion) over the centuries demonstrates the will to manifest itself, its organism as a state entity, then all attempts in one way or another to hold back such a natural process block the formation of the class forces on the one hand, and, on the other, introduce an element of chaos into the general historical process at work in the world. To gloss over independence with a hollow pseudo-Marxism is to fail to understand that Ukraine will continue to be an arena for counter-revolution as long as it does not pass through the natural stage that Western Europe went through during the formation of nation-states" [7].

It is very difficult to pass through this stage when the neighbouring great power does not wish to loosen its grip on its former possession, threatening it with war and annexations; and when the new government of neoliberals and radical right nationalists, no less anti-popular than what preceded it, is creating for itself a new oligarchic base and is ready to subject the country to a rapacious capitalist globalization.

One thing is sure. This new wave of the contemporary springtime of peoples has swept away another régime, through long struggle and heavy sacrifices.

For the first time, it has done so in Europe. It is a major event.

CHILE

The new Bachelet government, neoliberalism and struggle

FRANCK GAUDICHAUD ·

For months, the business seemed settled : Michèle Bachelet would be the next president of the Republic, initiating thus a second term after four years of the government of millionaire entrepreneur Sebastián Piñera, representing the neoliberal right and former supporters of the Pinochet dictatorship. Facing Evelyn Matthei (the right wing candidate, who won 37.8 % of the votes), Michelle Bachelet will be then the next president with more than 62.2% of the vote. This clear electoral victory validates the results of the primary elections and the first round, while the parliamentary elections gave her a majority in both chambers of the congress.

Although the right has been in power since 2010, Matthei's campaign was a fiasco. After several "casting" errors in the selection of candidates, the final choice was a government minister and the daughter of a general from the dictatorship era, deploying an ultra-conservative Catholic discourse. Facing her was Bachelet, equipped with a huge campaign budget and the broad support of the dominant classes, returning from the USA (where she headed "UNO Women"), with an undoubted popularity. Obscuring the fact that she is the purest product of the Concertation, the coalition of social liberals and Christian democrats which dominated political life for 20 years (1990-2010) and deepened the neoliberal model forged under the dictatorship (1973-1989).

The Communists nonetheless chose to join the coalition, now called the "new majority" and called for a first round vote for Bachelet. That allowed

them to double their number of deputies (with 6 seats). Among them the former Communist youth leader Karol Cariola and the student leader Camila Vallejo. But at a high price: despite the discontent of many activists, the party gives credibility to the Concertation, previously denounced as an instrument of capitalism and the class coalition. The CP thus becomes a kind of "progressive" booster of the future government in the unions (including the CUT, led by a Communist) and a part of the student movement.

However the majority of the popular classes do not feel themselves represented by Bachelet and an institutional system fashioned by the dictatorship. Of around 13 million voters less than 50 % voted, a record low. If some activist sectors and intellectuals (like the historian Sergio Grez) consciously called for an "electoral strike" it was above all apathy and disenchantment which dominated in a society marked by neoliberal atomisation.

This is confirmed by the marginal result of the left candidacies. Out of the nine candidates, two tried to stress an anti-neoliberal discourse, demanding a programme of a break with the established consensus. Marcel Claude, an economist close to the Humanist Party and the student movement and supported by a broad movement (called "Todos a la Moneda") regrouped several small collectives of far left origin. He finally won only 180,000 votes (2.8 %), despite an initially successful media breakthrough [1]. Roxana Miranda of the Equality Party was a combative female candidate originating from the poor neighbourhoods, but her discourse of rage and dignity, anchored in the movement of the "pobladores" (the urban poor), did not achieve a breakthrough (1.2 %). Neither of these movements

identified openly with socialism but they raised transitional demands whose application would have meant a break with neoliberalism and social mobilization of great scope.

For a number of collectives and activists of radical left origin, the only issue was the electoral boycott and the call for mobilisation, since the conjuncture did not allow a mass anti-capitalist electoral participation. In this perspective, the "reorganisation of a revolutionary bloc" could not in the short term pass by an "electoral ritual" still inserted in the institutional mould bequeathed by the dictatorship : the priority remains re-organisation of the popular classes and their politicisation [2].

However the conjuncture could be disturbed in the coming months. Recent years have seen big mobili-

sations: massive student movements, strikes in several sectors, ecological and regional struggles. The dictatorship's heritage is in the line of fire with the recent strikes of port workers being a clear example of this (particularly in the north of the country), despite a trade union movement which is still very weak and often highly bureaucratised.

Bachelet has moreover had to take account in part of the eruption of themes imposed by the social movement over the last two years. Thus her programme advocates the "gradual" return to free education in state subsidised universities, tax reform, reform of the employment code and the Constitution (but without any commitment to a Constituent Assembly), the creation of a state pension fund and equal marriage. A way also of anticipating and channelling future mobilisations.

EGYPT

The people want – but do they have a chance ?

GILBERT ACHCAR ·

Rana Nessim : In your book "The People Want", you said this is going to be a very long revolutionary process. Did you expect it to turn into a military dictatorship so quickly ?

Gilbert Achcar : I would dispute the idea that the whole regional revolutionary process has turned into a military dictatorship. Where did it turn into a military dictatorship ? If you're referring to Egypt, then that's one country, not the whole process. Even there, I don't think it turned into a military dictatorship, since it never stopped being a de facto military dictatorship. The Egyptian army has not ceased constituting the real backbone of the state from the time of Mubarak until now.

People thought, at a certain point, that Morsi's presidency spelt the end of military rule in Egypt and compared this to what had happened to military rule in Turkey : it was merely an illusion. Although SCAF (the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces) officially handed power over to Morsi, they kept the real reins of power in their hands. They were still very much in control of the whole set of armed forces. The army and the interior were very much a continuation of the ancien régime. There was very little change. Thus, what happened later on was not really surprising.

What I would emphasize much more actually is the fact that the social struggles are now flaring up again in Egypt, with a lot of strikes taking place, including among the textile workers in Mahalla El Kobra. Moreover, the youth do not seem to share the great enthusiasm for General Sisi, which is in part very artificially orchestrated. Their disaffection was reflected in the low turnout of young people for the constitutional referendum this last January.

I would therefore very much stress that Egypt is still only at the beginning of the long-term revolutionary process that started in January 2011. As in any historical revolutionary process, there are ups and downs, periods of revolutionary radicalisation, periods of reaction and of setback. What we have in Egypt right now is rather ambiguous actually since it is the product of a second wave of upsurge – June 30, leading once again to a second episode of direct military rule.

RN : When would you say the break between the military and Morsi happened ? Obviously there was an agreement between the military and the Muslim Brotherhood, and that's how and why Morsi came to power.

GA : I think the divorce happened long before Morsi came to power. Only in 2011 was there some collaboration between the Muslim Brotherhood and the army. The Muslim Brotherhood broke with most of the opposition when they went into talks with Omar Suleiman, the head of intelligence at the time, before the fall of Mubarak and later on when they closely collaborated with the ancien régime in creating social support for the constitutional amendments put forward by SCAF.

The first constitutional referendum in March 2011 saw a convergence between the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafis and the ancien régime, whose core force is the army. This collaboration was predicated upon the Muslim Brotherhood's pledge that they were not seeking power. At the beginning, they gave assurances that they were going to field parliamentary candidates for only one half of the constituencies and that they were not going to have a presidential candidate. But they broke their pledge on both accounts. This alarmed the military command, especially at a time when their

Turkish counterparts were being humiliated by the AKP rule. They got wary about any possibility of the same happening in Egypt.

That's where we saw the beginning of tensions rising between the Muslim Brotherhood and SCAF. These tensions reached a peak on the eve of the presidential elections of 2012 ; remember the huge suspense over the contest between Morsi and Shafik before the proclamation of the results. Morsi – from the Muslim Brotherhood – defeated Shafik – the military man backed by the military institution.

The illusion of a break with Egypt's long tradition of military rule came to the fore when Tantawi and Anan, the two top military men, were sent into retirement. This was overdue retirement actually, but they had kept their positions only because Mubarak wanted them around him as people he trusted completely. The rest of the army's high brass, as we know from Wikileaks' release of US diplomatic reports, were not happy with Tantawi. Sisi was next in line as a result of military consensus. Morsi did not freely choose him ; Sisi was the man designated by SCAF.

The military got even more worried when Morsi gave himself Pharaonic powers in November 2012. But they were not the only ones to worry : during Morsi's short-lived presidency, the Muslim Brotherhood managed to alienate almost everyone in Egypt, including their close allies, the Salafis. This opened the way to June 30 and July 3, 2013.

Rosemary Bechler : How would you contrast the Egyptian army's role to that of the Tunisian army ?

GA : The Tunisian case is very different. On the one hand the Tunisian army never had a comparable role to that of Egypt's ; Tunisia was never a military dictatorship contrary to other Arab Republics, most of which have been based on military rule. Tunisia is an exception, as Lebanon is also in a different way.

On the other hand, there is in Tunisia a major organised social force and therefore a major de facto political force, and that is the worker's trade union centre, the UGTT, and there's nothing equivalent in Egypt. The UGTT has been the chief broker in the confrontation between the Ennahda government and the Tunisian opposition.

RN : It's quite surprising that the Muslim Brotherhood have been branded as terrorists and fundamentalists but no one is battling an eyelid at the Salafis now standing side by side with the current military-backed interim government, although they are more radical. Do you think that the Salafis are going to replace the role the Muslim Brotherhood played prior to 2011 when it comes to the parallel welfare state, especially given the funding they have from Saudi Arabia ?

GA : The bulk of Salafis in Egypt are not more radical, politically, than the Muslim Brotherhood. Their kind of fundamentalism is related to a more stringent conception of life and society and in that sense they can be perceived as more 'radical'. But during the time of Mubarak, the government saw them very favourably because they preached obedience to the ruler. In that sense, they are not regarded as a threat by the ancien régime. This is all the more the case in that, as you said very rightly, they have the Saudi connection. In 2011 there were even Saudi flags raised in some of the Salafi rallies in Egypt. The Saudi connection is also one of the key reasons for the support of the Salafis' main party, El-Nour, for Sisi : it is obviously related to the Saudis' enthusiastic support for the same, which also fits with the regional rivalry between the Saudi kingdom and Qatar.

This said, the Salafis do not need to replace the parallel welfare state of the Muslim Brotherhood, as they already have their own networks in place. That's how they spread, especially in the rural areas of Egypt : in much the same way as the Muslim Brotherhood did. Borrowing a concept elaborated by a French sociologist, one could say that the

Salafis run a 'counter-society'. These forces manage to grow by filling gaps, which in the case of Egypt are huge gaps, left by the failure of the state to provide basic social services of every kind.

However, the Salafis are not as powerful as the Muslim Brotherhood in terms of organisational machinery, especially when it comes to politics, because the Muslim Brotherhood have been working for much longer in Egypt as a political organisation. They are basically a political party - indeed, the first modern Islamic fundamentalist party - combining Islamic fundamentalism with modern politics. The Muslim Brotherhood were hence well prepared to rise in power after the fall of Mubarak. With massive funding and television support from Qatar, they opened party offices everywhere with great pomp and circumstance.

I don't think that the Salafis are in the business of emulating that, at least, for the time being. They have no plans for seizing power in their own hands ; they want rather to be associated with power, and are therefore quite happy to work with the military. What they would prefer is something akin to the Pakistani scenario under General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988), where you had military rule, backed by fundamentalists, implementing fundamentalist criteria in government.

RN : Since we're talking about fundamentalists, local media in Egypt have been saying that there are Hamas-backed militant groups in Sinai, such as Ansar Beit El Maqdis or the Takfiri groups. Are they really posing a threat ? Or is this some kind of a distraction that the government is using to re-assert that the military is needed to protect Egypt ? Paul Rogers, in his latest column on openDemocracy, says that he thinks that Al Qaeda could build a new base in Egypt. What do you think ?

GA : These are indeed two different issues : one is about the Muslim Brotherhood and the other is about Al Qaeda.

To be sure, the kind of situation that is developing in Egypt is an incitement for fringe groups, which may or may not be by-products of the radicalisation of those in the Muslim Brotherhood that have decided to turn to violence.

It is not proved at all that there are direct links between violent actions taking place in the Sinai Peninsula and Hamas or the Muslim Brotherhood. What is more obvious to me is that the claim that there is such a link, before it could be based on any real proof, is a pretext for the military to better ostracise the Muslim Brotherhood in Egyptian society and to further legitimize and justify their repressive actions so far. It's striking how the language of the 'war on terror', which became so prominent with the Bush administration after 9/11, is now very widely deployed in the region by the Egyptian government as well as by the Syrian regime or the Bahraini monarchy.

It's hard to believe that the Muslim Brotherhood would resort to terrorism under the present circumstances ; it would be extremely short-sighted of them to do so. If one were contemplating a shift to armed struggle, one would hardly carry on organising mass peaceful demonstrations. The fact that they are doing so tends to indicate that the attribution of violent operations to them is dubious.

This said, even the tactic of demonstrations waged by the Muslim Brotherhood has been entirely counterproductive in my view, and a continuation of the extreme clumsiness of their behaviour since the start of the revolutionary process, and especially during the Morsi period.

The fact that Morsi, despite the huge size of the demonstrations against him on June 30, refused to call for a referendum or for early elections was extremely short-sighted. The fact that he stuck to the assertion that he was the democratically elected and therefore legitimate president lacked foresight. Think of Charles De Gaulle, a much more important historical figure with much higher legitimacy in a sense, who – when he faced massive demonstrations against him in 1968 – called for elections.

He happened to win the parliamentary elections in that year. The year after, in 1969, he called for a referendum on his programme, which he lost and subsequently resigned. Well, he was a lot cleverer politician than Morsi, and on the other hand, he had a lot more sense of what democracy means.

Once Morsi was overthrown by the army in the face of huge mass resentment against what the Muslim Brotherhood had been doing, the idea that demonstrations in his support would succeed in reinstating him as president was very unrealistic, bordering on the irrational.

The political turmoil organised by the Muslim Brotherhood actually played into the hands of the armed forces. They, of course, resorted to very brutal repression, but with support from most of Egyptian society, in the name of fending off the permanent agitation conducive to 'terrorism'. In that sense, the Brotherhood's demonstrations were completely counter-productive and actually served the purpose of those wanting to reinstate Mubarak's repressive state in full.

As for Al Qaeda, it is taking advantage naturally of the whole massively destabilising impact of the regional uprising and revolutionary process. All revolutionary processes come along with destabilisation. And any destabilisation helps fringe radical groups, in this case radical far right groups, to proliferate. Now, will they be able to build anything significant in Egypt, more so than the previous wave of terrorism in that country in the 1990s ? I don't think so. Al Qaeda manages to build some real base only in countries torn by civil strife. That has been the case in Iraq and is the case more and more in Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

However, the situation in Egypt is quite different. Unless you have a collapse of the military, which is not really on the cards for now, I cannot see Al Qaeda building for itself a regional base in Egypt. This is all the more difficult to imagine in Sinai since it is not only the Egyptian side that will not accept any Al Qaeda presence there, but also the Israeli side. So, I can't see that as a likely prospect.

RB : Are the Saudis funding instability in Syria or wherever they think there is the danger of a more democratic settlement ?

GA : It is wrong in my view to believe that the Saudis would support instability anywhere. They are actually the furthest you could find from any desire to destabilise ; they fear instability because it represents a direct threat to them. In Syria, they were actually quite late in playing a major role. Qatar has been much more prominent there until last year. This said, one should not forget that the main destabilising force in Syria is the Syrian regime itself. By replying to the very legitimate demands of the peaceful demonstrators in 2011 with extremely brutal and criminal repression, it created the current situation.

RB: So there is no significant proxy war ?

GA : Not in the sense that the Saudis would have wanted to overthrow the Syrian regime. The only reason why they expressed their support for the Syrian uprising is because they needed to divert it from a democratic uprising into a Sunni uprising.

As long as it is a democratic uprising, it represents a major threat to their own interests, even if they do not hold much sympathy for Bashar Al Assad.

Once it gets the character of a Sunni uprising, animated by a sectarian agenda, they are relieved as it is consonant with their own sectarian ideology.

They basically support the ancien régime everywhere. But in Syria they couldn't do so for sectarian reasons. In Yemen, they did. In Bahrain, of course, they even intervened militarily to uphold the ancien régime. In Egypt, they are very openly on the side of the ancien régime and they regretted very much the ousting of Mubarak. They resented the fact that the US administration let Mubarak fall. All over the region, the Saudi Kingdom is basically the main representative of the ancien régime and works for its stabilisation.

Libya is another exception. They couldn't express any sympathy towards Gaddafi with whom they had much trouble during his reign. Accordingly,

they tried their best to recuperate the Libyan uprising, along with western powers and Qatar, but they all failed miserably in preventing the country's destabilisation.

Everything that has been happening in Libya ever since the insurrection of Tripoli that brought Gaddafi down has been beyond anyone's control. In a sense, this is why it has been a much more interesting process than the image of pure chaos projected in the western media. There's much more happening in Libya than just militias clashing with each other ; there is also a very intense process of social and political mobilisation of a society coming out of a very long lethargy.

RN : Egypt/US relations appear to be changing. This week, Sisi went to Russia for a \$2 billion agreement on "military and technological cooperation". One might expect that the US would do everything in its power to keep Egypt on its side, especially as Israel's neighbour. Is this just a distraction or a threat to the US ?

GA : There seems to have been no done deal : they are still negotiating. The potential deal is said to be funded by the Saudis. Now, are the Saudis really going to pay \$2 billion to Russia's military industries, when they are at the same time on opposing sides of the Syrian conflict ?

Sisi's visit to Moscow served two purposes actually – one is the one which you mentioned, which is also a gesture addressed by the Egyptian military to Washington so that it stops putting pressure on them. The US is reminded that Egypt has the option of shifting back to old allies, to the time when Russia's predecessor, the Soviet Union, was the main sponsor of the Egyptian armed forces. True, Putin's Russia has little in common with what the Soviet Union used to be, but Sisi himself has even less in common with Gamal Abdel-Nasser, despite what his admirers claim... and Putin and Sisi have much in common as intelligence men with reactionary gender views.

The other purpose of Sisi's visit to Moscow is plainly related to Egyptian domestic politics. It is no coincidence that it happened prior to Sisi's proclamation of his candidacy. Had he already proclaimed his candidacy, he couldn't have gone there as Minister of Defence, since he needs to resign from his official positions in order to run for president.

His visit was 100% orchestrated as a presidential gesture, including the wide circulation of Sisi's photo in civilian attire on his way to the airport. His meeting with Putin went much beyond the usual minister to minister meetings. Putin came out openly in support of Sisi's presidential bid. All of this fits nicely into the attempt to exploit nostalgia for Nasser by spreading the suggestion that Sisi is his reincarnation.

In fact, the only thing the latter two do have in common is their military background and nothing more : they are actually completely contradictory characters. Nasser and his comrades, the Free Officers, were young rebel officers who overthrew the military hierarchy as well as the monarchy. Sisi, on the other hand, is a top member of the military hierarchy who was an obedient servant to the old regime of Mubarak until his very last day.

RN : In the past couple of weeks there's been quite an upsurge of workers' movements in Egypt and it has been very interesting in the sense that there hasn't been any repression – as far as we know – which is quite surprising because it was when the workers joined the uprising in February 2011 that Mubarak had to step down. But this time the state is not reacting with an iron fist. Why might that be ?

GA : This shows that it's quite exaggerated to portray the situation in Egypt as a totalitarian nightmare. It's much more complex, because if it is certainly true that the military took things back into their hands after July 3, they did so against the backdrop of a huge mass uprising. The fact that there is a new upsurge in workers' strikes is certainly very significant ; it shows that the long-term

revolutionary process is still very much alive and kicking, as I already mentioned.

The lack of repression of the present strike wave, I think, is mostly due to the fact that we are heading towards presidential elections. The army is probably holding the Ministry of Interior (MOI) back from spectacular repression because it could be harmful to Sisi's presidential prospects.

RN : Especially now that conscripts from the MOI have also been on strike, right ?

GA : Absolutely, this combination would be very harmful to Sisi's campaign and could destabilise dangerously the whole situation. Repressing the workers' strikes would also put the present Minister of Labour in an extremely embarrassing position potentially forcing him to resign.

RB : This is the leader of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions ? He hasn't seem so embarrassed up until now ?

GA : If you follow things closely, he has been embarrassed more than once. In my view, Kamal Abu-Aita fell into a trap by accepting to be made the Minister of Labour. However, it's not easy to throw stones at him because he was a real working class fighter. He wasn't a bureaucrat. He was deliberately co-opted into the government for that very reason indeed, and that's another indication of what I was saying about the ambiguous or more complex picture that prevails in Egypt, rather than just the military rule picture.

Abu-Aita was co-opted precisely because they wanted to appease the working class after July 3. But as we are beginning to see now, that was definitely not enough.

RN : Hamdeen Sabbahi does not seem as popular as he was during the presidential campaign of 2012. He's not given much credibility, because of his support for the current military-backed interim government. Does he have a chance in the upcoming presidential elections ?

GA : I would remind you that up to two weeks before the presidential elections of 2012 he was almost a non-entity in the media. He was seen, and the expression has been used countless times, as the "dark horse" in that electoral game, the man who surprised everybody. Indeed, it was a huge surprise that he got close to 5 million votes, and came in third, with negligible means in comparison to both Morsi and Shafik, and even, Amr Moussa and Aboul Fotouh.

Hamdeen Sabbahi had very little in comparison, and he still came third. Not only that, he was in the lead with the largest number of votes in both Cairo and Alexandria, the two main urban concentrations in Egypt.

I'm not saying this to suggest that he will repeat this achievement. This time things are much more difficult and there is actually very little doubt that Sisi will win the upcoming presidential elections.

In my view, the issue for Sabbahi this time is not to win the elections, although he has to assert that he is trying to win them, because you don't run in an election as one of two frontrunners saying, "I take it for granted that I won't be elected." You have to make your followers believe in the possibility of victory. And he has a lot of followers, especially among the youth. I would hazard that he could get significantly more support than what can be predicted at this point in time. People who previously refrained from expressing anything but support for Sisi are now becoming more critical.

The ice is breaking slowly ; there are various signs of that like the Bassem Youssef show, for example, which plays a very positive role in that regard. More and more intellectuals are expressing critical opinions in the Egyptian press, including Alaa El Aswany, who can be seen as a barometer. In his last columns he has been taking his distance more and more from Sisi, which is a positive development.

RN : Yet more and more people have been arrested. Freedom of expression, as such, is not really present.

GA : The latest wave of arrests was on the anniversary of January 25 and included many young people who were part of the June 30 mobilisation against Morsi but rejected the subsequent military rule. These arrests are now criticised and attacked by many people, so that I wouldn't be surprised if most of those detainees were released soon, or else this issue might be used against Sisi. Sabbahi clearly condemned those arrests.

RB : What's Sabbahi's constituency of support then ?

GA : He is betting on the vote of the youth who were key in the uprising and who did not overthrow a Mubarak in order to enthrone a Sisi, I would say. As well as all those who are unhappy with military rule for various reasons, including a sizeable section of the Muslim Brotherhood's sympathisers.

RN : Would the left support Sabbahi ?

GA : If you mean the radical left, this is not clear yet. I very much hope they will. The radical left should not repeat their past mistake of not supporting him. They made this mistake during the 2012 presidential elections. I was really appalled to see sections of them even preferring to support Aboul Fotouh, the liberal Muslim candidate backed by the Salafis.

Nasserism is by far the main form of progressive political consciousness that one can find in Egypt. This progressive consciousness takes the form of nostalgia for Nasserism – not nostalgia for military rule, as some people believe, but nostalgia for social benefits, nostalgia for agrarian reform, democratisation of education, the guarantee of jobs for graduates, etc. It's also, to be sure, nostalgia for the national dignity of Egypt as embodied by Nasser. Of course, there is also a right wing interpretation of the Nasserist legacy emphasising the dictatorial "strong man" dimension. But I would contend that a vast section, if not most of those invoking Nasser in support for Sisi are doing so opportunistically. It is funny to see how suddenly so many collaborators of the Sadat/Mubarak regime have started invoking the figure of Nasser.

In any event, if you're looking for a form of mass left wing political consciousness, Nasserism is what you find in Egypt. Anyone having illusions that you'd be able to build a mass current referring to Marxism or the like in that country, in the foreseeable future, is completely deluded. If you want to build a left current in Egypt, you have to work with the present and actual form of progressive political consciousness.

No one embodies the left Nasserist nostalgia better than Hamdeen Sabbahi presently, and this is also an indication that this nostalgia is not one for military rule, since he's 100% civilian. Moreover, he's going to be facing a military leader.

Returning to what I was saying, the key challenge for Sabbahi now is not to win the elections, but to come out with a significant vote in order to prepare for the future, because there is little doubt in my view that Sisi is going to fail.

Sisi is a continuation of the ancien régime. He may try to portray himself as a reformer and renovator and all that, but he is basically a continuation of the Mubarak regime, one moreover who depends on Saudi and Emirati funding, not exactly sources of the revolutionary type.

Sisi relies on their petrodollars to fund his government. But this will in no way be enough to solve the country's key problems. Anyone whose programme is but a continuation of the same economic policy that prevailed in Egypt over the last decades will fail at getting the country out of its present economic dead end, fail at reversing the hugely rising unemployment, or solving basic real and major problems.

Every government that has come to power since Mubarak has failed : the SCAF failed miserably. They were greeted at the beginning with slogans like "The military and the people are one hand" and so forth, and in a matter of few months they became increasingly the target of mass popular resentment.

Then Morsi incurred the same reaction ; he had a very short honeymoon period, especially when he so visibly shot himself in the foot, very clumsily, by giving himself 100 days to sort things out, and failed miserably. But this was also a recognition of the fact that one needs to deliver quickly in today's Egypt, and Sisi is going to face the same challenges.

To get out of the binary standoff between the ancien régime and Islamic fundamentalists, a third way needs to emerge. As they say in Egypt "La fu-loul wala Ikhwan, lessa el thawra fel midan" (No remnants of the old regime and no Muslim Brotherhood, the revolution is still in the square) - which is an excellent slogan.

Sabbahi represented this aspiration in the first round of the elections in 2012, because those who voted for him didn't want either Morsi or Shafik.

In a way, because he was very clearly against Morsi and in support of June 30 (his people were among the main actors in the build-up of the June 30 mobilisation and a lot of the now-divided Tamarod team are from among the ranks of his supporters) he is well positioned to represent this third way in standing against Sisi.

Without giving him a blank check, of course, the left in Egypt, in my view, should definitely give him support, albeit critical. It needs to be understood that it is essential for the future that an important and significant number of people vote against Sisi and for a progressive alternative. A boycott would not attain the same results, especially since it would be attributed to the Muslim Brotherhood.

RB : Can I be a devil's advocate on this one ? When you say that the radical left supported Aboul Fotouh and they should have supported Sabbahi, there is possibly an argument that if you really want to form a structure that will change things in Egypt, you have to somehow bridge the gap between the Islamist and secular constituencies ; and that moreover this necessitates cultivating political pluralism and diversity rather than cultivating a monocultural National Us.

Effective use seems to be being made now of the 'war on terror' precisely to scare everyone that anyone different is an enemy, and Nasserist nostalgia is redeployed to the same end. Under those circumstances, could we not argue that Sabbahi is really just another appearance form preventing change ? OK, he may want to change the complexion of the ruling entity, get a few of his own people in or have a bit more power for himself. But couldn't this illusion of a possible return to Nasserism also have the effect of yet another fail safe mechanism against real change ?

GA : I don't think that he can be seen in this light at all. He is someone who has been fighting fiercely against both the Sadat and Mubarak regimes his whole life. He has been jailed many times for his views. He was locked in much more radical opposition to Mubarak than the Muslim Brotherhood ever were. He was also involved in various kinds of progressive opposition against Mubarak, including the Kefaya movement, up until January 2011. He, therefore, has a long track record in representing both the democratic aspirations and the Nasserist nostalgia, which is the genuine desire to bring Egypt back to the progressive social measures that were completely reversed with Sadat's infitah policies. At this point in time, he embodies the aspirations of the vast majority of those who are looking for a progressive alternative.

RB : Which is that they want to go back ?

GA : Well, they want to go back to a social and national profile which I think should really be seen as quite progressive. Even Sabbahi himself would not defend the dark side of Nasserism, the dictatorial character, the repression, etc... But he defends all the rest. It's a balancing act ; I would say he is part of a vast majority of the Egyptian population who regard the positive legacy of Nasserism as more important than the remainder.

In that sense, he is seen as a major threat by the ancien régime. Aboul Fotouh is much less of a threat

to the social order, because after all he was part of the MB, albeit their liberal wing, taking its inspiration from the Turkish AKP model. For the ancien régime, this is much less of a threat than someone who has a real constituency in the working class and among the youth, and who represents left wing aspirations.

One major reason Sisi will be running for presidency is Sabbahi actually, in the sense that Sisi is not a political person, as Heikal emphasized. He is very much a military man, a man of the intelligence services, with the mind-set you would expect from people in this position in countries where the army is the dominant institution. He knows very well that the military is the real source of power in Egypt and that's actually the reason why in the new constitution they imposed the ruling that for the next two mandates the army will designate its own senior commander and minister of defence.

At that particular point in time, what that tells us is that Sisi was not yet enthused by the idea of becoming president. If you're sure of becoming president, why would you impose such limitations upon yourself ? And why didn't the military repeat the SCAF episode after July 3, but put forward civilian figures instead ? It is because they had learned the lesson. So why should they burn their fingers facing social unrest again ? It would make much more sense for them to have a weak civilian president, so that they keep intact their image as Egypt's saviours in the last resort.

But the problem is that the only person who has declared his candidacy, so far, is Sabbahi. And there's no one on the horizon matching his popularity but Sisi. My guess is that the Saudis were made anxious by the prospect of Sabbahi getting elected, and must have applied pressure on General Sisi to run for president.

RN : But wouldn't that be a bit of a suicidal path for the military, coming slap up against it all ? At the end of the day, if you don't have the middle man who's going to take the brunt of things, this will leave the people

face to face with the military, which will expose them.

GA : Absolutely. And that's actually one of the arguments that Sabbahi is using in his campaign, because of course he doesn't want to alienate the army, nor attack Sisi frontally. He would be foolish to do so given Sisi's present popularity.

His line of argument is, "I am against Sisi becoming president, because that would be harmful to him and to the army. It would create a wedge between the army and the people". This, of course, is a shrewd line of argument. One could wish that he put it still more straightforwardly, by emphasising the need to build a modern democratic Egypt with a "civilian regime", a phrase which was an object of vast consensus after January 2011. Even the MB argued for a "dawla madaniyya" (civilian state), which fundamentally means one that is ruled neither by the religious nor by the military institutions.

And one can address the soldiers and the lower ranking officers with similar arguments, telling them : "You joined the army because you believe in defending your country. This is what the army should be for and it's better for your own prestige and dignity that the army does not get involved in everyday politics".

RN : Is there some kind of a split between the MOI and the military ? You have these big talk-show hosts like Yosri Foda, Lamis El Hadidi, etc. being quite critical of the MOI and the arrests, etc... Or could this blame game simply be designed to give the military a better image ?

GA : Yes, of course. It's definitely not a split. I do not buy this thesis or any attempt at reading Egyptian history through the prism of the military versus the interior. Generally such readings are meant to create a more favourable image of the military. There are two people who have kept hold of their positions from Morsi's time till now : Sisi and Mohamed Ibrahim, the Minister of Interior. There's continuity here because they are quite sim-

ply two sides of the same regime, the same "deep state".

It is obviously in the interests of the army that someone else be responsible for repressing social struggles. The army is very happy taking care of their own interests and not getting enmeshed in this thorny situation.

However, does anyone entertain the slightest illusion that the repression is not endorsed by Sisi ? Everyone knows that he is the "strong man" in the present situation in Egypt. The real president, the real prime minister is Sisi. To believe that the MOI are doing what they are doing against his approval is just absurd. One should have absolutely no illusion in this regard. Sisi might play demagogically on the public mood and come out in favour of the release of some of the political prisoners if he sees this as useful. But this would be very much part of his electoral campaign. This or that MOI figure could be scapegoated every now and then. This is very usual political practice everywhere. People shouldn't be fooled.

RN : And the judiciary, where do they stand in the midst of all of this ? Because towards the end of Mubarak's reign there was quite a stand-off and now it seems that they've been completely co-opted, back to the way things were with very little sign of independent thinking ?

GA : The judiciary, the interior, the army, etc... are all institutions of the "deep state". Now contrary to the MOI or the military high brass, you may find judges – because of the nature of the institution – who are independent-minded or who wish to be seen as independent, but sooner rather than later the judicial hierarchy would bring them back to order. The deep state has not been undermined in Egypt. It is still very much there.

The only country in the region where the deep state was smashed is Libya. This did indeed lead to an almost stateless situation, with the absence of the first qualification of a state which is the monopoly of legal violence. Hence all these militias and the

insecurity. Libya faces the problem of building a new state almost from scratch and it's not easy. Aside from Libya, in Tunisia and Egypt, not to mention Yemen or the rest, the deep state is still very present.

RN : Would Hamdeen Sabbahi have any impact on the deep state ?

GA : I don't think that it is useful to enter into the territory of political fiction – and this for two reasons. The first is that what is important with Sabbahi's campaign is the building of a third current, regardless of whatever will come next, especially since Sisi is going to be elected in all likelihood.

The second point is that you can't limit political fiction to guesses about one man's idiosyncrasy. If you are going to speculate, you have to factor in the conditions under which Sabbahi would come to power. If it is in a context of mass upsurge and social radicalisation, he can go quite far with his agenda along the Nasserist road. Of course, he can hardly go beyond that, but that's quite progressive indeed. One can imagine changes on the model of Chavez and the Latin American left taking place in Egypt. It all depends on the overall balance of social and political forces.

RN : The Way of the Revolutionary Front have put forth a third way. We haven't heard much noise from them and it doesn't seem as if they have gained much of a following.

GA : It's an excellent thing that they exist ! However, they have faced a very difficult situation with the polarisation between the Muslim Brotherhood and a camp that appeared to be led by the army. The room for them was extremely limited and that's why, unfortunately, they remain marginal in the Egyptian situation.

But this is where Sabbahi comes into the picture. Some people believe that he is on the military's side since June 30. But this is a misunderstanding. A few days before the huge mobilisation, Sabbahi was

asked by a journalist, "Don't you fear that the army you are now allying with, against Morsi, might take power again?" His reply was, "No, I am convinced that our army is not interested in doing that." That was wishful thinking and a mistaken assessment indeed. But it is on the basis of that wishful thinking that he acted.

Now, Sabbahi has changed his tone and even more so the young people in his movement, known as The Popular Current, who are voicing more and more criticism of the government and what is going on, especially against the repression, as well as of the prospect of the military coming to power.

The main figure of The Popular Current, a young man declared a couple of months ago, "If Sisi runs for president, this would give credit to those who said that July 3 was a military coup. It's not acceptable that he runs while he is in his military position. He should resign long before that happens."

Now, of course, Sisi will resign, but only quite late on, after securing his control over the military institution and waging a long de facto presidential campaign while exploiting his official positions.

Sabbahi recently came out very openly on TV, criticising the government and especially their repressive tactics. He said, "We are all for fighting terrorism but we are against curtailing basic freedoms in the name of fighting terrorism" and he also said, "I hope that the Muslim Brotherhood will change their attitudes. I am calling on them to re-join the political game. And I am against treating people who shout slogans in demonstrations the same way you treat terrorists who engage in violent actions." So he was quite clear in that regard.

That's why I believe that his campaign is crucial in order to break the potentially dictatorial image that is orchestrated around General Sisi.

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PAKISTAN

Islamabad's "stain"

HASHIM BIN RASHID ·

THE decision by Islamabad's Capital Development Authority (CDA) to demolish at least a dozen informal settlements in the capital area starting the last week of March has been met with protest outside its offices.

Islamabad's bulging informal settlements have been long considered a stain on the 'planned' city's master plan. When Islamabad was conceived by Greek architect Constantinos Doxiadis in 1960, it was conceived as a city without the poor. The city's elite planned to keep it that way.

Nonetheless, the mushrooming of informal settlements was their own doing. The country's top bureaucrats could not do without household servants and so the first wave of informal settlements built up in Islamabad's vast empty lots were inhabited by Christian workers, who formed the bulk of the city's garbage disposal and household labour.

No city can exist without housing for its working underclass: from construction workers to shopkeepers to beauticians to street vendors to its drug dealers and commercial sex workers. Doxiadis could be forgiven for conceiving a city without residence for the working class poor. The architect expected the new capital to be inhabited by technocrats who could do their menial tasks themselves.

If he knew the cultural context of Pakistan, he would have known that the elite cannot survive without an underclass. Doxiadis's planning failure still haunts Islamabad's elite.

This has meant that 150,000 of Islamabad's population of 500,000 live in informal settlements. Of the 31 *katchi abadis* in the city, the CDA has refused to regularise at least 20, playing up the

Afghan refugee card. This is the same elite that backs Pakistan's Afghan policy, that brought the two waves of an estimated 1.8 million Afghan migrants in the 1980s and 2000s.

After 30 years of mostly peaceful coexistence with these migrants, who integrated themselves into the Pakistani economy without asking for much from the state, they are suddenly being called "terrorists".

In this context, the interior ministry's claims that 98,000 people are "unregistered" and therefore "suspect" appear ludicrous. That Afghan migrants are unregistered after three decades of migrations is not their fault, it is the interior ministry's fault. And being 'unregistered' doesn't make one a "terrorist".

The Islamabad High Court ordered NADRA not to issue CNICS to anyone without a title or lease document. If the problem is being "unregistered", why aren't they being allowed to register in the first place?

The real reasons are to do with Islamabad's burgeoning real estate market. Islamabad in its first three decades had a bare minimum real estate market. Most land was allotted to civil and military officials. In the 1990s, they could be allotted extra plots for as little as Rs600,000 per kanal. Now those prices have swelled to between Rs10-20 million per kanal and MNCs are looking to build hotels and shopping plazas. The CDA is looking to displace the city's poor to make way for high-end housing and commercial projects.

This is why it must contradict the guidelines of the 2001 National Housing Policy, which protected informal settlers against displacement until appropriate resettlement plans were formulated and advocated the development of low-income housing

schemes. With both conditions not fulfilled in Islamabad, it is in contradiction of federal policies.

Similarly, the PML-N government is in contradiction of the policy measures it implemented when it announced the Regularisation of Katchi Abadis Scheme 2012, which were said to "recognise all *katchi abadis* in the province".

The claim that katchi abadis are "illegal" is legal fiction. It is a discourse maintained by elected and non-elected officials in public that goes against the laws and policy guidelines developed by the state over the last three decades that legalise informal settlements.

Moreover, we must ask the larger question: what is the purpose of state land? Why do we not consider

"state land" as a trust granted by the people of Pakistan so it can make the best use for citizens? Following that logic, one would think that if the state is not able to guarantee its citizens affordable housing, is it not fair that we reclaim land that was being held in our trust. When officials tell *katchi abadi* dwellers that "it is state land, should they not respond, "No, it is the people's land."

This raises an interesting question of rights: if the state fails to fulfil its duties to facilitate people in the land that has been granted to it, do we have a right to take it back? Should people not be constantly monitoring the state's land use policies and determining whether they are in 'public interest' or not? This should be the real question of Islamabad's katchi bastis.

ARAB REVOLUTIONS

Aspects of the involvement of women in the Arab revolutions

LUIZA TOSCANE ·

At first, women did not demarcate themselves from the movement as a whole, demanding, like men and all the other minorities, the "fall" or the "reform" of the regime. And they suffered from repression: like their male peers, they were arrested, tortured and imprisoned (in Syria and Sudan), or killed. But they were also dealt with specifically, with rape being committed on a mass scale (in Libya, Egypt and Syria), the term rape including "virginity tests." In Sudan, women were publicly whipped, because corporal punishment is prescribed by law, such as public flogging for "moral or indecent attire" and "prostitution", whose definitions are so broad that the authorities can use them to repress women. And women have already disappeared from history, not ten years or a hundred years later, but in real time. Syrians pay homage every day to dozens of "martyrs" who fall every day for the revolution. The expression "Glory to the martyrs" followed by a reminder of the name, the date of birth and date of death, and sometimes even more details, which are rightly mentioned in the communication media of the Syrian revolution, is intended only for men; women are excluded, because you do not pay tribute to a woman who has been raped. She disappears immediately from the collective memory.

In a second phase, women expressed their own demands, either through existing movements (as in Morocco and Tunisia) or by creating new structures

(in Yemen, Syria and Libya) or by a third attitude, implying transgression. Among the women's movements created from nothing, we must obviously include all the women's structures established in the liberated territories in Syria; their newspapers, their radios, their structures to assist the wounded and displaced persons, etc. The same thing goes for the women's movement in Libya, which has won a victory that is historic, not only for Libyan and Arab women, but for women all over the world. In fact, on 19 February 2014, the Minister of Justice adopted by decree a bill recognizing the victims of sexual violence committed during and before the revolution as war victims; this victory is not only symbolic, but accompanied by compensation and a rehabilitation programme for the thousands of women involved, and for the children born from these rapes. This is a measure for which many women who have been raped in conflict zones around the world are still waiting ... in Bosnia, Congo and Darfur, to name only a few cases.

Alongside the old or new women's movements, there is a third attitude, which is certainly very much in a minority, but which has emerged in the wake of these revolutions; instead of demanding rights, you exercise them! This was the case of the "kiss of Nadhor" (in Morocco), when following the arrest and imprisonment of a couple of teenagers who had kissed in public, girls and young people decided to kiss in public, in the street. At the funeral of Choukri Belaïd in Tunisia, his widow Basma launched an appeal to women and invited them to participate in the funeral, even though that day is in principle reserved for men. Women responded massively and went to the cemetery. In Syria, the women of Salamiyeh declared on social networks that from now on they would bury the dead. A

woman took off her top in public (in Tunisia) and another removed her lower garments (in Egypt). In Sudan women defy the government and march bareheaded. And in Saudi Arabia, women take the wheel of a car at regular intervals and are starting to win small victories. It remains to be seen

whether these attitudes are the result of a moment of revolutionary euphoria, a spur of the moment decision, or whether they represent a more general pattern of behaviour. It is, however, hard to imagine Saudi women giving up the driving seat. It is up to us not to give up on them.

SYRIA

Establishment of the "People's Liberation Faction" to commemorate the third anniversary of the Syrian Revolution

REVOLUTIONARY LEFT CURRENT IN SYRIA ·

At the international level, the negotiations are conducted between the imperialist powers at the expense of the Syrian revolutionary people, as they try to cast away the fair demands of this revolution by seeking through these negotiations to maintain the regime of oppression, exploitation and corruption, by only modifying it superficially through so called "reforms". The response of the ruling regime to the demands of the peaceful masses during the first year of the revolution was bloody and brutal. This brutal repression led important sections of the revolution to adopt the armed struggle for the defense of himself or herself and his or her parents and their cities. This was not an easy choice and arms were not even taken willingly for many of them, but this form of mass struggle came in reaction to the brutality of the military incursions of the dictatorial regime. The armed struggle has become an instrument for the liberation of the masses and cannot be ignored.

The counter-revolutionary forces, whether local, regional or international have attacked our popular revolution, in order to try to abort or derail it of its popular and democratic path. We know that these regional countries have mobilized all their energy in this objective. This situation has been worsened by the absence of a clear political vision that is blurred by alliance with various regional forces and dominates sections of the oppositions. The various sections of the official opposition are also affected

by tensions that stem from conflict and struggles of various political and military agendas of regional and imperialist powers that sponsor them.

The experience from the last three years of the revolution nevertheless proves that these regional and international powers, despite their disagreements, without any exception, don't want the victory of the revolution. They are all working on trying to derail and abort a popular, democratic and social radical revolution. The fascist ruling regime justifies the killing of our revolutionary masses in the name of «homeland » or « front of refusal », while the fascist counter-revolutionary forces, on the other side, kill our people in the name of « God and religion ».

Both are two sides of the same coin: tyranny and exploitation. Both of the mentioned counter revolutionary forces did not hesitate to use sectarianism, religious, ethnic and local differences as well-known and worn instruments to distort popular consciousness and to try to derail the ongoing social struggle and divide the popular masses. The soul of the popular revolution is nevertheless still alive and was able, until now, to avoid falling into this mortal trap.

Our revolution erupted in the context of uprisings experienced by the countries of our region since 2010, and as our revolution affected the general course of these revolutions, in return, these latter affected ours as well. These are not merely purely theoretical words, but rather facts that have been proved by the extent of the correlation between these ongoing revolutionary processes in the countries of our region altogether. At the same time, we see that our revolution is part of the struggles of the

global toiling masses, of the oppressed and of the marginalized everywhere for freedom, equality, social justice and socialism. We see it in the struggle of the Palestinian people to recover all its land and rights, in the struggle of the peasants without land and labor in Latin America, in the strikes of the miners in South Africa and in other countries, in the struggle of the masses in Europe against neoliberalism and capitalist globalization, in the struggle of the oppressed workers of Southeast Asia, in the struggle of women for their rights and equality throughout the world.

Therefore, there is no doubt that our struggles are merged and are unified against the global capitalist system, which is based on exclusion and plunder and exploitation and in which imperialist predators struggled for more profits at the expense of millions of people and of their sufferings.

Radical left activists were not absent from the revolution in Syria since the time it erupted, many of them were actually the initiators of it, as new groups or as cadres who left the official communist parties, whose leaders showed their submission to the bloody bourgeois regime. But unfortunately, many of them faded away because of the repression, exile or his or her distaste for arm struggle.

But we, the revolutionary left current, remained tenacious and held on to the revolution. With our modest capacities, we participate in all forms of mass struggle, including armed struggle as individuals. But the time has come, at that particular moment of the revolution, for the revolutionary left current to play its role in the popular armed struggle through the establishment of the People's liberation faction without giving up for a single moment all forms of peaceful mass struggle that allow us to confront both the violent fascist regime and the reactionary counter-revolutionary forces. This is the road for the victory of the popular revolution, in rooting its nature in democracy and socialism from below, in defending the immediate and general interests of the popular classes, in securing the inde-

pendence of the will of the people from any imperialist or regional intervention from any foreign power, and in recovering our occupied territories of the Golan by all means possible.

On behalf of the revolutionary masses, the workers, the marginalized and the oppressed

On behalf of Syria's freedom, equality and social justice that emerge every day in spite of the pain and destruction

We, the revolutionary left current in Syria, declare, amid the ongoing popular revolution, the establishment of « People's liberation faction » that upholds the program of the original popular revolution. We emphasize that its mission is to defend oneself and the popular masses and their freedom paid heavily for it and for the right to liberate themselves from all tyranny and exploitation, in the face of all the counter-revolution forces, particularly the authoritarian ruling regime.

We do not call for death, but for a free and dignified life for the popular masses, for all the popular masses. Because life is beautiful, we want to guarantee that present and future generations are free of all evils, of all persecutions, and of all violence.

In our struggle with the toiling masses for their liberation, we call on all the leftist and socialist forces in the region and in the world to affirm clearly and firmly their highest degree of international solidarity, because the fate of our popular revolution will decide the fate of the revolutionary processes in the region, and even beyond its borders.

Glory to the martyrs and healing for the wounded and freedom for all the detainees

Victory for the ongoing popular revolution

All the power and wealth to the people

Revolutionary Left Current in Syria

March 18, 2014

For details for financial support please follow this link: <http://syriafreedomforever.wordpress...>

PAKISTAN:

Of heroes and villains

AASIM SAJJAD AKHTAR ·

Omar and his 'accomplices' spent the rest of the Zia years in the infamous Lahore Fort and other jails across the country. They were tortured, denied due process and slandered as enemies of Pakistan and Islam. There were thousands more like them, and more than three decades later we still await justice for the innumerable victims of the most brutal dictatorship in Pakistan's history.

Earlier this week Prof Jamil Omar passed away in Lahore, barely 60 years old. No heroic obituaries were published in major Pakistani dailies and none of our ubiquitous talk-show hosts dedicated a programme to his and his comrades' sacrifices. These 'villains' never received any tamghas or sitaras. They remain largely anonymous, even in death.

Of course, it all makes perfect sense. Leftist radicals who have spent their lives trying to foment progressive social change in this country have always been criminalised. At best they have been co-opted after death, made into apolitical symbols of state nationalism, the very same straw men these radicals spent their lives challenging. Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Habib Jalib are the most prominent examples.

Meanwhile, rightist radicals are unqualified heroes both in life and death. They are depicted as paragons of justice and morality, the most principled defenders of the land of the pure. Absurdly, their unapologetic commitment to ideologies of hate guarantees them elevated social status and a permanent audience with the powers-that-be.

Things have changed, to an extent. The fact that I am writing this piece is evidence of this. Yet it would be naïve to assume that the state and its ideologues in the media, educational institutions, religious establishment and elsewhere in society are

any more tolerant of dissident views than in the past. Leftist radicals neither pose the kind of threat nor face the same brutality they did when arch-conservatives like Reagan, Thatcher and Zia set the terms of the political debate. Overt repression like in the 1980s is therefore uncommon.

Let us also not ignore the tremendous ideological contradictions within which the Pakistani state has managed to wrangle itself. During the Zia years, the mujahideen were still the world's most loved freedom fighters and the forces of 'Islam' and the 'West' on the same side in a holy crusade of the 'ahl-i-kitab' against godless communists. As we know, the contemporary situation is less rosy for previously united and hegemonic rightists.

It is no longer possible to reject the 'democracy' for which tens of thousands of progressives have made countless sacrifices. Ayub Khan insisted that democratic norms were incompatible with our climate and societal ethos while Zia insisted that the imperative of Islamisation trumped democracy and just about everything else. Present-day rulers cannot get away with such hogwash, no matter how much they may harbour anti-democratic sentiments.

Certainly leftist radicals might even have been tolerated in the past if their vision of democracy was not such a departure from what is accepted in the liberal mainstream. It was, and is, the fact that the left talks of democracy not in the formal legal and political sense but in terms of socialising the means of production and eliminating age-old social hierarchies that make its agenda so abominable to state and capital.

Notwithstanding contemporary political correctness, there is no reason to believe that there will never again be large-scale state repression against leftist radicals, whether in this country or else-

where. Of course, a great deal depends on the extent to which the left maintains a commitment to a revolutionary as opposed to a reformist programme, and whether or not it is able to muster the organic bases of support necessary to make such a programme practicable.

Regardless of what happens in the future, we must not forget our past. Today pro-establishment intellectuals, media persons and politicians present themselves as defenders of democracy.

Only yesterday they were hand-in-glove with the self-proclaimed guardians of Pakistan's ideological

frontiers in their suppression of progressives whose dedication to the emancipation of this country's long-suffering people was, and is, second to none.

Some of them have now passed on, while others still live with the scars of tyrannical dictatorships. It is they who deserve to be called our heroes. It is they who give us reason to believe that the world can be changed.

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The writer teaches at Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Tuzla, the unknown capital of the Europe of workers and peoples

OLIVIER BESANCENOT ·

Yet in recent weeks, this country has also risen in revolt. The people has rebelled against social injustice and poverty and expressed loud and clear its desire for change.

Intrigued and excited by the information provided by our comrades there, I set off for a short hop to Tuzla and a brief stay there. It was fascinating to see how misleading time can be: the hands on the ordinary clock seem to freeze while the political and social clocks are going haywire. But it is well known that in times of rebellion or revolution seconds are worth minutes, minutes are worth hours and hours are worth days. This brief tour of internationalist solidarity seemed to be an eternity, rich in meetings, discussions and lessons.

At the airport in Ljubljana, Slovenia, it was Mladen, a comrade from the group *Iskra* (Spark), who led the small delegation consisting of two Belgian comrades and myself. We headed for Tuzla, the epicentre of the protests that are stirring Bosnia today. Mladen is preparing a protest against the liberal university reform which threatens the student youth of Slovenia. He is also active in organizing solidarity with the social rebellion, because the new frontiers between the different nations of the former Yugoslavia are not impermeable to the momentum of this rebellion. Along the way, Mladen evokes the great damage to the economy of the Balkans that has been caused by twenty years of frenzied liberalism. Constrained by a system that had remained bureaucratic, despite the dissidence of Tito against the Soviet regime, then ruined by years of war, the economy of the former Yugoslavia was literally vampirized by the market economy. The results were the development of increasing in-

equality, poverty, unemployment (between 40 and 45 per cent in Bosnia) and the privatization of public services and industry for the benefit of clan and mafia groups linked to a handful of thoroughly unscrupulous Western capitalists.

Concerning the war, Mladen is more taciturn and insists on talking about it in the past tense. He says with a smile that his passport is Slovenian, his mother is Croatian and his father Serbian. After a moment, the endless Slovenian conifer forest gives way to the tarmac of the long highway that takes us to Croatia, skirting Zagreb (we are still in the European Union, which Slovenia joined in May 2004 and Croatia in July 2013) and then leads us to Bosnia, a country that is not a member state of the EU. As the kilometers fly by we pass industrial zones with internationally known companies and villages with packs of straw that recall the traditional methods of another century. Gradually, a thick cloud of pollution tells us that we are approaching Tuzla. Chimneys and the huge yoghurt pots of the coal-fired hydroelectric power station appear. They spew out a continuous cloud of smoke that exudes an inescapable smell of sulphur throughout the city. The stage is set. If the administrative capital is Sarajevo, Tuzla is the industrial capital. Which is why the Serb shelling, twenty years ago, took care to spare the industrial sites, counting on taking them over. The bombardments were deliberately targeted, often for the worst, as is recalled by a monument in the city centre commemorating the massacre by cannon fire, on 25 May 2 1995, of seventy-one civilian victims, mostly young people sitting at pavement cafés.

Up till then, Tuzla had only made me think of a vague destination on the map, associated with the

humanitarian convoy project, "Workers' Aid to Bosnia" in the early 1990s. At the start of this initiative, trade unionists and anti-capitalist organizations had gone round several cities in Western Europe, in Britain, France and Belgium, to collect food, books and drugs before trying to reach Tuzla, the working-class city that dared to proclaim loud and clear its multi-ethnic character – in spite of war and hatred.

In the heart of the city, we were immediately enveloped in a dense and fragrant fog, giving the streets and neighbourhoods the appearance of London in the nineteenth century, so well portrayed by the Scottish novelist Conan Doyle. The houses are low and often lopsided, because the ground is unstable. The young people stroll around in groups, encountering each other in a permanent ballet, where laughter and discussions fuse, without excess. In the taverns, people drink, dance and flirt, just like anywhere else in the world. Dressed the same way, behaving the same way, Tuzla's young people look just like ours. The young people of Tuzla are also ours. Simply, they were born from the womb of war and have kept a serious and mature manner. Talking with different people, we quickly understand that this terrible ordeal, only evoked by a terse "after the war ...", has strongly marked this generation, which appears, when the discussion gets underway, very precocious for its age. Its Battle-hardened character is probably one of the ferments of the revolt.

The stigmata of social catastrophe and political revolt are obvious: closed shops, forsaken streets, rundown blocks of flats where people still live, buildings and walls that reflect the general atmosphere, reinforced by graffiti; a mixture of insults (which any self-respecting urban facade has) and all the "good feelings" the people have for the former government and for politicians. The highlight of this rapid tour was the building of the government of the canton of Tuzla, sacked and burned by demonstrators on February 7, the culmination of three days of protest involving more than fifteen thousand people. A few hours later, in Sarajevo, it

was the seat of the presidency which was burned in its turn. Here, the police pass by, now indifferent to the charred premises, a "distant" memory of a government forced to abdicate confronted by the power of the street. A huge graffiti proclaims "revolution" and indicates "nationalists, thieves." And indeed, at the heart of popular anger you find poverty and corruption. These two words sum up the balance sheet of the liberal policies implemented in complete harmony by the social democracy and the Nationalist Party of Bosnia (founded by Alija Izetbegovic, taken over by his son Bakir) alternating politically and overlapping to such an extent that Mladen said: "Here, the opposition was constantly in the government and vice versa."

"Was it the war that caused all this?". "Yes, the economic war!"

So, there has been no government in Bosnia for a month and it does not seem to bother anyone. A power vacuum such as this would make any politician from here or anywhere else dizzy, but any passerby on the street can explain it patiently, fearlessly and with conviction.

Gordan, who is 35 and one of the oldest activists of the *Lievji* group, explains for example the original experience of direct democracy that emerged in Tuzla after the demonstrations and the fall of the government. In the absence of government, a plenum, a popular assembly open to the entire population of the city, meets regularly in a communal room – in the beginning, every day, now twice a week – to deal with common problems and policy issues. This plenum involves between seven hundred and a thousand people, not always the same. Interventions are brief and timed; budding leaders are kept at bay. At each meeting, only mediators are designated, to ensure the smooth running of the meeting. The topics are varied and freely discussed: employment, industry, public services, education, culture, corruption, violence ... Twelve committees have been set up to work on topics hitherto treated by departments. Another is responsible for relations with workers. Three working groups deal with

the media, legal aspects and logistics. The plenum has demanded that Parliament quickly appoint a technical government, refusing the idea that the Prime Minister should come from its own assembly and preferring to remain independent of traditional politics so as not to be exploited. The plenum sees itself first of all as a counter-power, strong and legitimate. Its goal is that the solutions it works out are implemented to the letter by the future government, or else it will be brought down for non-respect of the mandate. It is a kind of veto imposed by direct democracy.

In the commission concerning the workers, in which we were present, the issue of restarting the detergent factory Dita was discussed. This enterprise had been privatized a few years earlier and ceased its activity, allowing its owners to make a great deal of money, and to do so fraudulently. There was a long debate in the group that had to submit its findings to the plenum: should the workers be helped to buy shares in the company; should the cancellation of Dita's debts to its suppliers be decreed; how could ownership of the plant be given over to its workers?

Mirna, a worker in the factory and a member of the group, took us to visit the factory. In the industrial outskirts of Tuzla it's a disaster zone, a real economic graveyard. Looking at the countless waste grounds, abandoned warehouses, buildings literally gutted, I ask naively: "Was it the war that caused all this?". "Yes, the economic war!" was Mirna's quick reply. Here, factories were born, lived and died, sometimes in only twenty years. Whereas our Western industrial histories, also run down, often last for more than a century, in Tuzla economic life is ephemeral. It boils down to rapid mafia-style capital accumulation, reduced to its most juicy and optimal expression, where capitalism comes to pillage and leaves as it came: a kind of economic Blitzkrieg. We are all overcome by a profound sense of the waste and mess of it all.

Stray dogs accompanied us on the wharfs and on the site, where vegetation is reasserting itself. Since 2011, the workers, who number a hundred and

twenty today, as against a thousand in the past, have no longer been paid and take turns in small coordinated groups to protect the plant twenty-four hours a day against theft or tampering. The workers explained proudly that with not much investment and support for vocational training, the company could restart quickly if a policy choice was made in that sense.

Back in the centre of town, we met four friends coming from Sarajevo. Tijana reported that beyond the towns of Tuzla and Sarajevo, the whole of Bosnia is in flames. In Mostar, for example, the fight took on a symbolic twist. On either side of the river two communities, Croatian and Bosniak (Muslim), usually face each other. This time, the revolt has unified the two groups, sparing neither the Bosniak or Croat government offices. Confronted with the accusations of the Bosniak authorities, accusing Croatian demonstrators of setting fire to their buildings, the Bosniak inhabitants loudly took responsibility for the action and proclaimed their solidarity with their "Croatian brothers." Of course, national questions have not disappeared; they are still present, veiled and latent. But for now the social question blocks and transcends them, which is a source of great pride for this new generation, which says that it observes with some anxiety the Ukrainian counter-example. There, the people that first rose up against social injustice and corruption is now held hostage by the machinations of the imperialism of the Russians and of NATO.

However, if Ukraine focuses the attention of all the champions of the EU because what is at stake on the strategic level is far more appetizing than in Bosnia (in geostrategic, economic, energy terms ...), Tuzla only offers the possibility to show solidarity and to identify with an exemplary struggle for emancipation. This social and political experience is thinking aloud and has probably rediscovered a hint of self-management buried in the groundwater of the collective Yugoslav memory. It is chaotic and it faces many obstacles, but it exists, it is there before our eyes, if we just open them and see. Ensure unitary political support for the insurgents in

Bosnia, conduct an internationalist trade-union campaign to support the recovery of the self-managed enterprise Dita; these are suggestions, non-exhaustive, around which we can rally the organizations of the social and political Left in France who are ready to do something. A Balkan Spring, a Slavic conjugation of the Occupy movement? What we call it doesn't matter much. One thing is certain:

the European elections are approaching, and while the political class is highly discredited, it is in the public and internationalist interest to proclaim that Tuzla is the capital of Europe that we lack. A Europe of workers and peoples, to be built on the ruins of the EU, its treaties and its present economic and political representation.

March 15, 2014

ECONOMY:

Banks speculate on raw materials and food

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

Banks speculate on raw materials and food

Banks, through their trading activities, have become the principal speculators on the Over the Counter (OTC) markets and ultimately on the futures markets for raw materials and agricultural produce, as they dispose of far greater financial means than other protagonists in the field.

A quick glance at the Commodity business awards [1] website reveals a list of the banks and brokers playing a major role both on the commodity markets (where raw materials are actually bought, sold and speculated upon) and on the commodity-backed derivatives market. The most frequently mentioned among these are BNP Paribas, Morgan Stanley, Crédit Suisse, Deutsche Bank and Société Générale. Some banks go even further by developing instruments that enable them to directly influence the stocks of raw materials. Such is the case for Crédit Suisse, in partnership with Glencore-Xstrata, the biggest international brokerage company dealing in raw materials [2] had the status of investment bankers, after the 1999 law on banking reform that accompanied the abrogation of the Glass Steagall Act, they were able to buy up power stations, oil tankers and other infrastructures.

This is how Morgan Stanley came to own barges, tankers, pipelines, and oil and gas terminals! JP Morgan, for their part, bought up the Royal Bank of Scotland's commodities division in 2010 for \$1.7 billion, enabling them to acquire 74 metal storage warehouses in the UK and the USA, while Goldman Sachs hold 112. Thus these two banks together hold more metal storage warehouses than Glencore, who have 179. Storage capacity is crucial for a company or cartel of companies (for example banks) that

wants to speculate by maximum stockpiling in order to force prices up or by selling to bring them down., The aluminium market, since 2008 is a prime example. According to an investigation conducted by the New York Times, since 2010 when Goldman Sachs bought up the aluminium warehouses of Detroit, delivery time for aluminium bars has gone from 6 weeks to 16 months. Prices have risen sharply despite the fact that the amount of aluminium stocks on the global market has increased. As a result, there have been strong reactions from companies which consume large quantities of aluminium in the manufacture of cans, such as Coca Cola and Miller, the brewers. Goldman has amassed 220 million dollars' revenue from aluminium stockpiling in Detroit alone [3]

After having made juicy profits by manipulating stock prices, the most active banks in the actual commodities market have adopted an exit strategy; this for three main reasons. Firstly, the regulatory authorities have become aware of the manipulations practised by several banks. JP Morgan, Barclays and Deutsche Bank have been fined over several affairs including the manipulation of California's electricity market. JP Morgan have agreed to pay a fine of \$410 million in this ongoing affair [4].

The American authorities, under pressure from companies competing with banks and faced with popular disgruntlement with the banking industry in general, are seriously considering putting a curb on banks' activities on the markets of actual commodities. Secondly, The banks' profits on this market have started to decline since 2011 – 2012 and market prices are contracting. Thirdly, the hard capital (Core Tier 1) required for investments in trading companies is greater than for other types of investment (such as sovereign debt, for example).

Consequently, as the banks have to increase their equity/weighted assets ratio, they reckon that they are better off unloading all or part of their investments in the actual commodities market [5]. Watch this space. Nevertheless, the banks will maintain high activity in the commodity-based derivatives market and in all areas of the financial markets relating to raw materials. The damage they can do will remain considerable unless radical measures are taken.

These banks are the prime agitators in the development of the speculative bubble which has grown out of the commodity markets. When it finally bursts, the fallout will hit the banks which will mean further damage. Even more serious are the disastrous repercussions for the populations of countries in the South which export raw materials. People all over the planet stand to be affected in one way or another.

The fundamental role that speculation had on the upsurge of food and oil prices in 2007-2008

Speculation on the main US exchanges, where the world prices of commodities (Agricultural products and raw materials) are negotiated played a fundamental role in the food price increases in 2007 – 2008 [6]. This price explosion caused a dramatic 140 million increase of the number of people suffering from malnutrition in the world, bringing the total to 1 billion (1 person in seven). The principal actors in this speculation were not isolated wide boys, but institutional investors: investment banks [7], pension funds, mutual funds, insurance companies, commercial banks and the big brokerage companies such as Cargill. Hedge funds and sovereign wealth funds [8] were also involved, to a lesser degree.

Michael W. Masters, who directed a Wall Street hedge fund for 12 years, attested to the harmful effect that institutional investors have on commodity price increases, before a Congressional Committee, assembled to examine this question, in Washington on May 20, 2008 [9]. He declared: "You have to ask the question 'Are institutional investors contribut-

ing to food and energy price inflation?' And my unequivocal answer is 'YES.'" In his authoritative testimony, he explains that food and energy price inflation is not due to insufficient supply but to a sudden increase in demand from new actors in the commodities "futures" market. In the futures market, investors purchase the upcoming production: the next wheat harvest or the oil production three or six years down the line. Theoretically, the principal investors in these markets are companies wishing to guarantee their supplies of commodities essential to their operations, for example airline companies that assure their future supplies of fuel or agro-industrial firms that purchase specific cereals. Masters demonstrates that in the US, assets allocated by institutional investors to commodity index trading on the futures market rose from \$13 billion at the end of 2003 to \$260 billion as of March 2008. The prices of the 25 basic commodities listed on these markets climbed 183% during the same period. He explains that the commodities market is a narrow market. Institutional investors such as pension funds, need only allocate 2% of their assets to overwhelm the system. In 2004 the total value of contracts on this market was about \$180 billion whereas the total value traded on shares worldwide was \$44 trillion, about 240 times more. Masters indicates that during that year, institutional investors invested \$25 billion in the futures market, accounting for 14% of that market. He shows that in the first trimester of 2008, institutional investors greatly increased their investments in this markets: \$55 billion in 52 business days. . Now there's a way to create bubbles.

The price of commodities on the futures market has immediate repercussions on the current prices of these goods. Thus, when institutional investors purchased enormous quantities of corn and wheat between 2007 and 2008, prices immediately skyrocketed.

In 2008 the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) ruled that institutional investors could not be considered to be speculators: these zinzins are legitimate commercial market

participants. This allows the CFTC to affirm that speculation does not influence prices on the commodity markets. Michael W. Masters severely criticises the CFTC but not so much as Michael Greenberger, lecturer in law at the University of Maryland and ex-Departmental Director at the CFTC from 1997 to 1999. Before a Senatorial Committee held on 3 June 2008 Greenberger criticised the laxity of CFTC directors, who bury their heads in the sand when faced with energy price manipulations by the institutional investors, and quoted a number of declarations they had made that are worthy of inclusion in an anthology of human hypocrisy and idiocy. According to Michael Greenberger, 80% to 90% of energy transactions on US stock markets are speculative [10]. His expertise is indisputable.

On September 22, 2008, in the throes of the United State's financial crisis, when President Bush announced a bailout plan of \$700 billion (not to mention massive liquidities that were also made available), the price of soybean jumped 61.5% because of speculation!

Jacques Berthelot, also shows the crucial role that speculation plays in the rise of agricultural prices worldwide [11]. He gives the example of the Belgian bank, KBC, which ran an advertising campaign in order to sell a new commercial product to savers called "KBC-Life MI Security Food Prices 3" that proposed to invest in six agricultural raw materials. The KBC advertising spin was: "Take advantage of the rising prices of food commodities!" The marketing diatribe presented the "shortage of water and farmland" in the form of an "opportunity" as there is now a "shortage of food products that has led to rising prices of food commodities" [12].

With regard to the American justice system, the speculators are within their rights. Paul Jorion, in an editorial published in the French newspaper *Le Monde*, calls into question the decision of a Washington tribunal which on 29 September 2012 invalidated measures taken by the CFTC "intended to fix a maximum limit to the volume of positions that one transactor can take on the commodity fu-

tures market in order to ensure that the transactor alone is not able to destabilise it" [13].

Jean Ziegler, formerly United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, does not mince his words: "The 2007-2008 financial crisis, caused by banksterism, has had two notable consequences. Firstly, the hedge funds and major banks reoriented their activity after 2008, dropping certain segments of the financial markets and turning towards the commodity markets, particularly of agricultural produce. If we examine the three main staple crops (maize, rice and wheat), which account for 75 % of world food consumption, their prices have skyrocketed. In 18 months the price of maize has increased by 93 %, the ton of rice has risen from 105 dollars to 1010 dollars and the price of a ton of milling wheat has doubled since September 2010 to reach 271 euros. This price explosion procures astronomical profits for the speculators but kills hundreds of thousands of women, men and children in the shanty towns. A second consequence is the rush on the part of the hedge funds and other speculators to buy arable land in the southern hemisphere. In 2011, according to the World Bank, 41 million hectares (over 101 million acres) of arable land were taken over by investment funds and multinationals in Africa alone. The result has been the expulsion of small-scale farmers." [14]

In February 2013, in a report entitled "Réforme bancaire : ces banques françaises qui spéculent sur la faim" (Banking Reform: the French banks that speculate on famine), the NGO Oxfam France indicates that, in November 2012, the four main French banks – BNP Paribas, Société générale, Crédit agricole and Natixis (BPCE) – managed for their clients at least eighteen funds that speculate on the commodity markets. "There are two ways of speculating", explains Clara Jamart, head of Food Security at Oxfam France, "by taking positions on markets of agricultural commodity derivatives. Or by these index funds, which monitor the prices of agricultural commodities and push them up [15]. Most of these funds were created after the start of the food crisis in 2008, with the express purpose of

making profit by speculating on food and other commodities.

Similarly, in 2013 the Réseau financement alternatif (Alternative Financing Network) in Brussels denounced the involvement of six banks working in Belgium in speculating on famine in the world. Some 950 million euros belonging to clients of Belgium banks are used to speculate on food commodities [16]

Alternative proposals [17]

To bring an end to this state of affairs, there follow 22 proposals for an alternative to the food crisis:

- ban speculation on food; it is a crime to speculate on a people's lives, and it is for this reason that governments and international institutions must stop speculative investments on agricultural produce;
- prohibit commodity-backed derivatives;
- prohibit banks and other private financial companies from "participating" in the commodities market;
- socialise the banks, under citizens' control, with a mission to finance projects of food sovereignty giving the priority to small-holdings, cooperatives and the public agricultural sector;
- establish or re-establish international organizations to regulate the market and the production of the main export products (coalitions of countries that produce coffee, coco bean, bananas, tea etc.) so that stable prices are assured on an international level;
- terminate Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) that force countries to give up their food sovereignty;
- put an end to land-grabbing;
- set up global land reforms (for farmland, but also for water and seeds) to ensure that the farmers who produce food for the local population have access to resources, rather than

favouring the large companies that produce for export purposes;

- create an international legal framework on food sovereignty that protects, and formally recognises every country's right to develop its own policies in order to protect its agriculture, without harming other countries (particularly in the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights);
- terminate the thrall of exploitation caused by the mechanism of the external or internal public debt, mainly led by private banks, and put an end to the slave-like subjugation of small-holders to private lenders;
- apply a moratorium on industrial biofuels and ban genetically modified organisms;
- reform the EU's Agricultural Policy and the United State's Farm Bill, both of which have disastrous effects on the agricultural markets;
- not sign and, if need be terminate, multilateral (WTO) or bilateral (ALE et APE) free-trade agreements that conflict with food sovereignty;
- establish or re-establish agricultural import restrictions;
- restore public food reserves in every country;
- re-establish mechanisms that will guarantee stable prices for foodstuffs;
- develop production control policies in order to stabilize agricultural prices;
- control the profit margins of intermediaries.

Food security for all starts with stable food prices that cover the cost of production and ensure producers a fair income. The model of low prices, promoted by western governments to increase the mass consumption of manufactured products and services (tourism, entertainment, telecommunications, etc.), is neither socially nor environmentally sustainable. This model mainly benefits large agribusiness companies and private banks, and also - by diverting the population's attention away from democratic ideas towards mass consumption - aids

the political and economic elite of those countries to confiscate power.

Faced with the current food and environmental crises, radical changes must be made quickly. The proposals listed below are feasible ideas for agricultural and business policies based on food sovereignty. They would stabilize food prices at levels capable of assuring sustainable food production in the great majority of countries.

On a local level:

- support local farm production, notably by supporting farming practices and by facilitating small producers' access to credit, whether they be men or women;

- support and develop short/direct marketing channels between producers and consumers in order to ensure that prices are profitable to farmers and affordable for consumers;
- encourage the consumption of local products;
- support more autonomous forms of production that are less subject to price fluctuations than those forms of production that use chemical fertilizers (grazing on grass instead of being fed corn/soybean meal for example).

Translation by Vicki Briault Manus, Adam Clark-Gimmig and Mike Krolikowski (CADTM).

| SWEDEN

Stand up to Nazism!

SOCIALISTISK POLITIK ·

Several people were attacked by Nazis on March 8 in Malmö, in a case of attempted murder in the street, after the feminist demonstrations of the day of women's rights. The victims were stabbed and the life of one of them, who was stabbed in the lung, is in danger. Some Nazis of the Svenskarnas Party (Party of the Swedes) were arrested on suspicion of attempted murder. All this happened just days after the Nazis who had attacked another peaceful demonstration in Kärntorp had appeared in court. One of the Nazis detained in Malmö recently returned from Ukraine, where he had fought alongside the fascists of that country.

In this society Nazis and right-wing extremists are committing violent and deadly acts against people who represent the values that they hate. Pro-Nazi editorials distribute Nazi propaganda, stocks of arms have been found, there have been threats and violent acts against LGBT activists, as well as Islamophobic and anti-Semitic actions against entire groups, and now the attempted murder of an activist on the international day of women's rights. The feminist activists had torn down Nazi stickers from walls and the Nazis embarked on a violent attack.

The escalation of violence by right-wing extremists and Nazis is happening at the same time that some of these groups are trying to appear politically correct. It is capitalist policies and their negative consequences that facilitate these groups going onto the offensive. Some are in the Swedish Parliament; others spread their hatred in the streets.

The advance of the Nazis is all the more dangerous when various social media facilitate the increase in armchair racism, at the same time legitimizing the

Nazi violence. The strengthening of nationalism at a time when capitalist globalization is leading to economic and social insecurity creates a basis for right-wing populism, neo-Nazism and fascist groups. The threat from right-wing extremism, attacks against political and trade-union activists, as well as everyday ingrained racism, when people are looking for an apartment or for work, are seen every day in our country. It really is a threat against democracy.

According to the SÄPO (political police) the Nazis committed 14 political murders between 1999 and 2009: how many others have been overlooked? We do not forget John Hron, Ronny Landin, Kent Antonsson, Hyan Altrn , Jimmy Ranjbar, Peter Karlsson, Gerard Gbeye and Björn Söderberg. They were all victims of premeditated actions of right-wing extremists. Despite this, the mass media continue to speak of "extremism on both sides," SÄPO describes the "autonomous" left activists as the "major threat" and the government launches actions against "radicalism".

It is time to wake up. The exposure of Nazi and far-right crimes is absolutely necessary for all those who want a democratic society. We must actively fight the Nazis; those who are affected by violence are entitled to organize their own self-defence. Only big and strong demonstrations can prevent the Nazis from attacking and striking fear into the population.

The police, the SÄPO, the government and the mass media should stop pretending that the fault is on both sides and stirring up Islamophobia so as to minimize the deadly violence of right-wing extremism. The Nazis are murderers!

The situation is serious. Socialistiska Partiet appeals to all democratic forces, to all social and

trade-union movements, to help create a broad movement against the actions of the Nazis. Let us	remain united! Drive them out! Never bend before them!
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GERMANY:

Die Linke takes another step towards adaptation

MANUEL KELLNER ·

But it is also true that the party has from the beginning – already in its precursor, the PDS/Linkspartei – suffered a strong pressure towards adaptation. In the Land of Brandenburg, it co-governs as a junior partner of the SPD and bears co-responsibility for a policy of capitalist crisis management to the detriment of the exploited and oppressed as well as the natural bases of human survival. In full negotiation for the formation of the new grand coalition with the CDU/CSU, the SPD had declared publicly that it did not rule out a coalition with Die Linke in the future. Thus, the leadership of Die Linke has tried to make advances to the SPD and Greens with a view to the 2017 federal elections and to prove that it is serious and responsible.

To become a party of government at the federal level, Die Linke must eliminate some key points of its identity and political profile, which will not be easy. First, it must accept the interventions of the Bundeswehr around the world. Secondly, it must accept the austerity programmes inflicted on the economically weakest countries in the European Union, starting with Greece. Thirdly, it must accept budgetary discipline in Germany, and thus measures of privatisation and austerity, and new gifts for the banks and trusts. Fourthly, it must prove its fidelity to the established state institutions, the bourgeois parliamentary system and its divine centre of gravity: the private property of the billionaires and multi-millionaires. Also, it must demonstrate its capacity to marginalise the decidedly anti-capitalist forces it still contains.

In this respect, in mid February 2014, Die Linke made an undeniable step forward at its congress of

preparation for the European parliamentary elections. That goes both for the content of its electoral programme for the European elections as well as for the selection of candidates on its electoral list.

Already before the congress, by the vote of a commission of around 80 or 90 members responsible for proposing the list of candidates to the congress, only Tobias Pflüger, an anti-militarist activist and member of the Anti-capitalist Left (Antikapitalistische Linke - AKL) current, was able to find a place in the first six of the lists proposed, in place 2. Michael Aggelidis, a former Die Linke deputy in the regional parliament of Rhineland-North Westphalia and a comrade of the isl [1], as well as being a member of the AKL and of Syriza Germany, although warmly applauded for his speech stressing international mobilisations of solidarity against the Troika, was eliminated with only one vote. Already a bad sign for the congress.

Gregor Gysi, chair of the party's parliamentary group in the Bundestag, together with the heads of the co-governmentalist current of the party, the Forum demokratischer Sozialismus (FdS) and the representatives of the party's big detachments in eastern Germany, had meticulously prepared his coup. Neither Tobias Pflüger nor Sabine Wills, both well known for their critical attitude towards the European Union, and their involvement in extra-parliamentary movements, were selected. At the head of the list, in the first places which have a chance of being elected, there is no member of the AKL, the most left wing candidate being Fabio Demasi in place 6 – he is a collaborator of Sarah Wagenknecht and a member of Sozialistische Linke (SL), a fairly heterogeneous current with a left reformist profile.

For the content, it was the same as for the personnel: decidedly anti-capitalist positions rejecting ac-

ceptance of the institutional framework of the European Union (EU) were marginalised at the congress. It was not really the overall electoral programme for the European elections which was at issue – it is some 80 pages and contains a whole series of very acceptable passages alongside others which are ambiguous or doubtful – but above all its preamble, whose draft text had been formulated by members of the Lafontainist, anti-capitalist and reformist left of the party in the commission responsible for preparing congress documents. Gregor Gysi and those close to him had launched a public polemic against this preamble in the media, citing the "unbridled radicalism" of the text.

It was above all a phrase in this text which was the target of this campaign of denunciation, in which the EU is characterized as "neoliberal, militarist and to a great degree non-democratic". Although with these characterisations of the EU the text did not imply any nationalist fall-back, but rather the construction of another Europe from below, it was denounced as "anti-European". At the congress, the passage was eliminated by a large majority, and only the AKL and another small left current (Ger-
aer Dialog/Sozialistischer Dialog) rejected the formulations of "compromise" which were patched up.

The consistent left was thus isolated. Even some AKL members, above all deputies and members of the leadership, had called for moderation while saying that the differences should not be "exaggerated", when there was a solid base of common positions in the party. At the congress, they spoke and voted against the amendment seeking to reintroduce the disputed passage. It seems then that the Anti-capitalist Left current will undergo further processes of differentiation and disaffiliation, after already having lost the comrades around Sarah Wagenknecht who have formed the association Freiheit durch Sozialismus (Freedom by Socialism), leaving the AKL some time ago.

If we study the electoral programme for the European elections in its entirety, as well as the public statements of the spokespersons of the party and its Bundestag fraction, we find a characteristic

ambiguity: on the one hand, the constitutional bases of the EU like Maastricht and Lisbon are rejected as are the policies of the majority parties in the European Parliament, the European Council of Governments, the European Commission and the European Central Bank, whereas the EU is accepted as a framework serving to preserve peace and organiser social and ecological progress. Instead of proposing new genuinely democratic European institutions, built on the basis of the mobilisations and self-organisation of the popular masses and leading to a democratically elected constituent assembly and the participatory drawing up of a European constitution representing popular interests, it is reform of the EU which is proposed. At the centre of the proposals is the demand to broaden the rights of the European parliament. That isn't very different from the positions articulated by social democracy, notably by its European president Martin Schulz in his book "Der gefesselte Riese. Europas letzte Chance" ("The Chained Giant. Europe's Last Chance").

It is probable, or at least possible, that our long-time guiding line – of bringing together anti-capitalist forces both inside and outside Die Linke to reflect together, draw up and articulate positions and take common initiatives as well as to participate jointly in extra-parliamentary mobilisations – could soon be concretised.

In Berlin, a new anti-capitalist organisation (Neue antikapitalistische Organisation, NaO) has just been created, and a process to broaden it to the federal level has begun. The NaO has already asked the AKL for a meeting to discuss the situation after the Die Linke congress and talk about possible common initiatives, like the creation of an anti-capitalist forum (Antikapitalistisches Forum) open to both members and non-members of the party.

It should be said that there have already been disaffiliations by members of Die Linke frustrated by the results of the congress. It is thus urgent to create structures which will avoid an uncoordinated loss of activists by offering a new framework for militant activity – while being conscious of the fact that

Die Linke has not yet arrived at its August 1914, and that there is not as yet space for a new party to	its left.
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SYRIA

Resolution on Syria

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

The ongoing uprising against the Assad dictatorship, which started in March 2011, is a movement for democratic, social and economic rights similar to that which erupted in Tunisia and Egypt at the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011. It is part of the "Arab Uprisings".

The uprising in Syria is a revolutionary process for political change, democracy, social justice and against religious sectarianism. This political revolution has undoubtedly a mass base, demonstrated by the fact that the Assad regime, after nearly three years, has been unable to defeat the opposition militarily or politically. There are areas of the country that are free from the regime's control.

The repression by the regime in the face of this revolt has been horrendous. Nearly three years on, there are over 130,000 dead, 4.5 million internally displaced and more than 3 million refugees from a country of 24 million.

The social and economic background is similar to others in the region: after 40 years of the Assad family in power there is massive unemployment, poverty and corruption. Extensive nationalizations took place in the 1960s, but since the 1990s there has been economic liberalization and privatization. This has led to dramatic wealth inequality and impoverishment of the population. At the outset of the uprising, growth and development had stagnated, inflation had soared to over 100% per annum, and unemployment was probably 30%. Half of the unemployed are educated and skilled youth under 24 with aspirations to a better life.

The repressive regime in Syria has ruled since 1970 when Hafiz al-Assad took power in a coup. Despite its secular claims, the Syrian regime adopted sec-

tarian and kinship-based favouritism to consolidate its rule.

Since the 1970s the regime has encouraged conservative Islam in order to add to its own legitimacy including by making large contributions Islamic schools and propagating Islam in the media. In 1973, following protests from some Sunni religious personalities, Hafiz Al Assad introduced an amendment to a new constitution, which declared that "the religion of the president is Islam". This article has been kept in the "new" constitution adopted by the current regime in March 2012; which added a new clause: "Islamic jurisprudence is a source of all legislation". Bachar Al Assad is continuing these policies and increasing collaboration with religious associations as well as accelerating neoliberal policies. These measures are accompanied by censorship, and the promotion of religious literature and Islamicization of higher education.

The regime has enforced a harsh grip over the Alawite community, driving many of its most impoverished youth towards the army. They have tried to eliminate dissenting voices inside the Alawi community and to transform it into a political sect linked to their clan, although they have not succeeded in this.

The Alawi community has not benefited from any specific economic policies favouring them. The Alawi Mountain is the second most impoverished region after the North Eastern, populated mostly by Kurdish people. The region and the Alawi community have suffered just like others in the country from economic liberalization, the end of subsidies and high inflation.

The Syrian regime employs sectarianism in a conscious and deliberate way, especially in handpick-

ing of the praetorian guard of the repressive apparatus around Assad.

The imperialist occupation of Iraq and the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran have also contributed to the development of religious fundamentalism in the region. So too has the failure of much of the anti-war movement internationally to support the revolution in Syria.

Despite painting itself as "socialist", nationalist and non-aligned, the Assad regime has been a useful ally to imperialism. It has maintained a peaceful coexistence with Israel, repressed the Palestinians (it entered Lebanon in 1976 to help crush the PLO), in 1990 participated in the US-led Gulf War against Saddam Hussein, and has allowed its prisons to be used by the US for torture as part of the war against terror.

Imperialism is prepared to see Assad go in the face of the uprising but is desperate to maintain the infrastructure of the regime and the state. The US has learnt from the catastrophe in Iraq where the result has been, despite a military victory, that the US and UK have been unable to achieve their political objectives.

Imperialism now wants a "Yemeni" solution, whereby the figurehead of the regime goes, but the regime itself stays. This means trying to force the opposition to accept a form of power sharing with the Syrian Baath party. The worst fear for imperialism is a victory of the popular uprising against Assad, which could re-energize the Arab uprisings that have stalled in Egypt, Tunisia and elsewhere. This is reflected by its legitimization of the Assad regime through the Russian-brokered agreement to remove and destroy its chemical weapons that also undermined the insurgency whilst ignoring the use of other equally destructive weapons. The current peace talks are also an attempt to split the opposition and force the FSA/SNC into power sharing with the Assad regime to fight "terrorism".

Russia, along with Iran, is Assad's main backer, providing all the weapons necessary to inflict a defeat on the opposition. Russia's only naval base out-

side the former USSR is in Syria, and it needs allies in the region who can help with its geo-strategic interests. The people of Syria should be free to determine their own future, free from all foreign intervention, not just that of US/UK imperialism but also that of Russian imperialism.

The political character of the forces that oppose the regime is extremely diverse and contradictory. There is a small but significant leftist, progressive and democratic element, organised mainly within the local co-ordinating committees. This element is seeing a modest growth.

The Islamist forces, backed by different external forces (primarily Qatar and the Saudi kingdom) are warring amongst themselves – militarily as well as politically. One of the most positive developments over recent months has been the resistance of large parts of the population to these Islamist forces.

Women have been a significant part of the uprising including on the front line against fundamentalist forces that seek to restrict women's rights even further.

But fundamentalist Islamists are a lot stronger now than at the beginning of the war. They have received money and resources from Gulf States, giving them an increased military advantage and they are therefore able to attract volunteers. Despite the hypocritical claims by US imperialism that it supports the opposition, it has prevented the delivery to the Syrian National Council of the weapons that they asked for to defend themselves against Assad's army.

The conflict in Syria is posing an ideological dilemma for imperialism. The war against terror has been the ideological glue it has used to win hearts and minds for its interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, and to impose western approved democracy to replace disloyal local tyrants. This dilemma reinforces imperialism's intention to have a "Yemeni" solution to the conflict. Imperialism therefore does not want the conflict to go beyond certain limits. A victory for the opposition and the downfall of the Assad regime would be yet another

blow for imperialism and give hope to the millions that the revolutionary process of the Arab Uprisings is unfinished.

While now claiming to be appalled at the crimes of Assad, imperialism is actively limiting direct humanitarian aid and military support to the Syrian people's uprising.

There can be no silence about the crimes of the Assad regime, and we cannot be neutral in this conflict. We need to argue firmly against those on the left who have adopted a "campist" attitude towards the Assad regime. For revolutionary Marxists, the choice is clear: solidarity with the people of Syria in their fight for democracy, social justice and against religious sectarianism until the fall of the Assad regime.

As revolutionary Marxists, we stand for:

1. Down with Assad. Solidarity with the uprising, and in particular with all progressive, democratic secular forces.
2. Support the right of the people of Syria to fight for their democratic rights and for social and economic justice. Solidarity with Syrian women fighting for their rights.
3. Oppose all direct foreign military intervention, whether it is from western imperialist countries, Russia, regional powers or Hezbollah.
4. Support the right of the people of Syria to determine the future of their country free from all for-

eign intervention.

5. Support the right of the people of Syria to take up arms to defend themselves against Assad, and to obtain those from wherever they choose.
6. For the political civil and cultural rights for the Kurdish people.
7. An immediate massive programme of humanitarian aid to the refugees.
8. Open the borders in Europe to provide shelter and assistance to refugees wherever they want to settle.
9. Defend democratic rights in Europe and oppose any attack on civil rights in the name of the "war on terror". No criminalisation of those fighting against Assad.
10. Condemnation of all indiscriminate attacks on civilians and for the trial of all those involved in war crimes.

We should aim to create campaigns of solidarity with those opposing Assad and fighting for democracy. The basis of such campaigns is a tactical decision depending on local circumstances and the political forces involved. We should aim to get the broad movement including trade unions, the peace movement and anti-war campaigns, to support these campaigns.

25th February 2014

OBITUARY

Canadian journalist killed in Syria

We are extremely sad to report that Ali Mustafa, an editorial associate of New Socialist Webzine from Toronto, was killed today along with at least nine other people in an air strike by forces of the Assad regime on the neighborhood of Hadariya in Aleppo. [1] Ali was for a time one of the editors of NSW, and continued to do administrative work for the publication while doing journalism in Egypt, Palestine and Syria.

Ali was a very principled and thoughtful comrade. He was inspiring to work with on the Editorial Collective for the NS Webzine, advocating for an open, accessible and creative approach that would attract newly politicizing youth - and pushing us to maintain an ambitious pace in publishing to build our readership. Ali made a significant contribution to the webzine as a writer and photographer, with a range of contributions including interviews, book reviews, analysis of middle east politics, and critical reflections on his own experience as an activist.

Ali had a rare understanding of the complex interactions of imperialism and the internal forces of re-

action in middle eastern politics. He would have agreed with Khalil Habash's observation in his 2012 article for NS that "A free, progressive, democratic and truly independent Egypt and Syria are infinitely more dangerous to the Zionist apartheid state and its occupied territories than the repressive Syrian and Islamic Republic."

Ali was a genial friend, a very human radical activist who understood the value in engaging with people outside the organised left. He always sought to reach wider audiences through the popular media, with published photos showing the carnage in Aleppo as recently as February 26. <http://www.ny-dailynews.com/.../canadian-photographer...>

The brutality of his death and the more than 100,000 others who have died, the more than four million who have been displaced, and the tens of thousands facing death by starvation as a result of the corrupt Assad regime's desperate effort to maintain power - and the courage and commitment of those who continue to risk their lives signal a grave responsibility for the international left to carry forward the struggle for justice.

Ali Mustafa's blog.

SWEDEN

Far right attack on feminists

Late last night [8 March] several people were attacked in central Malmö by members of the fascist Svenskarnas Parti (Swedes Party). They were on their way home after having taken part in celebrations for International Women's Day.

The incident occurred just after a nighttime demonstration against violence against women finished up at around midnight on Möllenvångstorget (a square in the heart of a multicultural and left wing district of Malmö). One person is now in intensive care with serious head injuries and a further three have suffered knife wounds to the arms and lung, amongst which was a member of Allt åt Alla Malmö. The nazis had been searching for potential victims the entire evening in the vicinity of the March 8th Festival at Moriska pavilion in Folketspark. The attack was, in other words, no coincidence.

The attack on the 8 March demonstrators can't be seen as an isolated incident. The arson attack on Kvarnby peoples high school in October 2013 was only the beginning of an escalation in nazi violence around Malmö. Left wing locales and premises have been exposed to graffiti and broken windows. In January a 16 year old member of SSU (Sweden's Socialdemocratic Youth organisation) was attacked by two men, warning her about spreading her views. In several other places and cities nazis have been identified registering participants in demonstrations during International Women's Day.

The seriously injured 25 year old, Showan, who is currently being cared for in a sedated state in hospital, is a leading figure in the fight against racism and homophobia in the football world, a SAC member and devoted supporter of Malmö FF. He also helped to found "Football fans against homophobia". Based on this, he has been recently

hung out on the Swedes Party linked website 'Realisten'.

According to witnesses at the scene, a high ranking member of the Swedes Party – Andreas Carlsson – was involved in the attempted murder. He was seen attacking feminists with a knife. Andreas Carlsson is one of the members of the Swedes Party who travelled down to Kiev as "Ukrainafrivilliga" (Ukraine Volunteers) to support the Svoboda party's efforts in taking power. On Realisten he has reported on the Swedish Nationalist delegation's operation. Some of the delegations participants have stayed, according to their own reports, "to enlist in the Ukrainian army", while Carlsson's group returned to Sweden only a few days before 8 March.

The Security Services' (Säpo) chief analyst Ahn-Za Hagström claimed on the 8th of March that they "see no increased intention or capability of committing politically motivated crimes when they get home." (SR.se March 8th) That same evening the nazis attacked. Foreign Minister Carl Bildt said in a recent interview on Swedish Radio's P1 channel that the Swedes Party's sister party Svoboda are "European democrats who work for values that are ours". This minimization and normalization of fascist parties has given the Swedes Party and their "Ukraine Volunteers" the belief that they have a free pass for their violent acts.

Not only the Security Service, but also the ordinary police have ignored the far-right violence, by depicting the murder attempt as a "gang war" between "opponents on opposite fringes". This comes less than half a year after police ignored warnings that a similar nazi party, Svernska Motståndsrörelsen (The Swedish Resistance Movement), planned to attack the anti-racist demonstration in Kärrtorp.

It is abundantly clear that the fascist threat against Sweden and Europe, against individuals and social movements, is not taken seriously. Neither the government, the security services nor the police have been able to present a clear and coherent approach towards this. Fascist violence should never be reduced to youth fights or extreme phenomena, such as, Birgitta Ohlsson's government extremist investigation. Then one misses the powerful political force that the fascist parties in Europe have be-

come, the impetus it gives the corresponding parties at home in Sweden and ignores the seriousness of the weapons training and street fighting skills Swedish right-wing extremists have gained during his travels and visits with Jobbik in Hungary, Svoboda in Ukraine and the Golden Dawn in Greece these last few months.

Today, they stand for violence in the streets. In September, they stand for parliamentary elections.

BOSNIA

List of Demands by Sarajevo and Bihac Protestors

SARAJEVO PROTESTORS

Regarding yesterday's protests across Bosnia and Herzegovina and the media's attempt to discredit this justified rebellion, this informal group of citizens and protest participants repeats our demands to the government.

IN THE NAME OF CITIZENS ON THE STREETS OF SARAJEVO

We declare:

We, the people who went out onto the streets of Sarajevo yesterday, also regret the injuries and damage to properties, but our regret also extends to the factories, public spaces, cultural and scientific institutions, and human lives, all of which were destroyed as a direct result of actions by all those in power for, now, over 20 years. We ask our fellow citizens and fellow sufferers not to allow these unpleasant scenes to cloud the fact that this kind of government and those in power have costs us immeasurably more.

We, thus, demand:

- Unconditional and immediate resignations of both the Sarajevo Canton and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina governments; and the formation of non-party governments.
- No measures, of any kind, to be undertaken that would limit peaceful citizen protests.
- Immediate release of demonstrators, no criminal case filings against them, and an end to the witch hunt of people.

When these demands are met, we can then ask for the start of conversations and actions at all levels of government in order to establish a more socially

just order for all social strata; and for all those whose human dignity and material basic needs have been endangered or destroyed by the transitional theft, corruption, nepotism, privatization of public resources, an economic model that favors the rich, and financial arrangements that have destroyed any hope for a society based on social justice and welfare.

To establish such a social justice order, before we undertake any social measures are, we demand an immediate end to the larceny of this society cloaked in politics, and criminal prosecution of those responsible. Only when all of that is complete, can we begin to build something new for all of us.

BIHAC PROTESTORS

Protesters have sent their list of 13 demands to the Parliament of the Una-Sana Canton:

- (1) Resignation and replacement of the Una-Sana Canton (USC) government and all directors of public institutions and public enterprises.
- (2) Appointment of a new government for USC and new directors, without influence of politics in choice of prime ministers and ministers (professional governance – with public release of biographies and the reasons for their appointment).
- (3) Matching salaries in the public sector to the industrial sector, so that the highest public sector salary cannot be higher than three average salaries in the industrial sector.
- (4) Matching salaries in the public sector to the educational/professional level.
- (5) Public release of documents for tenders in the last 10 years and in the future.
- (6) Matching levels of budget appropriations for agricultural production in the budgets at all levels

of government to the European Union standards.

(7) Matching educational standards, at all levels, to the European Union standards.

(8) Matching the number of employees in the public sector to the European Union standards.

(9) Finalizing construction of the veterans' building, at the latest by the elections of 2014.

(10) Ending all additional privileges for government officials.

(11) Ending additional financing of representatives and employees in the administrative institutions, on the basis of various commissions.

(12) Ending the salaries and other privileges of all politicians following the end of their term.

(13) Immediate end to the use of force by the police toward the protesters and vice versa.

translated from Bosnian by Marina Antic

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BANGLADESH

Rana Plaza (Bangladesh)... Women in the Garment Industry: Remembering Victims, Fighting for Justice

DIANNE FEELEY ·

Next month will be the first anniversary of the Rana Plaza building collapse in Bangladesh, which resulted in the deaths of 1,160 garment workers, mostly young women. Although the disaster occurred on April 24, 2013, two hundred workers are still missing. This is the largest disaster in the history of the international garment industry.

Workers throughout the eight-story building had been sent home early the day before so that an engineer could conduct a thorough inspection; he found cracks throughout and declared the building "unsafe." The bank and shops on the lower levels remained closed but the garment factories on the upper four floors, constructed without permits, sent factory bosses around to the areas where their workers lived, demanding that they reported to work. Knowing they would have their pay check blocked if they stayed home, they reported. As soon as the power generators were turned on, the building collapsed. Some workers remained trapped for days until officials or relatives were able to pull them out.

The year before, illegally-stored materials caught fire at Tazreen Fashions. Employees were ordered to ignore the fire and continue working until smoke enveloped the eight-story structure, including its staircase. Many of the windows had iron grilles that prevented workers from escaping. Out of a work force of 1,150, 112 died.

These two industrial disasters are the result of conditions imposed by a global supply chain that has subcontractors in the poorest countries making apparel worn in Europe, Canada, and the United States. Worldwide the garment industry sells \$48

billion worth of clothes, with China and Bangladesh as the #1 and #2 exporters. In Bangladesh, 500 garment factories produce over \$20 billion worth of apparel for export, for U.S. based companies including Walmart, Sears, Gap, and Children's World. Most factories are around Dhaka, the capital, and employ 3.5 million. Eighty percent are young women, often coming to the city from agricultural areas.

Bangladesh has the lowest wages in the garment industry: \$37 a month is the minimum. Facing dangerous working conditions and abuse from their bosses, the women work 12-14 hours a day, 7 days a week as long as there is a contract. Labor organizing faces hostility from the owners, who have enough influence with various government agencies that they can obtain permits and build with substandard materials and have influence with the police.

In 2010 Aminul Islam, a former textile worker, along with two other labor organizers, was arrested, tortured, and indicted for causing a riot. In 2012 he was tortured, killed, and left by the side of the road, near a police station. No arrest has been made.

The Bangladesh disasters parallel those that occurred in the U.S. garment industry over a hundred years ago. On March 25, 1911 a fire broke out at the viciously anti-union Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, located on the 7th, 8th, and 9th floors of the Asche Building, near New York City's Washington Square. The company had beaten a strike in 1910-1 so that the strikers' demands were never implemented: unlocked doors on the factory floors, working fire escapes, and a 54-hour work week.

The fire spread quickly and 146 women, children and men died. Some attempted to jump into blan-

kets or fire nets below, but the force of their fall left them smashed on the street or cellar below. Five days following the fire, two of the Triangle owners had set up shop, and inspectors found machines blocking worker access to fire escapes.

Protest meetings, memorial meetings, and a massive funeral parade of at least 120,000 marched in tribute to the dead, led by the garment workers' banner: "We demand fire protection." Factory safety laws, union organizing in the garment sector and support from the Women's Trade Union League were spurred on by the horror of those deaths.

Currently organizations, from United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) to the European-based Clean Clothes Campaign, expose the conditions of

the global supply chain, ferret out the brands that are made under these horrendous conditions and demand their accountability. In Bangladesh women workers are fearful that the Western-based companies will cut and run but it is clear that the campaigns are designed to improve working conditions and raise wages, not allow companies to find other suppliers in other countries. From the rubble and ashes of these disasters must come demands that allow workers, particularly women workers, the capacity to fight for a better life.

March 8, 2014

*This appears in the March/April 2014 issue of **Against the Current**.*

We Say No to Religious Fundamentalism, Privatization and Feudalism: They Collude Together to Kill, Exploit and Oppress Women

First of all, we condemn the co-option of the womanemancipation question by neo-liberal economic and politicalforces through the ahistorical and de-contextualized 'celebration' of Women's Day as another opportunity to further the neo-liberal development agenda. We want to remind the masses and women in Pakistan that the UN and the NGOs have got nothing to do with the ideological origin of international women's day. The 8 March International Women's Day came from Clara Zetkin, a socialist, at the Socialist Second International (and not from the 'advocates of human rights') in order to celebrate the movements of women garment workers in the US in 1857 and then in 1908 for their rights as workers. The Second International (1889–1916), was an organization of socialist and labour parties formed in Paris on July 14, 1889. Among the Second International's famous actions were its (1889) declaration of May 1 as International Workers' Day and its (1910) declaration of March 8 as International Women's Day. It also initiated the international campaign for the 8-hour working day.

While many of our demands relate to the state and its economic policies, we also see a need to combat the deep-rooted patriarchy that is embedded in our (and many other) societies. We understand that the patriarchal elite, along with the capitalist/economic elite, both of which happen to be predominantly male; both these forms of privilege are unaccept-

able, oppressive, and create a system in which a life of dignity is a 'luxury', available only to those who agree to trample upon the lives and opportunities of their working brothers and sisters.

The Awami Workers Party celebrated the 104th International Woman's Day by holding its Women Convention on 2 March 2014 to prepare the Party's position and statement of intent on the woman question, which has already been announced on 2 March 2014. We remain committed to mobilize the entire Party to struggle for equality, development and emancipation of women. The AWP believes that the oppression of women is a political, social, legal and economic question of the first priority.

We celebrate the struggles of and by women, and salute the women from working classes who are constantly at war with the exploitative system and struggling for social justice, gender equality, development and emancipation.

We are deeply concerned about the rise of religious fundamentalism in Pakistan which is affecting the basic right of women such as: right to life, education, health care, and employment. It has also reinforced the pre-existing patriarchal violence against women.

The religious fundamentalist-friendly government of PMLN is endangering the lives and rights of women, reinforcing patriarchal institutions and cultural values, by negotiating with the terrorists and accepting their demand to further define the state ideology as a theocratic state. This engagement with fanatics will certainly obliterate whatever little rights are guaranteed to women by the law and the constitution.

We cannot allow fundamentalist political parties and military establishment, their subsidiary terrorist organizations to define and drive the country on the pretext of security and stability in Pakistan, as it is detrimental to women emancipation in Pakistan. We reaffirm our commitment to the struggle for separating religion from the state and politics

The new liberal agenda of Muslim League (PMLN) government has resulted into policies of privatization and withdrawal of subsidies, which have hit women the most as women are the last ones to receive benefits and the first one to lose rights and resources. We reject the sale of public properties, public services, essential infrastructure such as energy, health, education, and transport such as railway and Pakistan International Airlines (PIA). We also reject the PMLN government's recent no-extension policy for federal government employees, which will certainly hit white-collar workers, mainly women in PIA, schools, hospitals and other offices. We demand for re-nationalization of electricity distribution system and reinstatement of subsidy for power sector to improve daily lives of millions of women and working conditions of home-based workers.

We have seen the worst forms of labour exploitation and oppression of women in areas, which are under direct feudalistic control. In addition to worst forms of labour exploitation, we have witnessed feudal/tribal jirga/pachayat endorsing sexual violence against women, forced marriages, child-marriage, gifting women for dispute settlement. To abolish feudalism, the AWP has moved the Supreme Court to implement the land reforms introduced by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto through Martial Law Regulation 115 of 1972 and the Land Reforms Act, 1977. The plea also urges the court to nullify the 1990 judgment of the appellate bench of the Federal Shariat Court declaring land reforms un-

Islamic. We condemn the feudal of Punjab who have colluded across political party and become a legal party against this constitutional petition, mainly PMLN and PTI. We call upon provincial governments, mainly Sindh and Baluchistan governments to express legal solidarity with AWP and support the constitutional petition for land reforms, as this is detrimental for social and gender justice in Pakistan.

With respect to women's basic needs, we demand for drastic reduction in military budget and considerable increase in the budget to ensure free public education and health services. We further demand removal of all anti-women systems and policy perspectives from health and education services through modernizing and secularizing health and education services in Pakistan.

Finally, we understand that it is the system of elite rule, which is the root cause of the multiple burdens that oppresses and exploits women, as workers, as unemployed housewives, as the urban and rural poor, as students, as professionals, as poor farmers and fisherfolk. This system uses patriarchal and conservative ideologies and violence to maintain the status quo. We reject this system because it defends an economic system based on the supremacy of "private profits" over "people's needs".

To significantly reduce and ultimately eradicate the multiple-burdens of exploitation and oppression faced by women, we reaffirm our struggle for socialism. We believe that this can be achieved.

We call upon all the progressive organizations and movements in Pakistan to form solidarity with AWP in supporting the struggle for women emancipation and oppressed.

Farooq Tariq

General Secretary

Awami Workers Party

Syrian Women and the Uprising: Fighting on Multiple Fronts

Regarding women's emancipation and liberation, we believe that there is an intersection between gender, class, and race (understood not as a scientific concept because it is not, but as a social construct) oppression. This intersection must nevertheless not be understood as a simple addition or summing up of oppressions.

As a result of this very intersection, women cannot be considered as homogenous subjects. Their diversity in racial, class, ethnic and status terms and how this diversification and interaction of elements play a part in forming their subjectivity.

This is why we should not underevaluate the interconnections between gender discrimination, economic conditions and cultural and ideological oppressions, otherwise we have the risk of losing sight of the complexity of the task of building a worker's movement of men and women.

Disregarding these interconnections not only disservice women's liberation and emancipation, but is also a disservice to Marxism and to a political project that has the objective of a radical transformation of society.

The question of the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy must be studied altogether. Capitalism has maintained and instrumentalized patriarchal power relations and ideology in many ways.

The bourgeois Assad regime in its rule in the past 40 years is no different to these dynamics in maintaining patriarchy and enforcing neo liberal policies, while it has not in any way implemented policies to emancipate and liberate women from capitalist and patriarchal oppressions.

To recognize that in this context men, including working class men, have and continue to enjoy a relative benefit from gender oppression does not entail to considering men as an exploiter class, but aiming at understanding the complexity with which capitalism incorporate and employs pre capitalist power relations to establish hierarchies of exploited and oppressed, digging trenches and raising barriers.

Indeed, to build a worker's movement, we need to understand how gender, race and sectarian influence both the composition of the labour force and the processes of developing subjectivity. Moreover, it also means an end to the contest over primary oppression. The point is not whether classes comes before gender or the opposite, the point is rather how gender and class interline in capitalist production and power relations, which result in a complex reality.

We believe that no socialism is possible without feminism, and no feminism is possible without socialism.

The issue of women liberation and emancipation is completely part of the process and project of building a third force, which is based on the objective of the revolution democracy, social justice and refusal of sectarianism, that is independent from the Assad regime and the forces linked to it on one side and on the other side the islamist and reactionary groups. Both are sections of the counter revolutions.

Around the issue of the veil, our position is clear: Women only should decide by themselves and independently of its wearing or not. The veil imposed or withdrawn by force is a reactionary act which

goes against any support for self-determination of women.

This is why we oppose similarly 1) the islamophobic policies implemented in Europe targeting Muslims but more especially Muslim women who are the target of racist policies from States, notably the law of 2004 in France forbidding the headscarves in schools and increasing violence from fascist and right wings political parties and groups, 2) the mandatory imposition of the headscarves in Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran, in addition to other reactionary laws targeting women.

This is the original article:

In Syria, women were at the core of the peaceful protests from the beginning of the uprising, in March 2011. From renowned opposition figures like Suheir Atassi and activists Marwa al-Ghamian and Razan Zaitouneh, to artists such as Fadwa Suleiman, May Scaf, Kefah Deeb, and Rima Fleihan, women have been instrumental to the civil disobedience movement since its earlier stages. The message was clear: men and women, hand in hand against tyranny.

In addition to the general struggle for human rights and social justice, the Syrian uprising was the framework for the questioning of a patriarchal society in which religion has been used to keep women under control.

Despite the shared goals of protesters, conflicting views between the secular and religious approaches emerged very early into the uprising. While some opposition activists wanted to break all taboos and question the patriarchal system as a whole, others focused on the regime while remaining committed to more traditional and conservative values.

Syrian activist Noura shows her support to the Uprising of Women in the Arab World. Source: the Uprising's facebook page

Syrian activist Noura shows her support to the Uprising of Women in the Arab World. Source: the Uprising's facebook page

As part of the struggle for equality, many Syrian women joined the Uprising of Women in the Arab World, a free secular space for dialogue about women's rights in the Arab world that welcomes women from all religions and backgrounds: Arabs, Berbers, Nubians, Kurds, Assyrians, Arameans, Syriacs, Armenians, Turks, Turkmen, Circassian... Syrian women joined the initiative under a powerful motto: "To overthrow the repressive regime on the one hand, the oppressive religious and social power structures on the other".

Among the many comments on the Uprising's site, we found Batoul's wish: "To become the President of Syria, this is why I support the Uprising of Arab Women," and Lamar's powerful insight: "I do not make a distinction between the Syrian revolution and women's revolution, to me they are the same." Syrian activist Dana Bakdounis exercises her right not to wear a hijab. Source: The Uprising of Women in the Arab World's facebook page.

Syrian activist Dana Bakdounis exercises her right not to wear a hijab. Source: The Uprising of Women in the Arab World's facebook page.

Some of the comments point at the issue of traditional clothing and the Islamic veil / headscarf. "I support the uprising of women and do not want intellectuals to look at my hijab as a symbol of backwardness," an activist wrote. "I stand with women's rights and everyone's right to choose. My personal choice is to wear the Islamic veil, and I do not want to be judged for it."

Other activists made an association between clothing and restrictions on women's freedom. "For 20 years, I was deprived of feeling the air touch my body and my hair," a young woman wrote, next to a photo of herself without a headscarf, holding her passport, in which she was wearing the hijab.

According to some, the time for this kind of discussions has yet to come, a recurrent argument in the history of revolutions against oppression in the region (From Algeria to Iran, women actively participated in the struggles against oppressive rulers,

only to find themselves pushed into the background as soon as those were overthrown).

"Now is the time to talk about women's rights," an activist assured. The Syrian regime is the product of a society that nurtured it. We do not only want to get rid of the regime, but also of its nurturer."

With the evolution of the popular uprising into a militarized conflict in which several external forces have intervened, women's rights, and human rights as a whole, have clashed with newly found enemies. Extremist groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) pose increasing threats to the diversity and co-existence characteristic of the Syrian context, including restrictions on women's movements and self-expression. From Raqqa teacher Souad Nofal to renowned activist Razan Zaitouneh, of Syria's Violations Documentation Center, many have stood against these groups which are trying to impose their own extremist agendas on Syrians, paying a heavy price for it.

Raqqa activist Suad Nofal with her one-woman demonstration's banners. Used with permission.

Raqqa activist Suad Nofal with her one-woman demonstration's banners. Used with permission.

"We did not take to the streets against Assad to be scared of these ones now!" was the motto repeated by many during popular demonstrations against the impositions of Al-Qaeda groups in the country.

In the words of Razan Ghazzaoui, while male activists are able to enter liberated or disputed areas, women face all kind of restrictions. "Opposition checkpoints's main task was to ask unveiled Syrian women what they are doing here, in their own country. 'Are you really a journalist?' they would ask. And the person sitting next to them would have to vouch for them in order to pass the checkpoint."

"All the revolutionary women who are going into Syria to see how they can help are having to take extra precautions and security measures to protect themselves from all kinds of dangers," she denounced. "And this is all because they don't have a penis. That's it. And when it comes to those male, secular or otherwise, activists who enter and leave the country as they will, none of them has raised a finger or condemned these obstacles that are being put in the face of their, supposedly, partners in the revolution."

Representation of women within the political opposition leaves much to be desired as well. With a large majority of men doing the decision-making, the few women involved in the process are but pure decoration within a male-dominated scenario. In the words of Khawla Dunia, "women are like spices for men in the political opposition. They use us to add some flavor, but we do not affect the main ingredients. I refuse to take part in this cooking, as long as I am not considered an active participant."

UKRAINE

Ukraine will be saved from intervention by solidarity

SOCIALIST UNION "LEFT OPPOSITION" ·

1) We are for the self determination of Crimea only after the withdrawal of the Russian armies that are carrying out this flagrant intervention. We are for the self determination of the people, and not of the mercenary elite who "self determine" so as to protect themselves from Crimeans with the muzzles of Russian automatic weapons. The outcome of separatism in Crimea will become the rebirth of the Russian empire, which threatens a world war.

2) The justification of Putin's aggression is the nationalist hysteria that the leaders of the Maidan have ignored. Aggressive xenophobic jokes were treated as normal, and even today on anti-war pickets we are still hearing provocative slogans like "Glory to the nation! Death to its enemies!" The Kremlin's manipulation of these slogans has frightened the people of the East and South. However, the aggression initiated by the Russian Federation is patently imperialistic and aimed against the revolutionary republic (the genuine revolution, unfavourable for the oligarchs, only just began to unfold and it was sure to put the question of social lustration on the order of the day).

A war of liberation if led by the Ukrainian oligarchs would resolve itself in the fascisation of society: we can expect unification around mythical national interests, an unrestrained dictatorship and the conduct of social policies aimed at concentrating wealth in the hands of the elite. Our government can claim popular legitimacy only after a social lustration has been carried out. However, our government has been legitimised by the threat of foreign intervention – we are forced to love a regime, not our country. Government in Ukraine is progressively passing directly into the hands of the oligarchs

(Kolomoisky and Taruta have become governors). The oligarchs plundered our country, and now they are demanding that hungry people stand in defense of their corrupt state!

3) the Maidan was not uniform – radical nationalists really bespoiled the protest with xenophobia, but fortunately they did not determine the Maidan's demands. The population of Eastern and Southern Ukraine, as well as the members of ethnic minorities should know that there stood on the Maidan many representatives of those forces who uphold internationalist, left and democratic positions. To support the myth of a "fascist Maidan" is to legitimise the use of force by neo-Nazis against such citizens as those noted here who disagree with them. We are very saddened to see that antifascist ideas are being exploited to justify war. [Antifascism is solidarity, not intervention!]

4) the citizens of Western and Central Ukraine should press the government not to allow linguistic discrimination, destruction of monuments or the incitement of unnecessary hostility. Ukrainisation led by the oligarchs can be realised only in a chauvinist key. It is necessary to review language policy and to broaden the right to use the native language in those regions where it is needed. The national-cultural renaissance of the Ukrainian and other peoples of our country is inseparable from the resolution of social questions.

5) We are for the preservation of a united Ukraine, as a unique cultural phenomenon. The coexistence of various ethnicities only enriches universal human culture. In the event of the country splitting the rule of chauvinists will be established in both its parts. All conflicts in Ukraine are as a result of the dictatorship of the oligarchs. Ukraine can be consolidated on the basis of defeating the rule of the oligarchs – the workers of the East and South

equally want social change and they should understand that inflaming conflict simply puts off the prospects for improvements to an unforeseeable future.

6) the Russian Federation government is controlled by the most conservative advocates of the interests of capital. And that is why those citizens who support a referendum on "reunification" with Russia had better prepare for a police state and for an anti-social policy. We will not allow for the precedent of a victory for Russian imperialism. Despite the claims of Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists, there are no traces of socialism at all left in Russia. The population of Ukraine will start to hate Russians even more, while among the Russian masses imperialistic and revanchist illusions will grow stronger. Hitler-style promises of a better life will culminate in a catastrophe for the aggressor nation. Let us not forget that this war is also an opportunity for Western capital to bring in its own armies and to seize part of Ukrainian territory.

7) It is necessary to appeal in the first instance to the Russian speaking population of Ukraine and to Russians who do not support war. They must sabotage the mobilisation and movement of occupying armies, while also exerting continuous pressure on the Russian government and Russian capital. Russian imperialism is using them to strengthen its

domination through a referendum. It is necessary to create international brigades to maintain lawful order, to oppose mutual chauvinisms, to defend strategic facilities, to conduct propaganda among troops, as well as to oppose the disarming of Ukrainian armies. Form workers self defence detachments at enterprises for their protection from external intervention and the covetous hands of their unpropitious "owners". Organise detachments with those you trust, or whom you are prepared to elect! The Ukrainian army should act under citizens' control. Why die under the leadership of nationalists like Parubiy and Yarosh? They have on their conscience inept tactical mistakes on the Euromaidan and the stoking of interethnic hostilities. Why die in the interests of the Akhmetov-Kolomoiskys? The workers of all nations should learn solidarity from the Ukrainian oligarchs – they overcame all their differences and united around their common class interests.

Down with the bandit office holders who have become separatists!

Down with Russian imperialism!

Down with the Ukrainian chauvinists!

Long live the workers' independent Ukraine!

3 March 2014

Translation from the original by LeftEast.

BOSNIA

Tuzla: building solidarities

Interview with Miroљub Radomirović, jurist, and founding member of the Bosnian political party "Lijevi", "Left".

After a first week of "plenums", Tuzlan citizens set up working groups, divided according to the various ministerial departments: Finances; Industry, Energy and Mining; Work and Social Policy; Health; Education, Sports and Culture, etc. You are part of the legal group. Can you tell me more about it? What are your objectives, and priorities for the coming months?

To start with, it's important to distinguish the working group for Justice and Administration – whose aim is to point out the problems in these areas—from the legal team of the Tuzla Plenum. This legal team is very important for the Plenum. It revises the requirements of each working group, in order to formulate them in the right way. We check the laws that regulate each sector, and we ensure that these requirements meet the legal standards of each department, responsible for a particular problem. So the working groups' requirements need to be concrete! We have put pressure on the government to check all the privatization contracts of our canton. If it turns out that these contracts were not respected, they'll have to be cancelled. Possibilities also exist to prosecute clients who have destroyed companies, even if they respected the contracts. We must make sure that these measures start immediately.

You've already won a victory...

Yes, we got back 1 million BAM (convertible marks, thus 500 000 Euros) due to the cancellation of "white bread", meaning the wages ministers kept earning one year after the end of their mandate. We have other measure to eliminate the different "bonuses" that have been voted over the years by a

corrupted and ruthless elite. I'm talking about ministers, but also parliamentarians. Our working group will try to propose a series of amendments... so that we're the ones making the amendments, not them. Every day, we come up with new ideas to implement, so we're not lacking initiatives for the coming weeks.

You're involved in the Plenum's legal team, and you're also a founding member of the political party "Lijevi" (the Left). Can you tell us how your party was born?

We were all members of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), during the opposition. We had the same goal and the same enemy. But when the SPD was elected in 2010, it formed a coalition with the SDA (Party of Democratic Action). The Social Democrats had put a lot of hopes in us, but we were too critical, and we left. We first founded the NGO "REVOLT", to criticize their broken promises. But gradually the NGO lost its sharpness and political aggression. So we decided to establish a true left party. Our struggle is against privatizations and the destruction of factories. Privatization contracts have to be cancelled and the stolen money needs to go back to the state. We advocate for an economy where sectors of public interests will be state properties under social control. Our first actions were in solidarity with the workers struggles from DITA factory. We helped them with media visibility, legal assistance, and food when they were blocking the factory.

At this time, had workers already united in solidarity? What about the unions?

Until now, there were no real solidarities between workers facing the same problems. It was every one for themselves. We've had a problem with unions, 90 per cent of which are corrupt. Today, the situation is getting more relaxed, as the workers can express

themselves directly in the Plenums. They don't blindly support the unions, which are now being challenged. Some of these unions wanted to create some collaboration with the organizers of the plenum. But the plenum doesn't work this way. There are no assigned functions, nor representatives. Relations need to change.

Is the Plenum opening the space for a left in Tuzla? Does it enable to consolidate "Ljevi"?

I'm becoming more and more optimistic. Citizens' forums have been forming across the country, despite all the authorities' and media's efforts to discredit them. I'm particularly pleased that my party comrades have begun enjoying a growing reputation and the trust of the citizens, through their ideas and their commitment. You should know that here, in former Yugoslavia, there is such a stigma

against communist ideology, that if you share these values, you start with a big disadvantage. And yet, people are coming to us, they're interested in our party. At the same time, the situation was so bad that every hope is on the left.

What are the main challenges to pursuing the revolt today?

We must keep up the pressure on the streets, in parallel with the working groups. What is happening today is the result of years of struggle. The government can no longer act in such an arrogant way, ignoring the workers' demands, as it has during the last twenty years. Our Plenum will continue after the elections, as a force for contestation, but also of real alternatives. The power is ours. The challenge is that people become more aware of their common strength, to build a cohesive society.

Interview by Kassia Aleksic and Ivica Mladenovic

RUSSIA/UKRAINE

Crimea—Not "Ours" or "Yours"

OPENLEFT ·

The Ukrainian peninsula has had the misfortune of finding itself on the intersection of Russia's imperialist ambitions and the brute nationalist politics of the "new" Ukraine. Open Left declares – the Crimean self-determination movement precedes both the imperialist games and the nationalist frenzy.

Today more than ever before it is necessary to call a spade a spade: what's happening in Crimea these days is a classic act of imperialist intervention on the part of the Russian state. It is a stupid, cowardly, and inconsequential intervention – which is also how Vladimir Putin's regime itself can be described. We can see that the plan to pressure Ukraine is being written on the go: two weeks ago, the Kremlin, without thinking about the consequences, was pushing Yanukovich toward the most brutal forcible dispersal of the Maidan; a week ago it was supporting the failed "separatist" congress of the disoriented state officials in Kharkiv, and right now they are playing the "Crimean card", seemingly long forgotten over the past decade.

The first two plans failed: the first quickly and bloodily, the second one almost immediately and shamefully. It's difficult to say how exactly the Crimean one is going to fail, but it is doubtless that it will. The Russian State has demonstrated repeatedly how quickly it can give in its allies. And from the very beginning of the dramatic development of the Crimean situation the Kremlin has also been leaving distinctive markings of potential retrieval. Despite the fact that the Russian troops have taken over a number of strategic facilities and are virtually controlling the airspace above the peninsula, the official position remains that what is happening is merely an "internal conflict" and planned military training. Viktor Yanukovich cannot be relying on

Russia's solid support. With his dual status of, at the same time, a legitimate president and an international criminal, Yanukovich was apparently giving a press conference in Rostov in some third, middle role. The new Crimean leadership, elected with Moscow's direct involvement, also remains a hostage of the situation.

The question put to referendum on May 25th is leaving a large array of possibilities for further shadow trade – both with the main imperialist players, the US and the EU, and with the new Ukrainian government controlled by the old oligarchic partners of Kremlin from Yulia Tymoshenko's circle. Responding "yes" to that question (which the overwhelming majority of the Russian-speaking Crimean population are obviously ready to do) can, in its most radical version, lead to the re-installment of the autonomous status of Crimea that existed in 1992, which in the contemporary circumstances will turn the region into a permanent source of internal tension in Ukraine and will guarantee the impossibility of it joining NATO in the foreseeable future. This autonomous Crimea will find itself in a constant economic and political dependency on Russia, while its inhabitants will be deprived even of those formal rights that Russian citizens possess. In the case where, by using the "Crimean card" for the effective blackmail of the senior Western partners, Moscow will be successful in redistribution of power within the new political order in Ukraine in general, nothing will change in Crimea whatsoever (with the exception, maybe, of Serguei Aksyonov and his colleagues from "Russian Unity", who will possibly also have to move to Rostov or Barviha).

In any case, the outcome of the referendum, as in general with the fate of the populace of the Crimea (not only Russian but also Tatar and Ukrainian),

will be decided behind closed doors. The population's right to self-determination will remain trampled for as long as the Crimea, and Ukraine as a whole, remains a zone of conflict among external forces – both from the West and from the East. The slogan of "federalizing" the country, with which the politicians from the Party of the Regions are accustomed to speculating irresponsibly, would in normal circumstances be the most just solution for Ukraine, with a population that is heterogeneous in cultural, national, and linguistic respects. The principle of federation in a multi-national state has been a democratic means of reducing conflict at such times when each of its constituents is guaranteed equal rights and the freedom to adopt measures at the local level. However, the modern history of Ukraine testifies to the fact that in a weak state this slogan signifies nothing more than the delineation of spheres of influence among its more powerful neighbors, each of which is interested in the continued escalation of conflicts and differentiation, and not in neutralizing them. For actual democratic federalism the development of the Ukrainian revolution towards genuine popular power is required, and not the ongoing usurpation of power by somewhat renovated elites or nationalists.

The problem of the Crimea was not dreamt up by the Russian authorities a week ago. The tens of thousands of people who came out onto the streets of Sevastopol clearly perceived a hostile signal from Kiev, where the majority of the victors in the Verkhovna Rada voted to change the law on regional languages. Notwithstanding the unconvincing arguments regarding its legal imperfections, this resolution had only symbolic significance. In a country standing on the brink of economic collapse, the new authorities decided to cloak the coming wave of "unpopular reforms" with a full portion of nationalist speculation. For the ultra-rightists from Freedom (Svoboda) Party who initiated this resolution, the question of language is a part of a large-scale reactionary program for an ethnic state, which has the potential to bury Ukraine in its cur-

rent form. This resolution, set against the backdrop of the rampage of the "Right Sector" (whose main media partner continues to be Russian television), has become an important factor in the worsening of the situation.

This "Crimean scenario" will not last long. The Kremlin elites will quickly play it out in their own interests. The patriotic vuvuzelas, in which teams of propagandists blew at the command, will die down. The passive "office hawks" who called frenetically on their social media pages for the return of "our Crimea", will fall silent and turn to other, fresher and more interesting topics (as during the Georgian war in 2008). Only the residents of the Crimea – the Russians, Tatars, and Ukrainians – will be left alone with their problems. The inhabitants of this depressed region, regardless of the flows of tourists and the presence of military bases, will remain squeezed between the right-wing politicians from Kiev, the "defenders of the Russians" fed by local oligarchs, and the cynical maneuvers of the Russian state, which spits on the rights and freedoms of its own 143 million citizens.

Today it is very difficult to evaluate and predict the actual consequences of the Kiev Maidan. It has led both to the resurgence of the oligarch clans suppressed by Yanukovich, and brought about victories for the popular grass-roots movement that were unthinkable for the post-Soviet space. Maidan has opened the sluices of activity of the far-right thugs – and at the same time has spurred to political life great masses of people, who perhaps for the first time perceive that they themselves are capable of determining their fate. This range of possibilities has the potential to resolve itself both into progressive social changes, and into the victory of extreme reaction. But the final decision must, without doubt, be left to the people of Ukraine themselves – whether in Kiev or Lvov, or in the Crimea or Donetsk.

2 March 2014

Translated from the Russian original by Kristina Mayman and David Brophy. First published on

LeftEast.

RUSSIA/UKRAINE

No war with Ukraine!

RUSSIAN SOCIALIST MOVEMENT (RSD) ·

War has begun. With the aim of protecting and increasing the assets of the oligarchs in Russia and in Yanukovich's coterie, Russia's leadership has undertaken an invasion of Ukraine. This aggression threatens catastrophic consequences for the Ukrainian and Russian peoples — most especially for the population of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Ukraine's southeastern industrial regions.

For Ukraine, this will also mean an escalation of ethnic conflicts; for Russia, a consolidation of dictatorial power, repression, and chauvinist hysteria, with which the ruling elite will be able to neutralize mass anger against a backdrop of deepening economic crisis. We share the concern of residents of the southeast over the nationalistic tendencies of the new authorities in Kyiv.

It is, however, our firm conviction that freedom will be won not by Putin's tanks, but by self-organization and the people's own struggle for their civil, political, and socio-economic rights.

It goes without saying that the peoples of Ukraine have a right of self-determination, of full autonomy and independence. But what we are seeing today has nothing to do with the democratic will of the

masses. It is a brazen and cynical act of Russian imperialism, aimed at annexing foreign territory and converting Ukraine into part of Russia's protectorate.

Today, the struggle for freedom in Russia is a struggle against the foreign policy adventurism of the current regime, which seeks collusion in forestalling its own end. The RSD calls on all sincere left and democratic forces to organize anti-war protests. Our demands:

NO RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR! NO PROVOCATIONS TO BLOODSHED IN UKRAINE!

NO PITTING AGAINST ONE ANOTHER OF THE PEOPLES OF UKRAINE AND RUSSIA!

NO INTERVENTION BY THE ARMIES OF RUSSIA OR ANY OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE AFFAIRS OF CRIMEA!

FREEDOM FROM DICTATORIAL ACTS AND PEACEABLE SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE PENINSULA'S RESIDENTS!

YES TO THE UKRAINIAN WORKERS' STRUGGLE AGAINST OLIGARCHS AND CORRUPT OFFICIALS! NO TO ETHNIC CONFLICTS!

Russian original here.

UKRAINE

Statement on Ukraine

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

1. The political crisis in Ukraine began in November 2013 when the President Yanukovich decided, under strong Russian pressure, not to sign the free trade association with the EU. The Party of Regions had been running an official campaign in favour of such an agreement for some months. It occurred in the context of a deep social and debt crisis that put the country under pressure from the IMF. The way the decision was taken, by the personal power of the president, increased popular fear that a new integration of Ukraine within a great Russian regional project was being decided and could increase the repressive oligarchic and presidential trend of the regime evident since 2010.

Therefore, within the crisis there were not two clear-cut camps or programmes opposing each other but rather splits and hesitations within the oligarchs and elites, even within the Party of Regions itself. And – despite cultural, social and political differences between historical regions of the country – the emergence of the masses as an independent factor expressing "indignation" and distrust in political parties – whether expressed through direct involvement in the Maidan movement (more in the West and centre) or through passivity (dominating in the Eastern Russian-speaking part of the country).

A week of bloody violence imposed the protesters' view for the immediate departure of the president Yanukovich. He has not been overthrown by a "coup d'Etat": his growing unpopularity became absolute rejection after the horror of some 80 deaths, victims of his snipers shooting demonstrators with

real bullets. After months of hesitation of the president between repression and dialogue, this led to his profound isolation within his own camp – the Parliament voted for him to be dismissed while a part of the police and probably the army declared in Kiev, as in other regions, that they were "on the side of the people", and his flight to Russia was stopped in Donetsk, in the very heart of his bastion.

2. This movement from the beginning presented a combination of revolutionary (democratic, anti-elitist, self-organized) and reactionary elements – the overall outcome was and remains a question of political and social struggle. Those features are also deeply rooted in the current character of the present post-soviet Ukrainian society (atomized, without any class identity, with degradation of education and hegemony of reactionary nationalist ideas in society, combined with a legitimate commitment to national independence and the dramatic legacy of Stalinism).

We support the popular discontent and aspiration to live freely and decently, in a democratic state and to get rid of an oligarchic and criminal regime, expressed in the so-called Euro Maidan movement and throughout the country – while we are convinced that the EU is unable to satisfy such aspirations, and we say so.

We support the right of the Ukrainian people as a whole to decide and control international agreements signed – or broken – on its behalf, be it with Russia or with the EU, with full transparency about their political and socio-economic effects.

We denounce all the institutions, international or national political forces, whatever their labels, which limit the full and free determination of these choices by the population, either by economic and financial diktats, by draconian laws and security

forces, or by physical aggression that prevents full and pluralist expression of choices and disagreements. From that point of view we denounce equally the far right currents and the security forces, which often share the same reactionary, anti-semitic and violently exclusive nationalist ideology.

While the main organized political forces are, for now, from the right and the far right, we support the social and political forces which are trying to build a left opposition within that movement. In so doing, they have refused to stay outside the movement and to identify the whole movement with its far-right component. Such an autonomous orientation has meant a difficult confrontation with fascist groups and a focus against 25 years of privatisations suppressing social rights whatever political party was in power since independence.

3. Since the end of the Yanukovich regime, the mass movement itself has no progressive pro-

gramme on democratic, national and social issues and lacks a workers' movement (independent trade union and political force implanted among the workers) - while being full of hopes for real democratic political and social changes. Whatever the result of the next elections, popular disillusionment will follow. And whatever the agreements with the EU, the new ruling parties will continue social attacks with possible internal confrontation leading to the disintegration of the country. The alternative left has to respond to these popular hopes and illusions through its own proposals on social, linguistic, democratic issues against parties of the right of different kinds.

We hope that the Ukrainian population will find its own forms of self-organized expression of its concrete demands and distrust of the dominant parties, in all the regions of the country.