

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV471 April 2014

INDIA

**Resist the Sangh Parivar-BJP and their allies, build
a working class alternative**

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

**Permanent revolutions and counter-revolutions at
the beginning of the 21st century – our tasks**

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SYRIA

Seeing the women in revolutionary Syria

RAZAN GHAZZAWI ·

"They brought us by bus. We were a large group of female and male comrades. I recall that we were shackled, and an increasing sense of fear overwhelmed me about reaching that place, the expected interrogation, from facing Mudar whom I thought was there, and seeing all the comrades. Mixed feelings of fear and anticipation and desire and ... But it all began to disappear en route and as I am approaching the city that I loved and still do, I did not feel the length of the road or the time that had passed by .. Damascus was looming in front of us."

- Amira Huweija, member of the Communist Labour Party, from her time in Douma prison between 1987-1991.

This account will try to give an overview of the role of grassroots women in the Syrian uprising in an attempt to highlight angles not widely covered by the mainstream media, in Arabic or internationally. Nor is this well represented in the narratives of the Syrian political opposition abroad. In fact in all these narratives, women are rather systematically excluded from any account of political decision-making regarding this country in such a historic phase. Women and youth have very little representation in the ranks of either the local councils or the Syrian National Coalition. So how is it that women in Syria have played an essential role throughout the phases of the uprising, a role that has shifted over time in response to the increased violence and rapid developments on the ground?

No political rights, no women's rights

Studying the women's situation in Syria, whether now or before the outbreak of revolution, without

taking into consideration the government's political structure, based on its intelligence personnel and tens of hidden security apparatuses, is a dead end if we wish to understand how women's rights are directly affected by the government's internal policies.

As a woman who lived most of her adult life in Syria, I would not dare to launch a women's magazine, for example, in my university, without it being under the supervision of a government institution. The Baath ruling party had a National Students Union (NSU) set up in each university, which not only hijacked any daring independent initiatives coming from students, but also served as an intelligence body that watched and monitored closely any student who tried to lobby or organize any activity on such causes as the war in Iraq or the conflict over Palestine – even though the government boasted that it was the lone defender of Palestinian rights and was constantly attacking the US invasion of Iraq. Yet the regime understood perfectly well, that any improvised initiative, even in support of Palestine or Iraq, might pave the way for a lobbying closer to home and the organizing of active groups.

I am reminding the reader that we are talking about a government that owned and occupied the public space of a country, and everything that this entailed, for more than forty years. Citizens were cultured into not initiating, not thinking or even daring to dream about challenging a system that was tightly structured on political, social, military and economic levels. Not forgetting too, that the government had widely disseminated a culture of fear among its citizens with massacres like the Hama massacre of 1982 and several arrest campaigns in later years of intellectuals, leftists and Islamists, of Syrians and Palestinians, which resulted in 20 years in jail for a dissident, with no access

to lawyers or visits from family members. So one should be clear, that the major obstacle towards securing and enhancing women's rights in Syria, was simply the absence of democracy. Failing to support the people's attempts at revolution, on the official level or in the decisions of international human rights groups, is in fact a clear statement of support for human rights' abuses as a whole and not just those of women.

The political and the patriarchal

The regime boasts about being the champion of women's rights in Syria whereas several examples rather suggest its hypocrisy. To name a few, Bashar's rule was strengthened through an alliance with the conservative upper-class, Qubaysiyyat women in Damascus, which according to the Al-Hayat newspaper report, resulted in building 80 schools in Damascus alone, hosting more than 75,000 girls. But the regime failed to reform the personal status laws and insisted on appointing female ministers to insignificant positions. A perfect example, one might add, of how intersectionality can be deployed as the path to address a groups' human rights abuses, is afforded by looking at the government institution, the General Women's Union. The government body, for instance, did not raise "honor-killings" as an urgent national scandal to be addressed, instead calling for punishment of the murderer for a minimum of six months, as stated in article 548 of the penal code – terminology adapted from the French code of 1810. Many young girls were killed in the name of "honor" based in this article. Ironically, it was only after the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions broke out in 2011, that Bashar Al-Assad himself issued the first legislative decree of 2011 to replace this with a maximum punishment for the killer of five years in prison.

Such a decree was seen by many Syrians around me at the time as a pathetic attempt to appear as the protector and saviour of 'the women's interest', especially on such a fashionable subject for the west as women.

Because change in Syria could only happen through the ruling government, specifically through the president himself and the close circles around him, there was absolutely no opportunity for the people to practise their right to self-determination.

The revolution and new spaces

It is always important to remind the reader that the first person ever to dare publicly to ask president Bashar Al-Assad to step down was in fact a woman, and from the minority community: the Druze. Muntaha Al-Atrash, daughter of Sultan Atrash, the leader of the so-called "Great Syrian Revolution" of 1925. On April 12, 2011 when out of fear, the protests in Syria were mainly asking for reforms and not for the toppling for the regime, Atrash, in a phone interview with Al-Shark Al-Awsat newspaper, called Assad to step down in response to peaceful protests.

In 2011, Razan Zaitounah was among many others, one of the main sources updating people on the protests in Damascus and its suburbs. Women started to take to the streets along with their male comrades and were detained in the process: Doha Hassan who is a Palestinian, Nura Al-Ghamian, Hanadi Zahlout, Rima Flehan, Mai Skaf, Lina Mohammad and many others in Syria I cannot name for their protection. It is important to stress here, that even though men are more targeted than women by the regime in their mass raids and detention, being in detention and prison for women is often harder than it is for men. Although women mostly avoid as tough a treatment as male comrades in jail, jailing women often imposes a social stigma on them, not to mention the issue of sexual abuse.

Nevertheless in time, women started organizing themselves in women's groups, like the Syrian Women for the Syrian Intifada – SANAD, two members of which I was privileged to meet. The group's main activities are to support the martyrs' families as well as the detainees'. SANAD's activities broadened later on to support grassroots' activists for those who lost their jobs because either

they were fired for their political stances, or forced to go into hiding when they learnt that they were wanted by the regime. The regime often arrests people from their workplaces. The group would raise funds from close circles and support activists to continue their work in aid, media or securing medicine.

Not many groups were as well-formed and structured as the one mentioned above. In fact, SANAD was particularly successful in forming a vision, goals and specific activities, because its members were older and more experienced in organizing. Unlike other groups of enthusiastic younger generation activists, who in time vanished due to their inability to sustain the many activities they tried to maintain under the watchful eye of state intelligence. Nevertheless, the emergence of groups like SANAD would not have been possible without the revolution and the space it provided for citizens who were denied the right to organize – but who did so in secret over the past forty years.

To give another example, most of the neighbourhoods that revolted against the regime were of the rural and working classes. They usually are conservative and women in these areas usually work with strange men only if they are doctors, nurses or old women. Covered and uncovered female activists who come from different conventional communities, also from the upper classes, worked hand in hand with the male leaders of these working class communities: in organizing protests, in securing banners, printing banners and flags (since they were all handmade) and securing medicine and equipment such as smart phones or internet 3G.

Such social interaction, outside the common clerk-client relationships in government institutions, was a real innovation and resulted in undermining and clearing up some stereotypical images in those communities. Similar interaction occurred heavily between Palestinians and Syrians during the uprising. Yarmouk camp in 2012 was the main host for many internally displaced families and was a vital collection point for securing medicine for other neighbouring cities. I remember vividly the

Palestinian mother who was given her early training on first aid in case the camp faced shelling. It was actually the revolution that provided the space for citizens from different nationalities, ethnic, conventional communities, and socioeconomic backgrounds to unite, interact and organize a grassroots movement in the face of one common enemy: the regime.

However, such new spaces that came into existence in the first couple of years in the uprising, gradually started to reduce with the increase of regime brutality on its people which resulted in the increased militarization of the revolution. Women revolutionaries, who basically were working on the peaceful and non-violent front, started to face a new reality, war. They had to come up with new techniques fast in order to react to this and to preserve the freedom of voice that had emerged in and because of the uprising.

The militarized front of the revolution and the women's role

2012 in my view was the peak for women's essential role in the revolution. This was due to the regime's systematic raids and arrests targeting especially male peaceful revolutionaries. As a result, women revolutionaries had to organize themselves in cells to fill in the gap and used to good effect the sexist view of them as a "weaker gender" to pass regime checkpoints in order to smuggle medicine, food, and also first-aid workers into besieged and shelled neighbourhoods. In fact, revolutionary women from minority traditional communities also used the sectarian classification of them by regime checkpoints in order to smuggle in aid into besieged neighborhoods. In time, some regime checkpoints discovered some of these networks and started checking IDs and to this very day, search cars driven by any woman who was not covered and also from a minority community.

This peak of the women's active and essential role in sustaining relief, among other activities, in besieged neighbourhoods in Damascus and its suburbs in 2012, started to minimize in 2013 with the

regime's increased brutality, the sheer amount of massacres and the lack of human capital among the revolutionaries capable of responding to the humanitarian crisis. Accordingly, the belief among young men, even among some peaceful revolutionaries, was that the only way to topple the regime was with an increase in arms. This conclusion played a big role in strengthening the militarized front of the uprising. And this development directly affected the women's role in the uprising.

Revolutionary women who used to visit other cities to train amateur media workers and to cover untold human stories under shelling, are now facing more obstacles apart from the regime's shelling and checkpoints, in areas – mostly shelled and besieged ones – that are rapidly changing into male-hegemonic spaces. Yet, women, both traditional activists and local women residing in "liberated" areas, are undermining such male spaces by their very existence: women like Marcel Shehwaro, a woman blogger in Aleppo, Razan Zeitounah and Samira Khalil in Douma, and other traditional women activists I cannot name here for the sake of their own security. The very existence of these women and the work they are doing in these areas poses a direct challenge to the growing male hegemony that was developed during the war.

Such female interference with war dynamics is equally evident amongst local women in liberated areas, such as Om Khaled in Kafranbel and many of her like in the Eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus. Om Khaled founded the first women's centre not only in Kafranbel, but the first in Idlib. The centre is called Mazaya and was launched due to the urgent need for women in Kafranbel to meet and discuss their situation in war. The centre gives free workshops in first aid, hairdressing, knitting and also free courses in English. The centre also owns a huge library that lends women books. Again, Om Khaled is a shining example of how local women are reclaiming their voices due to the spaces produced by the popular uprising. Despite the growing militarizing front of the uprising and the growing male-hegemony, women are still able to

reclaim their voice and the role that was long-ago stolen by the regime.

Razan Zeitounah: institutionalizing human rights

In the mainstream coverage of Syrian women today, one cannot help but get the impression that women must either have been "raped," "sexually abused," or "displaced." The necessity to document all sort of violations committed against citizens, is unquestionable. The lack of similar effort, however, in portraying women in Syria on the ground as active participants in the revolution as writers, human rights lawyers, doctors, teachers and politicians, when they are heavily engaged in such activities, is indeed perverse, especially when this constructed image of Syrian women hasn't changed one iota over the past three years.

Razan Zaitounah is a name that has become famous in the past three years. Zaitounah is currently still forcefully disappeared and kidnapped by an unknown armed group in Douma suburbs of Damascus along with her husband, Wael Hammada and two of her colleagues at the Violation Documentation Center (VDC), Samira Khalil and Nazem Hammadi. Zaitounah is the co-founder of the Local Coordination Committee (LCC), a revolutionary secular news agency that emerged in 2011 to update the world on mass protests across Syria. The group's importance comes first and foremost from being a network of women, and then for being the first revolutionary semi-organization to launch as a somewhat professional, credible and sustainable news agency regularly quoted and cited by international and regional media outlets. Zaitounah is also the co-founder of VDC which is the only platform inside Syria that documents a list of Syrian martyrs, detainees, kidnapped civilians as well as documenting violations coming from all the armed groups alongside the army of the regime.

As a lawyer, Zaitounah has been defending political prisoners under the Assads, father and son, for more than ten years. I once met her when she was on her way to visit a political prisoner's family in

2010. Not many lawyers dared to follow Zaitounah's path in fear of regime consequences. She used to visit detainees' families, and defend them in court – which many Syrians at the time did not dare to attend. Zeitouna would issue statements to the public informing them about the detainee's situation and the lack of transparency of the Syrian juridical systems. Zaitounah was banned from traveling in 2002 and received several threats by the security apparatus for her work on human rights long before the uprising started. Ever since the revolution in Syria broke out, Razan worked underground for two years in Damascus, changing homes and places, to then settle in a "liberated area" in Douma, only to be kidnapped with her colleagues by an armed group there, due also to her work in human rights.

Despite living under constant shelling, a survivor of chemical attacks and despite these extraordinary circumstances, Zeitounah faced life underground for two whole years. Her efforts in co-founding and developing LCC as a credible news agency, and VDC as a transparent documentation centre of human rights violations as well as other groups inside Douma today to support local women and to secure jobs for citizens there, are determined attempts to institutionalize revolutionary work in Syria, and to secure sustainable and professional results.

Zeitounah, who is an experienced human rights lawyer due to her work prior to the revolution, un-

derstands very well that in order for a country to reach peace-building and transitional justice, human rights advocates should document transparently what is happening. On this basis there is a chance of rebuilding the state in the future. Even though Zeitounah is kidnapped today, the work of both organizations, LCC and VDC, continues still. This is the legacy of her efforts in creating a decentralized institution rather than being centralized under her sole supervision. Such efforts are rare among revolutionary groups today.

Conclusion

This must serve as one overview of the women's role in the revolution that takes into consideration the historical and political obstacles faced by women and their male comrades alike. We cannot possibly hope to cover fairly the amount of work women in Syria have done in the past three years. I am one of many women in Syria who have different point of views and takes on this topic. But I sincerely hope that my fellow women comrades are also given the chance to express and document their views on this too.

8 April 2014

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Permanent revolutions and counter-revolutions at the beginning of the 21st century – our tasks

CHRISTIAN BABEL ·

This introduction to the debate on the world situation at the 2014 International Committee is situated in continuity with that of the three previous years: we remain in the period opened between 2008 and 2011, of open crisis at the financial and economic, ecological and social levels; a period of global instability, profound destabilisation of institutions, impressive mass movements going as far as a revolutionary process in the Arab region... and at the same time, a period where a crystallised progressive political opening is dramatically lacking. Obviously there are developments and questions to consider in more detail with more detachment. These questions are dealt with here in three parts:

1. The dynamics, paradoxes and contradictions of the economic crisis of capitalism;
2. The different aspects of the upheavals underway which are provoked by this crisis;
3. What is at stake for us as a political current: how to intervene in the current transformations of the class struggle, in the processes of mass revolt indeed revolution on the one hand, but also faced with an overall process of weakening of the organised workers' movement, confronted like the exploited masses as a whole with the rise of mechanisms of counter-revolution and the destruction of social and environmental tissues?

1. The world economic crisis – where are we?

1.1 Characteristics of the crisis

In February 2011, François Sabado asked at this same International Committee, on the crisis which broke out in 2007-2008: "Is it a financial episode analogous to all those that capitalism has known in the past, followed by temporary recessions? Or is it a systemic crisis at two levels: because the regime of financial accumulation developed over more than thirty years is exhausted, and because world capitalism has reached a limit linked to the finite nature of the planet and its natural resources." And in the case of the second hypothesis, to deduce from it the urgency of measures attacking the roots of the problems: anti-capitalist measures of overall reorganisation of production and society, to satisfy the basic needs of peoples plunged into this spiral of crises.

Three years later and with a little more hindsight, both our more or less impressionistic vision and the more profound Marxist discussions like those recently at the Economic Seminar of the IIRE, go in the direction of the definition of a systemic crisis of capitalism. And there are few bourgeois economists who advocate the opposite, in a return to optimism!

There are many ways to define the current crisis as systemic in nature. I will rest on those of the economists that we are close to: Michel Husson, basing himself on Mandel to define the limits of the "productive order" [1], or Isaac Joshua who speaks of a "crisis of capitalist overproduction of the third type" [2]. In caricaturing a little the history of crises:

– **The crises of the 19th century**, those of competitive regulation, resolved by the brutal lowering of the cost of raw materials, prices and the purge of debts and above all wages which mis bout à bout, and after significant destruction of capital allowed

the recovery of profits, resting on one, or on several motor sectors of production. These crises were intense but short.

– **The crisis of 1929** was very intense and very long. Capitalism entered into the period of the dominant wage earner. Hence, at the time of overproduction crises there is no longer any dilution of the cumulative collapse of production and consumption in an environment of small production. The initial impact is demultiplied and exit from crisis by competition becomes impossible. The latter is no longer endogenous to economic functioning but essentially due to political factors – concretely, it was the war and its outcome which allowed the overall recommencement of capitalist accumulation.

– **The current crisis** appears comparatively less intense... but its length about it also to convulsions whose end cannot be foreseen!

What are the bases of the current systemic crisis? So as to avoid a new paroxysmal crisis like that of the 1930s and 1940s, the response assumed by capitalism in the second half of the 20th century has been commonly called "Fordism" with a constant and generalised economic intervention of the state in the wage relation, and in the regulation of markets and currencies. And when profits fell in the mid 1960s, crystallising a new form of crisis of capitalism in the 1970s, Fordist regulation effectively protected the system from the violence of previous crises, but at the price of a limit to the lasting restoration of profits.

The phase of "neoliberalism" from 1980 onwards relaunched the capitalist offensive by resting on mass unemployment and the sophistication of financial globalisation. Placed before the need to significantly increase the rate of exploitation of the proletariat, capitalist competition has for more than 30 years, exacerbated by transnationals, globalised financialisation to ensure the reproduction of capital. Financial capital has attained an extraordinary predatory power in relation to human beings and nature. This power accumulates new di-

mensions of wage slavery in the globalised enterprises of industry, agriculture and services, an "accumulation by dispossession" in the dominated economies, and a penetration of the most peripheral societies for the grabbing of land and its monopolisation for export, with a new stage in the destruction of the conditions of survival of entire populations.

The liberalisation of the world economy is much more intense in certain aspects than at the end of the 19th century, when elements of industrial and commercial protectionism were very significant. But the role of states is not comparable (the share of public expenditure in GDP was, in 1913, at less than 9% in the USA and in France, against, respectively, more than 30% and more than 50% today). It remains specific in the current convulsions with in particular the voluntarist action of the central banks, which constitutes an essential difference, it should be stressed above, between the current | "neoliberalism" and the classical period of 19th century liberalism.

This neoliberalism has functioned to restore the rate of exploitation, structurally and geographically extend the space of the commodity, and profits have gone upwards. However the efficacy of the capital invested has not followed, none of the innovations, however rapid and numerous, have taken on the motor significance of railways, electricity or cars. From this viewpoint, let us remember the paradox enunciated by the US economist Solow: "You can see the computer age everywhere but in the productivity statistics". This characteristic lack of efficacy partly explains the difficulty in the increases in profit resulting in an overall investment dynamic, and thus accumulation for a real exit from crisis.

The credit economy allowed for a time a rate of growth sufficient to give the impression that the crisis could be overcome, but the growth differentials between the big economic zones of the world have increased. And finally, globalization has also had the effect of extending more rapidly the dynamics of economic destabilisation! The contradic-

tions are thus sharpened. As Isaac Joshua puts it, "state intervention on the one hand, and weak flexibility of wages and prices on the other, both reduce the breadth of the current crises ... Globalisation of productive capital and financialisation of the real economy, on the contrary, increase instability."

The strong pressure on wages having a negative effect on consumption, the ultra-sophisticated credit economy and the extension of the capitalist area have for while compensated for this effect on production outlets. But we now know that the current crisis was preceded by a turnaround in profit rates. At the end of 2007, the credit economy and generalised speculation had reached their limits, and led to the explosion of the financial bubble starting from the famous "toxic credits". Since then, the transfer of losses from banks to public finances, justified by governments to "save the economy" has allowed the bourgeoisie to retake the initiative by leading the assault against public deficits.

This orientation has led to very tough austerity plans everywhere, but most especially traumatising in Europe. These aspects have already been largely dealt with. We have then concluded that behind the initial big spending, the balance of the dominant bourgeois ideology remains firmly anchored in néolibéralism and is not at all shifting towards Keynesianism. Thus, the reforms of banking regulation against speculation appear very limited, while banking concentration becomes astonishing: the value of assets managed by the biggest US investment group, Black Rock, approaches the GDP of Germany; those (in descending order) of the banks Mitsubishi, Deutsche Bank, Crédit agricole or BNP-Paribas approach the GDP of France.

So what results in 2013, what perspectives in 2014?

The year of 2013 was still one of weak economic growth or more or less deep recession according to the country. Yet the debt crisis seems for now contained, and perspectives of slow resumption of growth are made for this year, but with what solidity? A question is then posed: will the debt crisis

portend a new deep fragilisation of the system, or finally a necessary evil from the viewpoint of capital which will reconsolidated on the basis of this purge? Several elements should be taken into account.

1.2 Very diverse situations according to the role of the dominant central banks

– In the USA, the Federal Reserve has an expansionist role to counter the recession (massive buy-out of financial securities, in addition to very low so called "director" interest rates for loans), which after the crash of 2009 has led to a resumption around 3.5 to 4% in growth this year, but with notable fragilities: new bubbles - property or internet – appear menacing.

In China, the central bank has incessantly used monetary creation to reflate its economy and growth is again high (7-8%). But with new fragilities: banking and property, rampant corruption, loss of competitiveness. Still more than for the USA, there is fear of bank failures with unknown consequences.

– Europe is globally the "sick man" of capitalism: the Euro zone is the most threatened by the fragility of the institutional edifice bringing together heterogeneous capitalisms, and by a monetary and credit policy which has amplified the crisis to an unexpected length. The differences in development of GDP reach a record level (Northern Europe +3% in relation to 2007, against -9% in the South). Even if they have not been reduced since 2007, public and private debt seem however well straitjacketed by the European Central Bank and the new tools of regulation (European Financial Stability Facility, European Stability Mechanism), which reduce tensions on interest rates for borrowing, with a monetary policy which remains restrictive. The countries stigmatised as "PIIGS", Southern Europe and Ireland will be under control in return for drastic "purges". Germany and Northern Europe are doing well enough, but France is experiencing social attacks unprecedented since the mid 20th century and the pressure of fiscal competition is strength-

ened everywhere. After a year of stagnation in 2013, will we see the beginning of a capitalist solution, all profit for the employers? Or at least a shock, the precipitation of a real deflation (a fall in prices and wages with compression of the economy) for a new phase of the crisis?

– The policies of the big central banks have effects on the other economic blocs, old (Japan) or "emerging" (East Asia, India, Brazil and Latin America, Russia, Turkey): rather than winners, will they not be victims of the beginning of US and Chinese recovery and big monetary discrepancies? The money markets indeed show a great feverishness, and some of these economies like Argentina, India or Russia were locked in a vice in early 2014 by the dynamics of the USA or Europe, with monetary and financial flights which destabilize them.

1.3 Jobs, unemployment and profits

The elements of the economic crisis in each country are used to justify the offensive of the dominant classes. The battles for competitiveness, against rights and social gains, for the commodification of the environment reform the state rules which still serve neoliberal deregulation.

– This offensive rests on **mass unemployment**, which continues to increase (more than 200 million worldwide), and is at the maximum in Europe: 26 million in the EU or 11% of the active population (6% in Germany as against 20% in the countries of the south of the continent). And there is a general rise of **precariousness in employment**. In these areas, women are the most affected, as well as youth, because these are the two categories first experimented with for all the techniques of precarity.

– **Competition** for international investment and **relocations** between continents, countries and even inside each country are used increasingly visibly to strengthen wage slavery...but also end up in a numerical growth of wage earners. These wage earners are increasingly subject to precarity, with the articulation inside them of global segments of production and also inside each enterprise of secure workers and poorer more precarious workers

who are frozen in this situation. We note that it is first this "halo of employment" which reacts when the economy revives.

– **Profits:** the transnationals continue their movement of concentration and strengthen their power in relation to the states. But if the stock exchange indices return to their levels of before 2008, profits, complex to analyse for Marxist economists, do not seem overall to have recovered until now, because of an still weak efficacy of capital invested (or productivity of capital) despite the increased rate of exploitation. Hence profits continue to orient towards a rentier distribution to shareholders rather than productive investment. We should specify our analysis per sector, and for example study more precisely the cars sector, which has returned to its pre-crisis level of production, for its pivotal place in capitalist production.

Conclusion: the deployment of the current economic crisis has been global, but unequal according to the part of the world. For now, we cannot speak globally of an exit from the crisis, more than 6 years after its explosion: profits are not consolidated, the economic "recovery" is fragile and the elements of destabilisation are very significant.

Capitalism continues to function, protected by its sophisticated organisation and its great flexibility. But the economic convulsions and dizzying growth of inequalities prevent a solid restoration of its legitimacy, in a world where access to information is without precedent, allowing for example the demonstrative fact that: "the 85 richest people possess as much as half of the world population" (Oxfam report 2014), to be broadcast everywhere.

2. Destabilisation and growing socio-political crises

2.1 The dynamics of inter-imperialist competition

Even if they remain the two biggest capitalist and imperialist blocs, the positions of the USA and still more Europe are weakened, to the benefit, first, but not only, of a shift of power towards Asia, primarily China. Hence the inter-imperialist struggle to re-

cover or acquire positions of geopolitical domination is exacerbated.

– The neoconservative counter-offensive of the Bush era USA has been a clear failure. The Iraq and Afghanistan wars have proved disastrous, and Obama's attempt to adopt a less aggressive basis in the context of the Arab revolutions is no longer convincing. The desire of the USA to concern itself first with the Far East, with the EU taking the initiative elsewhere is not really working. Thus we see attempts to develop a "pax Americana" with Iran on the one hand, and Israel on the other... with little success! And the credibility of the US government in the world suffers from the Wikileaks or Snowden/NSA affairs. At the same time, the governance of Obama is weakened by his difficulties in imposing his domestic policy: budget "shutdown", limits of Obamacare. At the same time, the USA remains the biggest capitalist power, which tries constantly to push its advantages. Thus it convinced the EU governments in 2013 to enter final – and secret – negotiations for a new free trade treaty for a big transatlantic market (TAFTA), which will open to unrestrained competition entire layers of European economies (public services and contracts, social, cultural and environmental protection and so on) and would thus give big private groups extravagant rights to exploit peoples and nature.

– The European Union, which structures the convergence of neoliberal capitalist interests, manifests at the same time very little political unity. Whereas the foreign policy of the EU is inconsistent, British and above all French imperialism try to play their own hand with few consolidated results: no grip on Libya after Western interventionism; growing destabilisation of the Sahelian area in Africa; return to the saddle of Russia in the Middle East starting from the Syrian conflict. Hollande and Cameron attempts to resume the traditional policies of their imperialisms in "projecting" themselves outside Europe have weakened their governments, while that of the union around Merkel benefits from "centre-periphery" relations inside Europe. Finally,

the rise of centrifugal forces inside certain states is confirmed: in the Spanish state, Britain, Belgium and so on.

– Structural adjustment policies and the modes of imperialist intervention in Africa dislocate numerous state structures. The economic growth which can be noted in some countries for the moment leads only to increased inequality, the destruction of food crop economies and despair. The installation of China as a new imperialist actor, the France-USA rivalries; the eruption of opportunist religious fundamentalisms as new ideological actors, as well as the reactions of the Western imperialisms (interventions in Mali and in the Central African Republic) continue to push this continent into war, chaos and humanitarian disaster. After South Sudan, is it Cameroon's turn, or somebody else's?

– In the Far East, we have for several years witnessed a rise of inter-imperialist tensions between Japan, China, the USA as protector of ASEAN, in particular for the control of the China sea, but also with North Korea. In early 2014, other tensions sharpened in eastern Europe as Putin rejected any new weakening of the Russian grip on its neighbours, like Ukraine. With the exacerbation of economic competition and the renewal of the use of chauvinism as derivative of the social and political problems internal to each country, the risks of an increased degree of confrontation between states are real and growing.

2.2. Ecological disasters, commodification of the environment and displacements of populations

The consequences of climate change only begin to manifest themselves in the entire world- but are felt first in the tropical zones. We see already the current damage (droughts and floods), but also the disasters that can be attributed to this change, like the exceptional storms which pose the question of raising the level of humanitarian solidarity and reconstruction, in a period where states and international institutions are increasingly ineffective at this level (see the balance sheet of Haiti). The de-

velopment of our specific response to disasters is the subject of a specific contribution in this session, starting from the typhoons in the Philippines and the experiences of solidarity that the Fourth International has been involved in there.

Faced with these perils for humanity, the capitalists assume the role of vultures in relation to the environmental crises, and in particular the climate and energy crises, to create new sources of profits ("green capitalism", carbon stock markets, and so on). Whatever the ecological awareness of the populations, the threats to the environments are still massive and degrade the living conditions in numerous areas and places: accelerated deforestation in particular in the equatorial zones; pollution of maritime and river waters and seizure of fresh water; predatory mining operations, the scandal of shale gas, dangers and price of nuclear power (thus the consequences of the catastrophe at Fukushima are far from being settled) and so on. At the same time the transnationals continue pressure for the appropriation of land, agricultural inputs and the patentability of the living. All these actions are today detonators of essential struggles.

Finally, neoliberal globalisation, the social, environmental and political crises multiply armed conflicts and the forced displacements of population, which together have a terrible human cost. While the countries of the North and in the first place Europe are transformed into inaccessible fortresses which literally push back into the sea migrants and refugees, millions of human beings are left in makeshift camps in the countries of the South. These phenomena have re-emerged in Africa or Asia, and now around the Syrian conflict. The abandonment of the refugees will be an increasing source of scandal and destabilisation of the world situation.

2.3 The explosion of mass movements against different aspects of the crisis

The mass movements which continue to emerge have economic, social, institutional and ecological dimensions. Faced with the degradation of their sit-

uation and the absence of a future for youth, the mass revolts articulate these dimensions in a renewed manner, mostly apart from the old workers' movement which is integrated into the dominant policies, or broadly outmoded.

– There is the **revolutionary process in the Arab region**: after the fall of the dictators in Tunisia and Egypt, we see the continuation of the mass movements up until the fall of the succeeding governments and in particular the Islamist governments, and the crisis of the Muslim Brotherhood has reached Turkey. The mass revolts have subsided in some countries (Morocco, Jordan and so on) but continue or emerge elsewhere (Sudan and even Saudi Arabia, for example). However as the Syrian people experienced in a heroic but terrible fashion, the counter-offensive of the state apparatuses and the fascistic religious currents broadens. And the weakness of socialist perspectives is increasingly problematic. Gilbert Achcar provides us with essential tools for understanding the process in its complexity and its probable continuation over a long period, with advances and partial retreats, and to help it to develop.

– There are socio-political explosions which emerge from **urban crises and the fight against corruption**, which shake some countries which had been believed to be stabilised for the dominant classes: in mid-2013, we have seen at the same time a revolt in Turkey based on the defence of Gezi park and Taksim square, and one in Brazil based on opposition to transport prices and the conditions of the soccer World Cup. Aspirations to democracy and social justice constitute ferments of revolt in numerous emergent countries which are only waiting to explode.

– We also see **new specifically proletarian revolts in East Asia**, with political representation sometimes very weak or disjointed: Bangladesh, Cambodia and so on. These are new areas for the search for radical alternatives to capitalist globalisation.

– **In southern Europe and the Balkans**, faced with an unprecedented degradation of living conditions, social setbacks, the revolts and mass mobilisations are structural, renewing or spreading, even if the victories are rare, even without defeating austerity, even without political outlet: Greece, Portugal, Spain, Bulgaria, and now Bosnia – while the old worker's movement is dying, what potential do the new social movements have? The fate of the situation in Greece thus takes on an especial importance.

– **In the ex-USSR**, the opposition to the "democratures" as specific regimes of the security services, oligarchs and corruption manifested itself strongly in Russia in 2012-2013. In early 2014 the impressive movement around "Maïdan » in Ukraine overthrew the ruling clan through mass activity. This is the approach that is needed: despite a very high level of repression, beyond the manoeuvres of Western imperialism, and with an extreme political confusion, the popular movements seek their path!

– **In Latin America**, the limits of extractivist neo-developmentalism in its diverse varieties have been reached, from its most anti-imperialist (Venezuela), up to the most integrated in neo-liberalism (Brazil), via intermediary forms (Argentina). New mass movements appear, but the reactionary right is also lying in wait.

Despite their frequent confusion but because of their just demands, we support virtually all these extraordinary street revolts. Rare exceptions are Thailand and Venezuela, since from what we know of them they are structured from A to Z by ultra-reactionary sectors. And we see last that without a progressive outlet in the medium term, mass movements can be transformed into destructive communal riots, and be more globally defeated by counter-offensives of the dominant classes mobilising counter-revolutionary instruments.

2.4 The counter-revolutions advance

With the sharpening of the economic crisis, counter revolutionary tendencies crystallise on the basis of the previous offensives of the dominant classes:

with the organisation of social regression intrinsic to neoliberalism, development of the "war on terror" apparatus by governments on the one hand, rise of ultra-reactionary activist currents on the other, which combine.

– The dominant political forces are deeply shaken, reacting by state apparatuses challenging democratic rights in the name of the defence of national interests: generalised electronic surveillance, from the USA to China; new laws threatening the freedoms of association and activists; perfecting and brutality of anti-demonstration devices. Numerous recent affairs have shown that no continent escapes the criminalisation of working class, democratic, cultural activity: in Europe (Spain, France, Russia), Asia (Pakistan, China), Africa (South Africa, Egypt) and Latin America (Argentina).

– Including in Europe, where democratic gains were most stabilised, we see democratic rights reduced at all levels: parliamentary functioning challenged by the "Troika"» (European Commission-ECB-IMF), anti-activist laws and legal decisions, inflated security and police apparatuses and equipment, including private ones;

– Ultra-reactionary and fascistic currents intervene increasingly effectively on the public scene everywhere in the world, under very varied forms and sometimes combined, criminalising the rights of women, lesbians, gays, bi-, inter- and transsexual (LGBTI), challenging social public services:

- the Tea Party in the USA, "Manif pour tous" in France ;
- racist populist movements in Europe, against Arabs and Muslims, black people and in a still more generalised manner against Roma ;
- far right populism in power in Hungary and perhaps soon in India;
- neo-Nazi movements in Greece or in eastern Europe, sometimes very much present inside cross-class movements of democratic opposition;

- fundamentalists of all religions, on the march everywhere, who threaten the right to education, women's or LGBTI rights, the rights to artistic expression, and which increasingly go as far as murder; and religious fundamentalisms which divert and attempt to crush popular liberation movements;
- jihadists who carry out armed operations as far as veritable military conflicts, which worsen in a good part of Africa and Asia.

– In this context, we should stress the violence and reactionary determination with which women's rights are everywhere attacked in all areas, and threatened in a broad manner at the institutional level, as in Spain in relation to abortion rights.

Conclusion:

We are faced with several counter-revolutions, which pose old but renewed tactical problems:

- What level of political alliance is possible against them?
- How to deal with fascistic or fundamentalist currents which infiltrate movements of popular anger?

3. Permanent revolutions and counter-revolutions at the beginning of the 21st century – our tasks

We must act in a very contradictory situation, with many paradoxes (happily we think dialectically!): there is on the one hand a numerical growth of the working class at the world level and of mass struggles; on the other hand there is a crisis of capitalism which is becoming exhausted, and notable counter-revolutionary offensives, in a context of loss of structuring of the workers' movement and of socialist perspective. But an essential thing is that the fear of confrontation with the established powers has decisively decreased in very many situations.

– Revolts and revolutions (in the objectivist sense of Lenin) are very powerful and determined, invent new forms of struggle, but have a limited self-organisation, and formulate little alternative of power

– and they do not succeed in obtaining or consolidating conquests. Hence, they are only partially "examples" and continue in great confusion. How to advance, in particular at the level of consciousness?

– The impossibility of capitalism satisfying the aspirations of the broad masses prevents it from stabilising situations by the methods of bourgeois democracy. That frees spaces for more directly counter-revolutionary instruments. But why so many difficulties for the redeployment of the workers' movement and its revolutionary component?

– The crisis of the old workers' movement continues: ever closer integration of social democracy into the bourgeois apparatuses (grand coalition governments in 16 European countries, the Hollande presidency in France and so on), and integration of the big trade union confederations. Social democracy is no more than a form of bourgeois alternation, with a historic left culture "for the gallery". Neo-reformism, incarnated by the old CPs or the new left coalition parties, has trouble in developing the spaces to the left of social democracy that it has been able to recreate. They come up against the difficulty of developing dynamic perspectives, sometimes advocate new protectionist impasses, and often have a "campist" vision of relations between the big powers which has led them to repudiate mass uprisings for liberty, like those of the Syrian or Ukrainian peoples. It is also necessary to analyse the evolution of nationalist movements of progressive origin, faced with a multiform world capitalist crisis which places them before decisive challenges of orientation.

Finally, what balance sheet can we draw of the wave around the global justice movement, now in reflux as an attempt to overcome these crises?

– The revolutionary and anti-capitalist left seeks to emerge from marginality in the new mass movements. It still intervenes in the social movements, sometimes obtaining significant electoral results, superior to its real influence. But it does not find

sufficient points of support to present a credible progressive political opening, and fragments.

– Our current, the Fourth International has come to position itself in an irreplaceable manner: seeking the self-organisation of the masses, of unity to win essential essential social and democratic demands; fight against imperialism and reject campism, formulation of anticapitalist and ecologist programmes, feminist and internationalist, adapted to the new situation of convulsions and transitional towards socialism, starting with the expropriation of the banks and socialisation of the big groups like those of energy which destroy humanity and the planet. But at this stage of strong rejection of the "political apparatuses" that is not enough to gain significant influence! We need to find bridges between the level of organisation of the masses in struggle and the organisation of political parties for the victory of the proletariat against all exploita-

tion. And we must follow closely the new experiences of regroupment of the radical or revolutionary left, in their specificities: in the Spanish state, in Britain, in Argentina and so on.

– We are more or less present, we intervene to the extent of our forces in many countries, but there are some who are at this time particularly emblematic of the responsibilities of our current, like Greece, Syria, Bosnia, Venezuela, on which we should reflect in our international contribution.

The central issue is for us to found new international articulations between exploited classes, between the various forms of struggle against oppression. How to revive international solidarity and political struggle? Because failing that, the tendencies towards reactionary fragmentation of society could triumph!

February 22, 2014

PORTUGAL

40 years after the Carnation Revolution

JORGE COSTA ·

The hegemony of the New State (*Estado Novo*) , which brought together the different expressions of the Portuguese right, as these developed throughout the century, through the civil war in Spain , the Second World War and the liberation struggles of the colonized peoples, was eroded by the effects of the colonial war and political emergence of a sector of the bourgeoisie whose "developmentalism" was less and less in tune with the regime of corporate representation (integrating both the employers' guilds and the loyal trade unions) with its control over industry that kept an iron grip on all aspects of production. Even the monopoly groups, although still dependent on colonial extraction, from the sixties became increasingly interested in European markets, and pushed for reforms that deepened the cracks in the regime's political base.

Since the late 1960s, Portugal had experienced a growing wave of struggles. The universities were paralysed or closed; the repression affected hundreds of high school students. Independent forms of union organization took shape and gave birth to the *Intersindical* (later the CGTP). In the last six months alone of the dictatorship, a hundred thousand workers in industry and services took strike action. The order of the *Estado Novo* had become highly unstable. Those on "top", like those "below", felt the end was coming.

The intensification of the war, with the extension of its fronts, led to a huge expansion of the army, which required the promotion to middle officer rank of young people called up under conscription, and coming straight from radicalizing student mi-

lieux. These soldiers were to play their part in preparing the 25 April, and in the struggles that followed.

In 1973, the Socialist Party was formed, around Mario Soares, in anticipation of the end of the regime, determined to exploit the possibilities opened up by its relations with foreign powers. The Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), which of all the CPs in western Europe was the most closely aligned with the USSR, remained the main point of reference for the underground resistance; it was able to bring together a broad range of political sectors, for example around the fronts set up to take part in the dictatorship's tightly controlled elections. In the last decade of the dictatorship, the PCP found itself facing myriad formations to its left, coming out of the student mobilizations and able to dialogue with the working-class radicalization.

Despite being a "pressure cooker", in the words of Fernando Rosas, Portugal in 1973 and early 1974 was not experiencing a pre-insurrectionary situation. It would be the military coup that, largely unwittingly, would transform the way the people took part in the process. The last attempts to bolster state authority came from within the regime, resulting in the formation of a federalist political alliance with neo-colonial pretensions, strong relations with the Western powers and a disposition towards European integration. General Spínola was at the centre of this project, which was represented in the dictatorship's parliament by figures who would later found the parties of the post-25 April right, the CDS and the PSD. The Prime Minister, Marcello Caetano, who had replaced Oliveira Salazar in 1968 with the promise of a political opening, ended up aligning himself with the

African colonialist interests and the ultra-right, marginalizing the "liberalizing" sector.

A number of middle-ranking military officers, exhausted by the war effort, organized the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), initially based on essentially corporate demands. On the eve of the coup, they sought political support at the top of the hierarchy and received it – from the Chief of the Armed Forces, Costa Gomes, and his deputy, Antonio Spínola, a former governor of Guinea.

Year One

The military uprising of April 25 encountered no serious resistance – those who did not support it, did not fight against it either (except at the headquarters of the political police, where shots were fired at civilians in the centre of Lisbon). General Spínola was handed power by Marcello Caetano, who went into exile. In the capital, a few hours after the tanks moved into the Lower City, the only movement was that of people celebrating with their carnations; it was the first sign of disobedience towards the new power, which had instructed the population not to leave their homes.

After removing from the MFA's programme the self-determination of the peoples of the colonies, Spínola emphasized in his speech to the nation that the first task of the new power would be "to ensure the survival of the nation and its sovereignty across several continents". However, the first few weeks after the 25 April soon revealed the failure of attempts to keep the apparatus of political repression functioning and assert any kind of stable bourgeois leadership over the political process underway. The new power spoke with many voices; it was divided between the Junta of National Salvation (where Spínola presided over the remains of the old military hierarchy) and the Council of State, which included the officers of the MFA. Spínola made an attempt to maintain social order (with the suppression of the postal strike) and quickly to consolidate his support base (the big bourgeois families formed the Movement for the Development of Enterprise and Society, with a promise to create immediately a

hundred thousand jobs). But the new power lacked political coherence and the force of arms it needed to ensure that the weak movements of economic groups could lead to any kind of normality.

This almost total absence of repression and the signs of support from some sectors of the MFA itself for the mass movement opened the floodgates of popular initiative and triggered the Portuguese revolution. In the colonies, fighting ceased and the colonial troops and liberation forces began to fraternize. In the metropolis, new democratic rights were won in practice much more quickly than they could be formally recognized. This was the case with the right to strike, the minimum wage, reduced working hours, holidays and the purging from workplaces of those still loyal to the fallen regime or seeking to sabotage the changes underway. With no state force behind him, and increasingly dependent on the turbulent MFA Assembly, Spínola made his final political gesture with an appeal, in September 1974, to the "silent majority" to mobilize. Its failure only increased popular confidence for the next cycle. The sectors favouring continuity with the old hierarchy and the intervention of the armed forces in the process of class struggle were marginalized. The general with the monocle soon joined Marcello Caetano in Brazil.

Two conflicting paths

The revolution was to last nineteen months, from April 1974 to November 1975, and would leave lasting marks on Portuguese democracy, both in terms of its constitutional shape and its practical exercise of political freedoms.

Two conflicting paths collided, crossed and combined in those months. One, centred on the MFA, involved a permanent attempt to rehabilitate a minimally efficient centre of state power. Throughout almost the entire revolutionary period, the main forces of the left, the PCP and the SP, followed this path, seeking to influence the development of the new power and, in particular, a portion of this. In seeking such institutional respectability, the PCP even tried to demobilize what it considered

"wild-cat" strikes, and insisted that leaving NATO was not a political priority. At the same time, fearing that general elections in a country like Portugal could produce unfavourable results, it emphasised the "institutionalization" of the MFA as a legitimate state body, alongside the still-to-be elected Constituent Assembly. As for the Socialist Party, it prepared for elections, as the key to rebuilding a state power capable of subduing the popular dynamic. Soares combined proclamations of socialism (which were shared right across the political spectrum) with the slogan "Europe is with Us", banking on integration into the European Common Market, whose most powerful members provided significant support.

The other path was that of real democracy, the direct popular involvement and self-organization of the masses, who confronted their immediate needs and the pressure of the crisis (this was shortly after the oil shock of 1973) by creating their own political culture and structures of intervention. This was a broad torrent that far overflowed the banks of state authority, taking on myriad forms: the squatter movements of those crammed into slums, initiatives by people to build their own neighbourhoods, social services, schools, health centres and community organizations, as well as businesses under workers' self-management and producer cooperatives on occupied farmlands. Each of these initiatives experienced contradictions, dilemmas and conflicts, as well as achievements of profound and lasting significance. They represented a dramatic awakening of important parts of a backward and depoliticised society, where self-organization of the working class had been practically invisible for four decades; in a matter of days and weeks they learnt to carry out a revolution, taking charge right from the start of the heart of the system - property, be it in land, real estate, or industry.

This sudden change in all dimensions of social life was the great historical trauma that the Portuguese bourgeoisie would never overcome. The climax came after 11 March 1975, the date of a failed military putsch, also involving General Spínola, which

led to an acceleration of the revolutionary process. Many business leaders were charged with economic sabotage and imprisoned or sent into exile. Decrees were adopted on land reform and the nationalization of the banks (the latter measure, seen as essential to keep the financial system operating, was passed with the votes of even the PSD, on the right). With the dissolution of several far-right groups, networks of anti-communist terrorists developed across the border in the Spanish state, supported by sectors of the Portuguese Catholic hierarchy; these carried out hundreds of attacks against activists and offices of the PCP and the radical left, and even some murders.

The split in the MFA and the preparation of 25 November

These two paths were to coexist for a whole year, a year that profoundly transformed the country. But it was especially after the elections on 25 April 1975 that the economic and political impasses of the Portuguese revolution opened up the split between two conflicting political camps.

In these first elections, on a very high turnout, the Socialist Party won most votes (38 %). If you take into account the votes for the communist parties (PCP + MDP, 16.5%) and the radical left (4 %), the right-wing parties (PSD + CDS, 34 %) lagged well behind. But the political alignments that developed following the elections took a different form, based primarily on the nature of the state power that for six months was negotiated between the MFA and the parties represented in the Constituent Assembly and the government.

The MFA's role as intermediary between the weakened authority of the state and the mass movement had reached its limit. The clash between different camps in the class struggle was reflected in the different components of the military movement – the "Spinolistas" (on the right), the "group of nine" (aligned with the SP), the "gonçalvistas" (aligned with the PCP), the Continental Operational Command (COPCON, led by Otelo). The "Hot Summer" of 1975 was one of confrontation between two opposing political camps.

On the one hand, there was the political role of the mobilized sectors of society, which went as far as experimenting with forms of "dual power" (in June 1975, for example, the first popular assembly was held in Lisbon, at the military engineers' regiment, bringing together more than fifty neighbourhood committees and 26 workers' councils); this accentuated the crisis of command in the military, with the formation of "Soldiers United Will Win" (SUV) groups and because of the action of COPCON itself.

The latter was closely linked to the most advanced mass actions. These reached their climax with the occupation of military installations and a number of demonstrations called by the SUV: on 10 September in Porto, when a march of forty thousand people was headed by two thousand soldiers; on 25 September, when another march about a hundred thousand strong included hundreds of soldiers in uniform from fifteen different units. At the end of the demonstration, dozens of buses were diverted to take the protesters to the Trafaria prison, where they released soldiers who had been imprisoned for belonging to the SUV. But despite its growing momentum, this broad movement was still a long way from producing a revolutionary political leadership able to develop a social and political alliance which enjoyed majority support and expressed the independent initiative of the people.

On the other hand, the ones who did unite and develop alliances were precisely those who, under a variety of banners, sought to preserve and restore that bastion of order, the authority of the State. This was after all the only sector that, as Francisco Louçã says, "had power and fought for power" (*Rehearsal for a Revolution*, 1984).

The outcome of this confrontation came on 25 November, the date of the military revolt that brought together the political and military components of the right and the SP under the command of Eanes ("the group of nine"), who would become president with the support of these same sectors. From then on, the PCP would be oil in the wheels of a negotiated democracy. In its texts, the party explains clearly which side it was not on during the

critical moments of the Portuguese revolution: "the Central Committee of the PC draws attention to the idealistic illusions that have led some sectors to see in these forms of popular organization the future bodies of State power. It also draws attention to the abstract theorizing about 'people's power', which creates the illusion of the existence of a popular political power in opposition to the military and governmental power" (*Avante!*, 16/12/1975). Already defeated, this sector based on "idealistic illusions", nonetheless won 16.5% of the votes in the presidential elections of 1976, for its candidate, Lt. Col. Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho (more than double the vote achieved by the PCP's candidate, Octavio Pato). [1]

The State remakes the Portuguese bourgeoisie

The years following the revolutionary period saw the reorganization of production conditions, within the framework of a balance of forces reshaped during the revolution and the implementation in law of some of the "achievements" of the process. The winds of April would also blow through the field of social rights, with the development of Social Security and the National Health Service, as well as advances in the freedom and social status of women. The nationalizations of 1975 left a public sector made up of more than eighty companies and another 140 with state participation; it included 90% of banking and most of the transport, communications and energy sectors – in all about a quarter of GDP. Land reform, which in 1975 took over 1.2 million hectares and affected over forty thousand agricultural workers (and many more indirectly), lasted for another decade, even though it was concentrated in the southern region of Alentejo. Not until 1977 was the first fall in real wages recorded.

For over a decade and a half, the economy would continue to be characterized by strong state intervention, with a ruling class that remained weak and incapable, politically and financially, of taking possession of the main public companies. The State continued to manage the economic system and as-

sumed its historical role as incubator and protector of the Portuguese bourgeoisie. It was under state direction that the power of the bourgeoisie was rebuilt.

This period of transition came to an end when Portugal joined the European Economic Community in 1986. Throughout the eighties, foreign dependence increased and the model of low wages and specialization in labour-intensive, low-tech sectors was consolidated. This remains true, even with the massive expansion of universities and education in general (illiteracy was 40% in 1974). The rapid economic growth between 1974 and 2004 (3.5% per year) was based mainly on mobilizing more labour, especially that of women.

European integration and absolute majorities for the right (with the governments of Cavaco Silva and the PSD), created the conditions for a new cycle, one of privatizations, with the necessary constitutional amendments to overturn the legally "irreversible" nationalizations. The Right, and later the SP, handed over control of much of the banking system to the old capitalist families of dictatorship (Champalimaud, Espírito Santo, Mello). This was the key to controlling the subsequent phase of privatizations. The privatized banks became the basis for the huge debts of both old and new economic groups (Sonae, Amorim, Jerónimo Martins, construction) that piled into the major business sectors of the turn of the century: the monopoly income from energy and telecommunications, mass distribution and retail, and real estate.

It was precisely real estate and construction that supported domestic demand during this long period of wage squeeze. The latter was offset by making it easier for households to borrow from private domestic banks, while these borrowed from the European banking system. Between 1991 and 2010, the number of dwellings in Portugal grew at an average of 80,000 new homes a year, the equivalent of a city the size of Coimbra. This whole model hinged on substantial public investment, mainly in infrastructure and inflated spending, for example on football stadiums.

The neoliberal strategy imposed from Europe, reduced the capacity of the Portuguese economy, which became increasingly dependent on capital, with more and more debts and less and less autonomy. The ability to export was compromised by the conditions of accession to the single currency, while foreign investment was limited to assembly lines with little value added. The ruling class sought its comfort zone in an economy that was highly vulnerable to recession, and which collapsed under the impact of the 2008 financial crisis and international speculation in Portuguese public debt.

The rest of the story is well known: the 2011 external intervention triggered a social counter-revolution of unimagined proportions and a process of transfer of wealth unprecedented in the country's history. The protected sectors of the economy continue to produce growing fortunes, while compared with the situation in 2009, the percentage of population living below the poverty line increased from 18% to 25%. The period of the troika saw the most intense cycle of privatizations since the revolution, handing over to foreign capital the airports, control of the energy system, a third of the insurance market and the post office. And the list of privatizations planned for 2014 extends from air travel to suburban railway lines and the treatment of solid waste in the cities.

The unemployment figures are barely disguised by state initiatives that remove a significant portion of the unemployed from the statistics, and especially by the forced exodus of over one hundred thousand Portuguese per year. At the same time, more than half of those who still had a job received the minimum wage (485 Euros) or suffered pay cuts of 23%. In Portugal there are 5.5 million people able to work. 1.2 million are unemployed or have emigrated. Nearly one million work less than ten hours a week. One million work more than forty hours a week.

"All that is solid" ...

The Portuguese experience over the last 40 years conjures up the bitter memory of the "irreversibili-

ty" of the popular conquests included in the 1976 Constitution. The huge fright suffered by the Portuguese oligarchy during that short period was the result of a "hot" democratic transition (unlike the "cold" one in the Spanish state). Within that, after the masses first erupted on the social and political stage in April and May 1974, there appeared signs of the "old mole" of socialist revolution at work, with forays into private property and control over both territory and businesses. But the order of the State itself was never lost (however many of its parts seemed to have been "lost" at one point or another). Slowly, patiently, absorbing partial victories and historic advances, it was able to restore consensus, that is, the full control of the ruling class.

With the number of people leaving Portugal now back to the level of the sixties (when malnutrition and war forced hundreds of thousands of Portuguese to flee their country), the current Portuguese tragedy finally puts paid to the gradualist illusions of some on the left. Those who thought the pre-revolutionary crisis of 1974-75 might be the beginning of a democratic and social modernization of the country, in line with the PCP's doctrine of the sixties on the tasks of the democratic, anti-

monopolistic revolution, can today see exactly what an "advanced democracy" under the sway of capital looks like.

For those on the left who today struggle for a majority of society to break with the blackmail of the creditors, who advocate nationalizing the banks and the strategic sectors of the economy to achieve economic self-determination and to break with the mechanisms that constrain democracy – like the European treaties and NATO's militarism – the experience of the pre-revolutionary crisis of 1974-75 continues to be an absolutely fundamental lesson about the nature of the power of the bourgeoisie, and its ability to survive, adapt and restructure.

In those nineteen months that were so unique in Portuguese history, because of the scale of mass involvement in the revolutionary process, the people won a dignity they had never had before, and changed the face of the country. That is why, even in the dark times that workers face today – or especially in these times – the streets of Portugal continue to reverberate with the song that, in the early hours of April 25, gave the signal to the rebels to leave their barracks, José Afonso's "Grândola, Vila Morena".

PORTUGAL

Forty years later: the grandeur and the limits of the Portuguese Revolution

UGO PALHETA ·

From April 1974 to November 1975, the Portuguese working class sought to break the state apparatus inherited from the Salazar regime and to invent roads towards a democratic socialism in the conditions of economic backwardness and political repression bequeathed by a dictatorship that had held power for over forty years. Rooted partly on the terrain of contradictions specific to Portuguese colonialism, the revolution began on April 25, 1974 by a revolt of captains organized in the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), before becoming radicalized by leaps and bounds - through increasing self-organization in the workplaces and the neighborhoods, among the soldiers and the peasants - in response to the successive attempts of the ruling class to stop its forward march.

It took all the counter-revolutionary determination of the bourgeoisie, based on conservative factions of the army and on the ideological power of the Church, to push back popular militancy and the rise of a broad anti-capitalist consciousness. The responsibility also lies with the two major parties of the Portuguese Left, each in its own way: whereas the Socialist Party (PSP) fully assumed the task of managing loyally the interests of the bourgeoisie and maintaining the structures of the capitalist state, the Communist Party (PCP) devoted much of its energy to diverting the proletariat from any autonomous political action and to limiting the objectives of the struggle, seeking to undermine the growing audience of the far-left groups (Maoists and Trotskyists).

A revolution with deep roots

A revolution is never a flash of lightning in a clear blue sky; it announces its coming through multiple warning signs that most often only become legible as such after the fact, once the popular uprising has begun.

This difficulty in interpreting the silent modification of the balance of forces and the convulsions of popular anger explains why genuinely revolutionary organizations rarely take the initiative during the early stages of a revolution and may have the greatest difficulty in conquering influence within mass movements, especially when they are faced with more structured parties that have superior financial resources, regular access to the mainstream media and an audience that has been won over many years.

The Portuguese Revolution plunged its roots in the crisis of the Salazar regime. A fascist dictatorship based on a reactionary ideology which would serve as inspiration for the Vichy regime, the *Estado novo* ("New State") presents original features in comparison with the fascist regimes of Mussolini and Hitler, features that help to explain both its longevity and its weakness at the moment of its crisis in the early 1970s.

If the regime founded in 1933 by Salazar [1] lasted so long, it is because it succeeded in uniting the various factions of the Portuguese ruling class around a political project based on the repression of any trade-union and political opposition [2], ensuring the super-exploitation of the proletariat and the defence of big landed property, but also on the continuation of a particularly brutal colonial rule.

Nevertheless, unlike the dictatorships of Mussolini and Hitler, the advent and the installation of this dictatorship was not the product of a political radicalization of the petty bourgeoisie or a fraction of the bourgeoisie, expressed in mass fascist parties fighting the organizations of the working class. It was only once the state apparatus had been put in place by Salazar that he deemed it appropriate to develop a single party - the National Union, which later became the National People's Action - which never had the vigour and the autonomy of the Nazi Party (NSDAP) in Germany.

Not only did the regime not really succeed in inspiring mass support for its policies, but the bourgeoisie remained incapable of structuring itself in an autonomous way in the political sphere. This partly explains its stupefaction in the period following April 25, 1974, unable as it was to find a capitalist solution to the political crisis triggered by the revolt of the captains.

But it was essentially the colonial wars, which began in 1961, that were going to upset the internal equilibriums of the *Estado novo*, by becoming intertwined with the crisis of the regime opened up by the candidacy of General Humberto Delgado in the presidential election of 1958. Delgado succeeded in uniting around his name the antifascist opposition, restructured and revitalized after the Second World War, but the election was characterized by massive electoral fraud and was followed by the assassination of Delgado in 1965.

At that point the regime revealed itself to everyone in its true light: a violent dictatorship, repressing by murder, imprisonment or exile any hint of opposition or autonomy. In relation to the size of the country, the wars in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau would cost in lives and money twice as much as did the Vietnam War for the United States, [3], reflecting the unprecedented violence of a regime clinging to its colonial possessions.

The dictatorship and its contradictions

Not only was the Portuguese army beginning to suffer defeats by national liberation movements, pushing the *Estado novo* to increase significantly its military spending (and limiting de facto government investment at home). These wars eventually led to great war-weariness: in the army, on the part of the soldiers and of the officers who made up the intermediate hierarchy, but also in the population. Adding to the prevailing poverty and repression, the refusal to go and fight to defend the colonies caused a huge movement of emigration in the early 1970s; nearly a quarter of the Portuguese population moved to other countries.

From September 1973, captains organized to formulate their demands; to start with they were strictly professional and corporate, but they rapidly took on a broader character, going so far as to question the continued existence of the fascist dictatorship. The MFA was thus the product of the failures of the colonial war and of the social frustration of these "middle cadres" of the army, but also of the pressure that the struggles of workers, peasants and students began to exert in Portugal.

By this time headed by Marcelo Caetano [4], the system was characterized in the early 1970s by a high level of economic imbalances and social tensions. Having become dependent on foreign capital due to the colonial wars and its integration in 1960 into the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) [5], which preceded a free trade agreement with the EEC signed in 1973, Portugal occupied a subordinate position in the international division of labour, and could only claim as a "comparative advantage" for imperialist capital the violent repression of the working class that made it possible to artificially lower wages.

There was the development of an export industry, which coexisted with maintaining a largely archaic agriculture, based - especially in the Alentejo - on huge estates owned by landowners who maintained law and order in the countryside. Portugal experienced a real industrial development: the secondary sector employed, in 1969, 35.5 per cent of the working population, against 26.5 per cent in 1950.

Similarly, the percentage of waged workers - including manual workers, technicians, etc. - went from 53.6 to 74.7 per cent of the working population, reaching 82.3 per cent in Porto and 86.5 per cent in Lisbon.

The capitalist modernization of the Portuguese economy thus favoured the emergence of an urban working class which, in the course of its struggles, became aware of its strength and organized itself (in 1970 the Intersyndicale trade-union confederation organized two million workers). The years 1968-1969 were the scene of large-scale protest movements in the main sectors where the working class was concentrated: urban transport, TAP (airline) Lisnave (shipyards), metallurgy, the car industry, canning, etc. Struggles broke out among youth but also among the peasants of the Alentejo, who in 1962 had managed to win the 8-hour day thanks to the mobilization of 300,000 agricultural workers.

April 25, 1974: military action and popular outbreak

It was in this context that the MFA was created clandestinely in March 1974, in relative independence with respect to the military high command. Composed mostly of junior officers and traversed by all the currents of the anti-fascist opposition (from liberal democrats to the far left, passing by social democracy and the Communist Party) it was the organization that would prepare and execute successfully the military initiative of April 25.

At 25 minutes after midnight, the famous song "Grandôla, Vila Morena" - banned by the regime - was broadcast on Radio Renaissance to announce the launching of the action. Around 3 a.m., the premises of the main radio stations were occupied, which made it possible to broadcast a series of communiqués in the following hours, as well as the airports of Lisbon and Porto. The headquarters of the military regions of the two cities, but also the ministries, the offices of the police (PSP) and the Bank of Portugal were besieged by the troops led by the MFA.

An ultimatum was addressed to Caetano who, having taken refuge in the Carmo barracks in the centre of Lisbon, only agreed to resign at 4.30 in the afternoon, demanding to hand over the leadership of the country to a superior officer, who was not part of the MFA, so that power "did not fall into the street": Antonio de Spínola, a general who had been dismissed two months previously because of his (very measured) opposition to the regime's policy in the colonies.

However, we cannot reduce April 25 to a mere putsch, in which some saw the hand of the CIA or the Bilderberg group, nor even to a well-conducted series of military operations. Because the Portuguese population spontaneously took to the streets at dawn to support the action of the MFA (going so far as to offer carnations to the soldiers), to celebrate the end of the dictatorship and to ensure that this victory was not stolen from them, contradicting the communiqués of the MFA inviting them to "stay calm and go home."

Moreover, a captain of the MFA, Maia de Santarem, said afterwards: "We came to the conclusion that something had to be done, because if we did not do it, it would be the people who would. We had the feeling that we were walking towards an abyss and that this abyss would lead to a civil war in which the people would take up arms." Even if that probably does not reflect the very broad range of views within the MFA, it seems clear that it had not foreseen the extent of street protests or desired such a popular outbreak.

The military insurgents could not do without the Portuguese people, who immediately showed great initiative in seeking to bring down the repressive apparatus of the regime, which was as hated as it was imposing [6]. Thus there emerged an "April 25 from below" [7]: in Lisbon demonstrators gathered in front of the barracks of the GNR (National Republican Guard) where Caetano had taken refuge, besieged the headquarters of the PIDE secret police (who fired into the crowd) and the offices of the ruling party, invaded and sacked the building of the censorship authorities, encircled the

Caxias prison until they had obtained the release of all political prisoners (including those that Spínola wanted to keep locked up because of the attacks they that they had committed) .

Almost everywhere in the country the same scenes of jubilation were to be seen, reflecting the euphoria of finally seeing the dictatorship fall, but also the popular vigilance against a transition that would just exchange one set of leaders for another, while maintaining intact the instruments of repression and censorship. The people of Lisbon did not, however, manage to stop Caetano from quietly escaping, escorted by officers of the MFA, and from leaving power in the hands of General Spínola.

Class struggles in the Portuguese revolution

Spínola was then the leader on whom the Portuguese bourgeoisie was counting: his personal trajectory reassured all those who aspired to a refurbishing of the system and a better integration of Portuguese capital in the global market; in short, a revolution without revolution. Spínola had fought as a volunteer on the Francoist side during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) and then with the Nazi troops on the Eastern Front during the battle of Stalingrad. He had been a loyal servant of the *Estado novo* in its colonial wars (which ensured him the support of the upper layers of the military hierarchy). He was also close to Portuguese financial circles, having frequented the salons of the rich capitalist Champalimaud family. So he appeared to the ruling class as the only solution for the maintenance of calm in the country.

And in fact the "monocled general" did make every effort to limit the popular combativeness which manifested itself in the days following April 25 (especially during the May 1st demonstration, which assembled between 300,000 and 500,000 people). Not only did Spínola fail, but his attempts to increase his power in order to prevent decolonization and suppress the strikes that multiplied during the months of May-June 1974, led to mass movements of increasing magnitude. On 16 May and 28 September 1974 and on 11 March 1975, the ruling

classes suffered resounding defeats that eventually compelled Spínola to flee to Spain, where he founded a far-right organization whose objective was to impose an authoritarian regime.

On March 11, the attempted putsch was defeated by the population, which formed pickets in front of the barracks, by the soldiers of the left wing of the MFA who organized to repel the attacks of the putschists and by the workers who went on strike throughout the country, at the call of the Intersindicale (which furthermore organized very large demonstrations in the evening). This popular victory represented a turning point in the revolution: not only did the failure of Spínolism leave the bourgeoisie without a political solution or a strategic perspective (at least temporarily), but the Portuguese workers gained in confidence and became politicized.

From April 1974 to November 1975, the Portuguese workers would thus reconnect with the fighting traditions of a militant workers' movement which, under the First Republic (1910-1926), had organized no less than 158 general strikes (almost ten per year!) before being brutally suppressed after the military coup of 1926. Even though the rise of an anticapitalist consciousness remained very uneven from one sector to another and from one region to another, self-organization undeniably progressed.

From May 1974 occupations of empty houses or apartments by poor families were organized, prior to the development of commissions of residents (*moradores*) in the cities. In the countryside, especially in the Alentejo, farm workers organized to win a genuine agrarian reform. In the workplaces, strikes and occupations were accompanied by the formation of workers' commissions. Finally, we witnessed the emergence in August 1975 of the SUV ("Soldiers united will win") committees, which sought to promote the self-organization and the politicization of soldiers.

These initiatives remained limited to a minority and were not structured nationally, so that we cannot speak of a situation of "dual power" without indulging in wishful thinking. Could they have been

the expression of an embryonic popular power? Probably, at least if they had not been weakened by the sectarianism of some Maoist movements and the hostility of the reformist organizations, especially the PCP, which enjoyed by far the strongest presence in the working class and in the unions, only consenting to participate in the workers' commissions from fear of losing ground to the far left, whose audience was growing.

It remains true that the committees of workers, residents and soldiers not only reflected the radicalization of mass movements in response to the counter-revolutionary intentions of the ruling classes, but was a reminder that the confrontation with the bourgeoisie and its state can only be undertaken in favourable conditions if the class of the exploited and oppressed succeeds in developing, in the very course of the revolutionary crisis, democratic instruments of struggle which can be transformed into organs of an alternative power to the capitalist state, from the local to the national level.

The ruling classes take things back in hand

Once Spínola had been taken out of the equation by the victory of March 11, it was largely within the MFA - whose prestige, resulting from April 25, remained very high throughout 1975 - that the social and political contradictions that emerged from the revolutionary process would find expression, and it was there that the question of power would be posed. In fact, the MFA laid claim to the leadership of the revolutionary process: in March this was institutionalized through the creation of the Council of the Revolution and the MFA made a turn to the left.

Under the pressure of the workers, the Council of Ministers decided to implement an agrarian reform (which remained very incomplete but would be accompanied by an increase in land occupations) and decreed, between March and August 1975, a series of nationalizations in key sectors of the Portuguese economy (banking, insurance, electricity, transport, steel, oil companies, tobacco, cement, etc.), without, however, posing the questions that were deci-

sive, from the revolutionary point of view: the compensation of the former owners and workers' control over the management of the nationalized enterprises.

It would take too long to go over again the months between this left turn in the revolution and the putsch on 25 and 26 November 1975, led by the right and far-right fractions of the military hierarchy and the MFA, in association with the Socialist Party, the bourgeois parties and President Costa Gomes. The move came after an acceleration of workers' struggles, which were beginning to escape the control of the reformist apparatuses.

In particular, on 12 November, a demonstration of construction workers surrounded the National Assembly, sequestering the members of parliament for 36 hours until they accepted their demands. On 16 November, a demonstration called by the workers' commissions and supported by the FUR (Revolutionary United Front) and the PCP mobilized 100,000 people in Lisbon. The bourgeoisie understood that only a decisive initiative could enable it to change the balance of forces in its favour, thus taking preventive action against a possible popular insurrection.

Without the shilly-shallying of the MFA left, which however enjoyed a large military superiority, and without the refusal of the PCP to launch a working-class counter-offensive, the putsch would probably not have succeeded or would have led to a situation of military and political confrontation. From November 25, a state of siege was decreed and the publication of the press was forbidden: the putschists occupied some strategic points but failed to take the barracks of the military police (which was dominated by the far left).

Rather than accepting the fight and launching their forces into action, the leaders of the MFA left went to the presidential palace to negotiate their own surrender. The Portuguese revolution would not recover from such a setback: the bourgeoisie regained confidence in its own strength, relying on the PSP to ensure the process of normalization and to put

an end to the embryos of popular power that had emerged in the preceding months.

"The carnations have been cut"

[8]

Ultimately, it is probably in both the advances made and the limitations of the forms of self-organization that we should look for the reasons for the success of the counter-offensive by the ruling classes. The rank-and-file commissions (and the far-left parties) were too weak to do what the PCP did not want to do, that is to know how to resist an offensive aimed at restoring the full authority of the state, but were too developed not to frighten the bourgeoisie, the parties of the reformist left (PSP and PCP) and the left wing of the MFA, which remained attached to the military hierarchy and was frontally opposed to any movement of self-organization of soldiers.

Nothing illustrates this better than the declaration of Mario Soares, the principal leader of the PSP, which is worth quoting at length in order to measure the fear, the contempt and the violent hostility shown by the reformist leaders towards workers when they sought to organize themselves and to do without the professional politicians:

In the towns and cities, [...] people stopped producing for a yes or a no, an assembly, a discussion or a "demo" (...) In the countryside - in the Alentejo essentially - they confused agrarian reform and anarchy, everywhere they occupied land that should not have been occupied (...). It was time to restore order before others took the responsibility of doing so under the leadership of a providential Pinochet. (...) So what was the meaning of this monstrous disorder, this lack of discipline, this

generalized subversion? What were these soviets of soldiers and sailors, straight out of the garrisons of Petrograd and Kronstadt, doing in the Portugal of 1975 (...)? Where was this anarchy taking us? How could we not see, not understand the rage of most of the officers faced with scruffy soldiers who saluted with a clenched fist? [9].

The regression following the decisive days of November 1975 was as rapid as it was profound. Not only were the achievements of the revolution being challenged, but the Right returned to power in 1979 in the person of Sa Carneiro, who had distinguished himself before the revolution by his membership of the ruling party, the only recognized one, which led to his being elected to parliament under Caetano.

Worse, General Spínola was rehabilitated in 1978, elevated to the title of marshal and appointed chairman of the commission responsible for organizing the official commemoration of the 10th anniversary of a popular revolution that he had never wanted. In contrast, the man who had led the military action of 25 April 1974 and was subsequently the principal figure of the MFA left, Otelo de Carvalho, was sentenced in 1987 to 15 years in prison for his alleged involvement in a clandestine armed organization (the Popular Forces of 25 April).

The contrasting destinies of these two prominent figures of the Portuguese Revolution suffice to cast full light on the Thermidorian reaction that followed the coup of 26 November 1975, a reaction whose magnitude was a measure of a revolution which frightened the Portuguese ruling class and shook Europe for a year and a half.

FRANCE

Notes on the French situation after the local elections and the 12th April demonstration

FRANÇOIS SABADO ·

Of course, after years of social-liberalism where the SP took its distance from the labour movement, a defeat of the SP at the polls no longer automatically indicates a defeat of the workers' movement.

These workers, who do not feel represented by the parliamentary left any more, do not feel the bankruptcy of the Socialists to be theirs, fortunately. They even abstained massively (between 50 and 60 % of the registered voters in the popular suburbs or regions).

2) But when such defeat at the polls of SP leaves the space to the right and far right, when what remains of "historical municipal socialism" is falling apart, when the CP loses a third of its local councils, in particular in the "red suburbs", and these retreats are not compensated for, far from it, by victories of the radical left, this can only weigh negatively on the power relations between the classes.

This took place in an economic context marked by plant closures and governmental attacks which can provoke struggles or partial mobilizations, but that are not strong enough to block the austerity policies or to force the government to retreat. Years of reorganization of the workforce force, casualization and unemployment have shaped a workforce that is now paralysed by the crisis. Especially as here too, the trade-union leaderships directly support the government's "pacts" with the employers or position themselves as "accompanying" them.

3) The last demonstration of this turn to the right was the nomination of Manuel Valls as Prime Minister.

In the SP primary elections that decided on the candidate for the 2011 presidential election, Valls

represented the right within a Socialist Party that is already itself well to the right. He stood as a candidate against the 35-hour week, against an economic redistribution policy, for the privatization of the public services, and for reduction of the social security contributions, which aimed at new attacks on the Social security system. He identified loud and clear with the "policy of offer" based on a reduction of labour costs and subsidies for businesses – opposed to a policy of restarting the economy by demand. He got only 5% of the votes in this election, which proved that even for a very rightwing SP Valls was too much.

Two years, later, Valls' policy is being openly applied, by Hollande, by the government and the SP. Stark result: 30 billion of subsidies to business, 50 billion of budgetary "savings" which will result in severe cuts in the public budget and social security. Already announced: the closure of ten hospitals, non-refunding of certain prescriptions, fall in wages of state employees. In Europe that is in a deep and lasting crisis, and where growth rate is around 1 %, such a policy can only plunge the country into the infernal spiral of austerity, unemployment and precarity.

But isn't this precisely the desired goal, a radical modification of the social and political balance of forces? To undermine what remains of the "European social model" by eliminating a series of social gains, and align Europe in world competition.

4) The problem is that these socio-economic choices sap the social bases of the traditional parties, both of the right and left, and provoke political crises.

As regards social democracy, these parties are "less and less working-class and increasingly middle-

class". They are not bourgeois parties like the others, because the system needs their specificity to ensure alternation. But the relationships of these parties to the labour movement no longer express their history and their politics no longer have much to do with the classical policies of social democracy. They are neoliberal policies. For ordinary citizens and salaried workers Hollande-Valls are on the same line continuity as Sarkozy not only on social and economic questions, but also in repressions on the undocumented or communities like the Roms. Valls is not offended by being considered the Sarkozy of the left.

But will the neo-liberal evolution of the SP not put into question the very existence of these parties? In southern Europe, the Portuguese SP or the Spanish PSOE have not shared the historical catastrophe of the Greek PASOK, even if they have been weakened. The French SP is still a major party, but these elections shook one of its fundamental pillars: its in the bases... If it continues its policy, other electoral failures will follow: with forthcoming European election, in the regional elections and cantonal and one does not see how the SP could claw back its support before the next presidential and parliamentary elections in 2017. A total collapse cannot be excluded.

The drop in support for the PCF is of another nature, that of the historical decline of post-Stalinism, but it represents also this worsening of the balance of power, in particular in a series of cities where the right has replaced the PCF elected representatives in the councils.

5) It is in this situation, with record abstention, that there was the swing to the right and the Front National, the latter gaining control of about ten big cities. The right has been strengthened in spite of contradictions on a series of questions: Europe, relations with the Front National, its leadership given the possible "comeback" of Sarkozy. Its activist base and its electors are under pressure from the ultra rightwing or the far right. As for the FN, it has confirmed its popular base, and the fact is that it increasingly attracts part of the working and popu-

lar electorate. Like the parties of fascist origin, it combines social questions and racism in its programme, but how in this situation will it manage contradictions between its fascist origin and leadership and the pressures that will arise from its integration in the institutions?

Admittedly, we are not in the 1930s, the ruling classes have chosen integration in capitalist globalization and not protectionist nationalism, but there can be "political accidents", swing moments, where there would be a desynchronization between the fundamental socio-economic choices of the capitalist classes and the irruption of authoritative political solutions with the coming to power of (direct or indirect) coalitions of the right and the far right. The growth of the far right throughout Europe and the acceptance of governments like that of Orban in Hungary show the possible dangers for democratic freedoms and the popular movement.

In France as in many Europe, the balance is tipping towards the right, but fortunately there is also a social and political fightback.

6) The day of demonstrations on Saturday 12 April 12 in Paris and throughout the country testifies to this resistance. Several tens of thousands of demonstrators answered the call of more than 200 leaders of campaigns, trade unions or political parties to fight against the right and the far right and to oppose the austerity plans of the Hollande-Valls government.

The origin was a call by Olivier Besancenot for a weekend of revolt by the left against the successive demonstrations of the extremist right and the governmental policy. This was followed by statements along the same lines from Front de Gauche leaders. Then there were several weeks of work on a united-front call and preparatory meetings. The nomination of Valls gave an additional impetus to this mobilization. What made the success of this demonstration was its unity, its radical nature and its diversity. As well as the political organizations, tens of campaigns in particular for the right to housing, and sectors of the trade union movement were mo-

bilized. In the CGT, a significant number of federations and local sections called for the mobilization against the position of the confederal direction. We should also note the significant contingents of PCF and the NPA in the Parisian march. This demonstration showed that, despite of the results of the municipal elections, there is a leftwing in France that does not accept the government's policy and resists, and goes well beyond simply the parties of the radical left.

7) One of the key questions is: how to continue, how to express politically this dynamic of partial but significant mobilization, in this context of downturn?

The questions of unity of action, of radicality, and the fight against the governmental policy, the right and the far right are a guiding line for anticapitalists.

First in day-to-day social resistance, the fights against redundancies, budget cuts, strikes or mobilizations for social rights. The demonstrations for 1st of May are the next occasion. Without broad social mobilization which blocks austerity plans, wrests some partial victories, makes it possible to give back confidence to the workers and social movements, there will not be the beginning of change of the balance of forces. It is decisive.

But this must also be expressed politically by united action in struggles and in electoral battles. Already in the local elections, the NPA presented or supported 87 lists including 55 unitive ones, on an anti-austerity programme independent from the SP in the first and second round of the elections. Beyond, the radical left presented several hundreds of lists which marked a certain resistance, with appreciable results – unlike the rout of the SP.

After the municipal elections and the preparation of the 12 April demonstration the question existed of a unitive proposal for the European elections. It is on this basis that the NPA sent a letter to the Front de Gauche, to LO, to Alternative Libertaire to discuss the possibility of a united list for the European elections. There are, of course, different

positions on this question: the Party of the European Left is for refounding the European Union which seems to be an attempt at reform, whereas the anticapitalists fight for a break with the European institutions; Mélenchon can make ambiguous statements against "German Europe" or for "interdependent protectionism", whereas we defend an internationalist policy without concession to nationalism. But for the "general public", both will seem to be opposed to governmental austerity policies and the European Union and will propose another social and democratic Europe.

We this it is regrettable that the conditions could not exist to reach an agreement. The hesitations on both sides had an impact, but the tensions which paralysed Front de Gauche did not allow for a true discussion. It was, moreover, only at the last minute that the components of Front de Gauche finally reached an agreement on their own lists.

But beyond this agreement for the Europeans, the Front de Gauche is deeply divided on the relations to have with the SP. In the majority of large and medium-sized cities the PCF was allied with the SP. The other components of the Front de Gauche refused this alliance for the first round of the local elections. The result was that the Front de Gauche exploded on a key question that the NPA has raised for years: relations with the SP, then with the government. Although the NPA has been violently criticized for having put this question at the centre of the debate and has been accused of looking for excuses not to make the unity, many FdG activists recognize today that in fact the divergences on this point led to the explosion at the time of the municipal elections. Many things will depend on the next election results, in particular the Europeans, but the formula of Front de Gauche launched in 2010 is null and void today, it is necessary to discuss again unity and the basis for unity.

Indeed, unity is needed, and the anticapitalists must redouble efforts to deploy a unitive policy, but with the stepping up of the neo-liberal attacks by the SP in government, electoral alliances with this latter are impossible, support for SP parliamentary

majorities or governments even more so. This is why the policy of Mélenchon to build an "ecologist popular front" with the leadership of the Greens (EELV) would lead to a new dead end, especially as the majority of the EELV group supports the Valls government.

The objective, in the weeks and the months to come, it is to broadcast loud and clear the voice of a left opposition to the government. A broad unitive opposition but a true opposition and, in this sense, we cannot build a left opposition with forces that support or take part in the government. This is unfortunately the case with the "left" of the SP and the EELV...

For the anticapitalists, in this difficult situation we have to combine unity social and political action

with a policy of clear independence from the SP, and an anticapitalist programme that defend the social needs of the workers and the population as a whole.

In a situation where the old left is rejected, it is necessary to rebuild the labour movement by redefining a unitive perspective which integrates the organizations but invents new forms and new programmatic content. It is by fertilizing "the unity in action" with anticapitalist content that the revolutionaries will be useful in rebuilding.

The unity achieved on 12 April and suggested for the Europeans is a good indication for the orientation of the NPA in the months to come.

18 April 2014

SOUTH AFRICA

On the Sidikiwe Vukani Vote No Campaign

This initiative is providing a wake up call for the thousands of honest cadres and activists who fought for the liberation of our country and built the mass democratic movement, and who believe South Africa has to break the shackles of capitalism and imperialism to be truly free. It is an opportunity for our compatriots to regain their voice.

This is not a call for abstentionism. On the contrary this is a call for intensified activism, for political renewal that goes beyond placing a cross on a ballot paper every few years. Those who decry this Campaign for turning its back on those who gave up their lives for fighting for the vote are just being opportunistic. Though the franchise is very important our liberation struggle can never be reduced to the vote alone. Fundamentally it was a struggle to unite workers, communities and youth through regaining control of the wealth of the country. Our struggle continues and the vote, parliament and government are sites of different moments of struggle as we march to fulfill the forgotten aspirations of our liberation struggle.

When it comes to the election the Campaign provides opportunities for the millions disaffected by an ANC that has bought into the game and which plays by the rules of the global elite and the rest of the one percenters. The call for votes to either be spoilt or given to smaller parties is understood as tactical as part of a holding operation until a credible left and radical electoral alternative emerges. And who are the smaller parties we believe those who exercise their vote should tactically support? These are parties that say yes to a living wage of

R12 500. These are parties that fight with our people for radical land and agrarian reform and for decent public services. These are parties that campaign for nationalisation of the heights of the economy under popular control and say No to capitalism.

Breaking with the ANC is neither to be cold nor to enter the political wilderness but to join many committed activists that never believed the negotiated settlement ended the struggle for freedom. It is to be in solidarity with a generation of new activists embedded in hundreds of trade unions, social movements and popular organisations that take on the good fight for social justice. We see Sidikiwe Vukani as a bridge that will help our comrades trapped in the wilting and discredited Tripartite Alliance to cross over to begin the long path of renewal of the progressive, anti-capitalist and socialist traditions of our struggle for emancipation. The embrace of people fighting for their dignity 20 years after the end of Apartheid is very warm. Working in solidarity with those fighting for a living wage, decent work, shelter they can call home, for land to grow their food and feed their families, for education that opens the doors to knowledge, literature and culture, for safety and security that guarantee women and children can walk our streets freed from fear, for decent public services, for a society free of corruption, is to be warm.

As the DLF we believe the Sidikiwe Vukani Vote No Campaign can be an important step among several towards the building of an anti-capitalist electoral platform for the 2016 local government elections.

19 April 2014

QUEBEC

Québec Solidaire and the resistance

BENOIT RENAUD ·

QS was the only party that wholly identified with the massive student mobilization from February to June 2012, known as the Maple Spring (printemps érable). The only QS MNA at the time, Amir Khadir, not only opposed the "back to school legislation" adopted to force an end to the strike, he endorsed disobedience to that law and participated in illegal demonstrations himself, like most QS members. QS is also the only party in the National Assembly advocating free tuition for universities. Undoubtedly, this explains why the party membership doubled in 2012; this in spite of the fact that all major student unions kept their distance from political parties during the struggle and remained neutral during the election campaign.

More recently, it has been the only party squarely opposed to the various pipeline projects going through Québec to bring tar sands and shale oil to the East Coast, as well as plans to develop offshore oil drilling in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. It led a campaign last fall around a series of proposals for a green energy and green jobs policy. In the context of the accidental corporate bombing of Lac-Mégantic—the derailment and explosion in eastern Québec last summer of fourteen train cars carrying crude oil that killed more than forty-five people and destroyed more than thirty buildings—this approach is very well received by a significant segment of the population.

The dynamic of Left regroupment

After decades of domination of the global Left political landscape by social-democratic/labor or

Communist/Stalinist parties, the 1980s was a period of decline of these traditions and the opening of a space allowing for new political experiences and experiments. Social-Democrats adapted completely to the austerity regime of neoliberalism, transforming themselves into social-liberals. Communists were demoralized and demobilized by the collapse of the bureaucratic dictatorships they had equated with socialism and the neoliberal transformations of Russia and China.

But from that crisis of the old to the birth of the new, the process is long and complex and takes many different forms adapted to the specific history and situation of each country. In Brazil, a vibrant working-class movement against the military dictatorship allowed for the creation of the Workers Party (PT), which later formed the government under President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and adapted, in turn, to neoliberalism. Being the first country with a new type of party (the PT called itself neither social-democratic nor communist), it also saw the first second generation left regroupment with PSOL, in 2004.

In Italy, a split in the very large and influential Communist Party led to Rifondazione Comunista. Through the 1990s, it played a key role in the multiparty Italian Parliament, but entered into a crisis after supporting a social-liberal-led coalition government. In Germany, a left split from the Social-Democrats, converging with a fragment from the East German Communist Party gave us Die Linke (founded in 2007), a party with significant anticapitalist elements, but one that also participated in local and regional governments in coalition with the old Social-Democrats.

This list could go on and on with Respect in England and Wales, the Scottish Socialist Party, the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) in France, the

Left Bloc in Portugal, and Syriza in Greece. For our argument, the main lesson to draw from these experiences is that they all represent a step forward in attempting to build a new mass political movement on the left, but always with contradictions and difficulties. We need to embrace that potential while being aware of its limitations to make the most out of those opportunities.

Mass movements of resistance to austerity, oppression, and imperialist war need to find a political expression, to converge into an attempt to change power (not simply take it) if they are to be successful and not always on the defensive. At the same time, activists are wary, with good reason, not to repeat top-down political models based on accommodation with capitalism or bureaucratic centralization.

A history of national oppression

A distinctive feature of politics and social struggles in Québec is that the majority of the population of the current Canadian province has experienced a history of oppression based on their language (French) and religion (Catholic), starting with the conquest of New France by England during what US historiography calls the French and Indian War (or Seven Years War—1756–63).

The British occupiers followed the classic colonialist model of coopting local elites and supporting their privileges in exchange for an alliance against the overexploited lower classes. As a result, the Catholic Church maintained its domination over education and health services until the 1960s. Also, the semi-feudal landowning system established in New France (seigneuries) was continued until the 1850s, when the peasantry was allowed to take massive mortgages in order to buy the land they had been working on for several generations. This made it possible for the lords to convert their old privileges into capital, while poor peasant families continued paying those mortgages for decades.

The French Canadian working class was used as cheap labor (not unlike the Irish) in the second half

of the nineteenth century, many migrating to New England to work in textile mills. Until the 1970s, it was very common for French-speaking workers to have English employers and have to function in an English-speaking workplace, in spite of French speakers being the majority, both at the factory and in the town.

This oppression led to several major confrontations between the majority of French Canadians and the Canadian State, especially in times of war. Political crisis erupted during both World Wars over the draft. With the Quiet Revolution—the period of secularization, modernization, and progressive state and educational reform in Québec during the 1960s—a new movement for independence developed, with strong socialist elements. The Canadian state responded with massive police surveillance and waves of repression, most notably during the October crisis of 1970 when 500 activists were imprisoned without charges and 3,000 homes were searched by police without warrants.

To this day, the province of Québec still hasn't ratified the new Canadian constitution adopted by all other provinces and the federal parliament in 1982. Support for independence has ranged between 35 percent and 40 percent for most of the past thirty years, with a peak around 50 percent in the early 1990s. This movement is an expression of resistance to oppression, even if the current leadership of the movement does everything it can to appear reasonable and win over the capitalist class.

Challenges of left politics in Québec

One significant difference between the case of QS and the other Left regroupments mentioned earlier is that it was formed in a society that had no tradition of mass working-class politics. Québec has had a very militant labor movement, but the domain of electoral politics has been dominated by bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces. This is one of the symptoms of Québec's national oppression. Successive bosses' parties have managed to prevent the creation of a significant working-class political alternative by playing the nationalist card in various

ways. Most recently, this has been the pattern for the hegemony of the Parti Québécois (PQ) over the left of the political spectrum since its creation in 1968.

From the 1920s to the 1960s, several attempts were made either to rally Québec workers to a Canadian working-class party or to create an original one. Divisions over the questions of language and national self-determination played a key role in the ultimate failure of all such attempts whether by the Communist Party, the Canadian Commonwealth Federation [3] and its successor the New Democratic Party (NDP, a labor party) or the Parti Socialiste du Québec (PSQ).

In 1970, the PQ was the first party advocating for the transformation of the Québec provincial state into a sovereign country to elect members into the Québec Parliament since the rebellions of the 1830s. Hopes were high throughout the 1970s that this young party, a cross-class coalition of right and left political forces, would achieve some sort of independence. Many on the left, including revolutionary socialists, rallied to it with the stagist strategy of achieving independence first and fighting for socialism after. Others turned their backs entirely on the national struggle, calling it a bourgeois distraction. Forty years later, with two failed attempts (in 1980 and 1995) at renegotiating the relationship of Québec with the rest of Canada by way of a popular referendum mandate, the PQ has only proven that it can be a completely ordinary provincial government, implementing the same kind of pro-business policies as the federalist Liberals. In the meantime, the radical Left was reduced to very small groups often dedicating more energy to fighting each other than fighting the Right.

For QS, this lack of a working-class political tradition has had advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, it has contributed to the party being a direct expression of the new social movements that have emerged since the 1970s. QS is unequivocally feminist, ecologist, and for global justice (altermondialiste). It has deep roots in antipoverty groups and the student movement. Also, it has experienced

very little tension and infighting caused by old divisions within the Left. On the negative side, the roots and influence of the party in the union movement are minimal and the working-class perspective is not always present in its analysis.

Struggling toward an alternative

As mentioned above, when the sovereigntist PQ was founded in 1968, most of the Left rallied around it in spite of the fact it had been created and was led by liberal and conservative politicians. The uniting factor in that coalition was the goal of achieving some type of independence for the French-speaking nation. What further cemented this alliance of Left and Right was a program of social reforms made possible by the postwar boom and a common view of "progress" that included better working conditions and expanded social services.

This started changing in the early 1980s when the PQ government, under its founding leader René Lévesque, took a sharp turn to the right as a response to the global recession. But the Left—still reeling from the collapse of sizable Maoist groups, divided by sectarianism and isolated by the defeats of the social movements—was unable to truly take advantage of the crisis in the nationalist party resulting from this new turn and the defeat of the first referendum (May 1980).

For a new politics to emerge, the decline of the old was not enough. What was needed was the rebuilding of a capacity for mass resistance to right-wing policies—which emerged when the PQ came back to power in 1994. The PQ held a second referendum on sovereignty the following year (losing by 1 percent of the vote, with over 93.5 percent turnout), and then proceeded with another right-wing turn in the name of fiscal responsibility.

The first in the new wave of popular mobilizations was the March of Women against Poverty and Violence in June 1995. Fifteen thousand women participated, which could be considered a modest mobilization by today's standards, but was remark-

able after many years of isolated struggles generally ending in defeat. That movement was organized by the Québec Women's Federation (FFQ), chaired by Françoise David, who was to become the second QS MNA in 2012. Some of its demands were met with a favorable response; enough to give people hope that struggles could still achieve results, but not enough to renew people's trust in the PQ government.

Then a student strike took place, mostly in the colleges, [4] in the fall of 1996 as the government was holding summit meetings to discuss how to eliminate the province's deficit. This strike was successful in forcing the government to abandon the idea of increasing tuition fees and of introducing them in the college system.

The government-sponsored summits were also the target for large rallies uniting students with unionized workers and members of community organizations. The signing of the zero deficit pact at the second summit (October 1996) by the presidents of the main unions was met with strong criticism from the rank and file. The policy of "concertation," or constructive dialogue between the government, bosses, and the unions, had reached its objective limit (but not the subjective one, which seems to be infinite!).

It is in that context, with brutal austerity policies enforced by a party that had enjoyed the support of many activists in the social movements, combined with large mobilizations against those policies, that the need for a political alternative became obvious to many. After a few preparatory meetings, hundreds of activists met in 1998 to create the Rassemblement pour l'alternative progressiste (RAP). But this organization had a hard time breaking completely from the PQ and only supported a handful of candidates in the general election held in November.

Meanwhile, the former Québec section of the New Democratic Party (NDP, Canada's Social-Democrats), which had changed its name to Parti de la démocratie socialiste (PDS) in order to underline its differences with the federal party (notably

its support for independence), had candidates in most ridings, [5] but only garnered about 0.6 percent of the vote. A lot of work still needed to be done.

A new global movement

While RAP and PDS struggled to create an alternative to the left of the PQ, the women's movement and antipoverty groups continued building on the success of the 1995 march and worked toward a World March of Women for 2000. That event was a great success, with 40,000 participants across Québec, demonstrations in dozens of countries, and five million signatures gathered worldwide for a common set of demands.

Less than a year after the historic Seattle demonstrations against the World Trade Organization, this global movement initiated from Québec was another example of how the tide had changed and a significantly broader section of the population was no longer willing to accept neoliberal policies and inaction on pressing social issues.

Then, in April 2001, close to 100,000 people marched in Québec city against the Summit of the Americas and the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). This mobilization united most progressive movements across Québec around a common focus (no to the FTAA) and a new sense of optimism. The fact that the PQ had supported free trade policies from the start, in the late 1980s, meant that this mobilization was incompatible with the pro-PQ strategy of the union bureaucracy and created further space for an alternative to emerge.

A few days before the summit, a by-election was held in the Montréal riding of Mercier. This could very well have been a non-event, as most by-elections usually are. But a coalition of political groups and parties (including PDS and RAP), as well as some local unions, decided to back an independent candidate under the banner of Union des forces progressiste (UFP). This candidate (Paul Cliche, a retired union staffer) got 24 percent of the vote, which sent a shockwave through the ranks of the

broad Left and pushed hard toward the founding of UFP as a new party the following year.

Then opposition to the Iraq War brought to Montréal the largest demonstrations in any Western country not part of the "Coalition of the Willing," with more than 200,000 people in the street, not once but twice (February and March 2003). We now know that the Liberal Canadian government seriously considered joining said coalition but thought better of it in the face of such a mass movement. March 2003 also saw an election campaign in Québec, in which UFP got 1 percent of the vote overall, including 5,000 votes for Amir Khadir in Mercier. Khadir, a medical doctor born in Iran, became the first QS MNA five years later.

Founding a new party

In order for these threads to come together and create QS, another push had to come from social movements and the struggle. This took the form, in 2002, of a campaign against the rise of a populist right-wing party called Action démocratique du Québec (ADQ). The rise of that party in the polls signaled a new phase in the long decline of the PQ, still in government at that time. The movement against this shift to the right was called D'abord Solidaires (Solidarity First).

Then, following the election of a provincial Liberal government under Jean Charest in 2003, the activists involved, many of whom had followed the FFQ and Françoise David through the Marches of Women of 1995 and 2000, had to decide what to do next. Many of them decided to embark on the challenging process of engaging with electoral politics. This new group called Option Citoyenne (OC—Citizens Option) rapidly built a membership comparable to that of UFP and called for the founding of a new party.

Negotiations then took place through all of 2005 between UFP and OC, leading to the founding of QS in February of 2006. At the start, the party had 4,000 members and was well received among a significant segment of the public. At its first general

election in 2007, it garnered close to 4 percent of the popular vote, but failed to get into the National Assembly.

The founding meeting proceeded with the election of a first coordinating committee, a collective leadership with gender parity, including Amir Khadir and Françoise David as the two spokespersons. Some individuals obviously had more influence than others in the new formation, but it consciously decided that it would not have a leader in the traditional sense.

Also of note, the initial membership of the party was very well balanced in terms of gender and generations and spread out across all regions, with a concentration in Montréal. Most of the members were of French Canadian ethnicity, descendants of the French colonists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which is also the case for about 75 percent of the Québec population. But there were also a good number of Latinos, Anglos (English-speaking Canadians), and members of various other minorities.

What does QS represent?

As this brief history clearly shows, QS was the result of a combination of two processes, which we could label convergence and emergence. On the convergence side, several organizations had to come together and overcome their differences in order to create a broader party. At the same time, new layers of activists made the leap from movement activism to electoral politics: what we can call emergence. This dual process went through several iterations before leading to the critical mass making it possible for the Left to break from its marginal position and gain the ability to get people elected in spite of the "first past the post" system.

"Uniting the Left" by itself would not have been sufficient; the move toward electoral politics by hundreds of social movement activists, sick and tired of having the doors of parliament shut in their faces, and their demands rejected out of hand in the name of the neoliberal consensus, was abso-

lutely necessary. At the same time, the established Left groups, with their experience of electoral politics and programmatic debates, provided the frame around which these new layers of activists could get organized rapidly and meet new challenges.

What does it stand for?

The QS views on the Québec national question may seem innocuous at first glance but constitute a program for a democratic revolution, which rests on the potentially explosive convergence of the national struggle with social and environmental struggles. The key proposal in that part of the program is the election of a Constituent Assembly, which would be mandated to draft a constitution for Québec following a vast public consultation. This would be followed by a referendum asking the people to support this new constitution and make Québec an independent country.

It also distinguishes itself from the PQ by standing in complete solidarity with the struggles of indigenous First Nations (for self-government, against capitalist pillaging of resources, etc.) and committed to international solidarity. For example, QS is the only party in Québec to endorse the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign on Palestine and oppose the trade agreement with Israel.

The QS election platform and its unfinished program are reflective of the complexity of its origins, the diversity of its membership, and the contradictions inherent in mass movements in a wealthy liberal capitalist society. Some of its proposals are certainly compatible with the capitalist order, like investing in green energy and public transit or defending human rights. Others are much more subversive, like the ban on lockouts or the creation of workers' cooperatives in response to plant closures.

On the spectrum of Left politics, we could position QS as radical reformist, or implicitly anticapitalist. Nothing in its program is explicitly revolutionary, but the long list of reforms and the solid principles they are based on are very far from the type of so-

cial liberal politics we have seen from Labour and Socialist parties in Europe or the NPD in Canada.

The formulation created to reflect this orientation is "going beyond capitalism" (*dépasser le capitalisme*). What is meant by capitalism in this expression is not very clear; neither is what going beyond it concretely means. For some members of the party, capitalism is about greed and bad policies and going beyond it means adopting good policies and limiting the influence of greedy corporations over society and governments. For others, capitalism is a global system, dominating our society and shaping the state, and going beyond capitalism means imagining and creating a post-capitalist society and a radical democracy.

So far, these two main tendencies have managed to work together very well, united against right-wing parties and austerity policies. One could qualify QS as a united front party, with reformists and revolutionaries working together to achieve common goals. But for the full dynamic of a united front to be at play, there is a need to better organize and activate the revolutionary minority. The active involvement of revolutionaries was made possible, although not encouraged, by the structure of the party. Members are allowed to form collectives, based on any type of affinity they may have, including a full political program or tradition. This makes it possible for revolutionaries to organize without being attacked for "factionalism" or accused of forming a party within the party. On the other hand, those collectives don't have delegates at party meetings or the right to put forward motions, but have the right to distribute materials, which limits their ability to influence debates and encourages members to channel their involvement in riding and regional associations instead.

In spite of that, many revolutionary socialists are involved in the party because they can see beyond the ambiguities in the program and understand that QS, being deeply rooted in the working class and oppressed groups and their struggles, is more likely to radicalize than to rally to neoliberalism when push comes to shove. But this cautious opti-

mism is not simply a prediction. It is what socialists inside QS are working on, consciously and sometimes collectively, as with the formation of the Ecosocialist Network (Réseau écosocialiste) in March 2013, following the massive student strike of 2012.

QS and federal politics after the Orange Wave

Québec Solidaire is involved in provincial politics and doesn't have a sister organization at the federal level. But the Canadian state cannot be ignored and the evolution of federal politics can have a significant impact on social and environmental struggles as well as on the ideological climate.

A recent development at that level which poses a challenge for the Left in Québec is the surprise election of a majority of social-democratic NDP [6] candidates in Québec ridings at the last federal election, in May 2011. This has been referred to as the Orange Wave (orange being the color associated with the NDP). It was the first time since the founding of the sovereigntist Bloc québécois (BQ) in 1990 that another party won a majority of the 75 Québec seats in the House of Commons. In fact, the BQ collapsed, with less than a quarter of the vote and only 4 seats.

For QS, federal politics pose a significant challenge. It is torn between its commitment to independence, which leads some of its members to support the sovereigntist Bloc Québécois (BQ), and its opposition to the hegemony of the procapitalist PQ in provincial politics; the activist base of the PQ and the BQ being mostly made up of the same people. In 2011, QS called for opposition to the ruling conservatives, without explicitly endorsing either the NDP or the BQ. In the next federal election, which is scheduled for November 2015, this tactical discussion will take place in a radically different context, with most incumbents being NDP and the main challenge being to deny the Conservatives another term to implement brutally antiunion and antieconomic policies, as well as racist and sexist policies.

The BQ, which cannot form the federal government because of its regional and separatist nature, had been led for most of its short history by Gilles Duceppe, a former union staffer, and a team well connected to sections of the labor movement. It received the explicit and active support of the Québec Federation of Labor (FTQ, the largest union body in the province) in several elections including the last one. This means that the union movement in Québec will soon have to decide if it backs the federalist NDP, with its deep roots in the union movement across Canada, or stick to its traditional support for the sovereigntist but increasingly irrelevant BQ.

The recent announcement of the official registration of a provincial NDP in Québec could also complicate things. But there are no clear signs of this possible new division in the Québec Left becoming a real factor. Many QS activists are also involved in the NDP and so the federal NDP would have a lot to lose in alienating the QS base by engaging in provincial politics.

What next?

2014 is increasingly looking like a pivotal political year for Québec. The PQ minority government, after abandoning most of its progressive election promises and getting back to its deep commitment to neoliberal budget and economic policies, is attempting to gain political momentum by playing the identity card. Their new series of proposals for a "values charter" (now Bill 60) are taking advantage of a lack of clarity in Québec on the issue of the secular nature of the state and public institutions as well as the lack of a clear resolution to the media created "crisis" of religious accommodation in 2007, in order to foster divisions between the French speaking and historically massive Catholic majority of the population and several religious and cultural minorities, with a special emphasis on Muslim women who wear hijabs, orthodox Jews, and Sikhs. The spearhead of that divisive tactic is the proposed ban on wearing "conspicuous religious symbols" for all workers in the public service

and provincially funded institutions like schools, hospitals, and municipalities. More than 600,000 jobs would be affected by that ban.

Many analysts have agreed that this is a strategy aimed at turning the fifty-four-seat minority PQ government into sixty-three-seat or bigger majority by rallying various strands of Québec nationalism and undermining the third party, the neoliberal and moderately nationalist Coalition avenir Québec (CAQ). But this strategy has already backfired, causing divisions in the sovereignty movement and alienating many members of various minorities who can no longer identify with the PQ and its cause. The resignation of Maria Mourani (the only woman and member of a cultural minority left in the five-member caucus of the BQ), followed by her conversion to federalism, is symptomatic of this situation.

Fortunately, an increasingly vocal section of the movement for Québec independence is already denouncing that proposal as being very bad for the national cause, sacrificed for the convenience of narrow electoral calculations by the PQ.

In this new polarization between an ethnocentric and pessimistic nationalism and a progressive and pluralistic movement for independence, QS could emerge as the main party that still embodies the struggle for national liberation. Mass struggles against the integration of Québec in the oil and gas industrial complex centered around Alberta's tar sands, which the PQ government now favors, could also play a key role in continuing the tradition of mobilizations which made QS possible and push the party to new heights. But whatever the future has in reserve, it is preferable to be facing it together in QS than isolated without it. The struggle continues.

Further reading about Québec politics, Québec Solidaire, and the Réseau Écosocialiste

In French

www.ecosocialisme.ca – The Réseau Écosocialiste website

www.quebecsolidaire.net – Official site of Québec Solidaire

www.pressegauche.org – Main alternative news source for the Québec Left

www.leblogueursolidaire.blogspot.ca – Benoit Renaud's blog

In English

www.rabble.ca – Main online news sources for the English-speaking Canadian Left

www.socialistproject.ca – Site of a socialist collective with some articles on Québec, including: www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/286.php

www.socialist.ca – Online news site of the International Socialists (Canada) with ongoing coverage of Québec politics and social movements

www.rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/nora-loreto – Blogger based in Québec city, member of Réseau Écosocialiste

www.socialistvoice.ca/?p=896 – A detailed account of the 2009 QS convention, discussing the national question and secularism

Some historical background on socialists and the Québec question

www.socialisthistory.ca/Remember/Profiles/MicheMill.htm

www.socialisthistory.ca/Docs/1961-/Quebec/Quebec-Res-1975.htm

*From **International Socialist Review**.*

CLIMATE CHANGE

IPCC recognizes inequality as a key for "climate risk". But we must go much further than that.

ALEXANDRE COSTA ·

It is common for the socialist left to neglect the issue of climate change. But this is a very serious mistake. We insist that seeking answers to the central question of the ecological crisis in general (and in particular the climate crisis) is crucial to the struggle of the working classes and the poor in the 21st century. After all, the fight to avoid a catastrophic outcome to this crisis engendered by capitalism is the fight to safeguard the material conditions for survival with dignity of humankind. No Socialism is possible in an isolated country. No Socialism is possible while keeping sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia and xenophobia. Socialism is not possible on a scorched Earth.

Are IPCC assessments reliable?

They mostly are. The role of the IPCC is to survey the scientific literature, in order to compile the current and most advanced knowledge in the area of climate and its impacts. Their reports are scientific compendia of high quality and of great value, not only for academic purposes. More than that, unlike the myth that climate change deniers attempt to spread, trying to discredit the scientific community, the IPCC reports are anything but "alarmist" or "catastrophist". Instead, the language is very moderate, conservative and timid, belying the magnitude of the problem they address.

These reports leave no doubt about the extent and depth of the changes that occur in the Earth's climate system nowadays, nor regarding their causes. The planet is warming, the polar ice caps and glaciers have shrunk, the seas are rising and acidifying,

extreme events (heat waves, floods, droughts, hurricanes) have become more frequent and/or intensified. These are facts. Just as it is a fact that there is no other plausible cause for this warming than the excess of greenhouse gases in the Earth's atmosphere, i.e., CO₂ produced by burning fossil fuels (oil, coal and natural gas), but also methane, nitrous oxide (both associated with agriculture) and halocarbons. In particular, the concentration of CO₂ has grown over 40 % since the pre-industrial period (around 280 parts per million, or ppm) and in a year or two will exceed 400 ppm in the annual average (already in 2014 it will be above this number for several months).

There is a broad consensus within the Climate Science community that an average temperature rise of several degrees will worsen this whole picture so much that Earth's climate may become quite hostile. This almost certainly will become an irreversible path, if global warming surpasses 2°C, which is expected to happen after a concentration of 450 ppm CO₂ is exceeded. It is noteworthy that the projections presented by the IPCC have been confirmed or underestimate the pace of the changes: the reality of rising sea levels and especially the loss of sea ice in the Arctic is much more serious than previously thought.

Inequality in emissions, inequality in benefits inequality in impacts

"All aspects of food security are potentially affected by climate change, including food access, utilization, and price stability"; "Climate change over the 21st century is projected to increase displacement of people"; "Climate change can indirectly increase risks of violent conflicts in the form of civil war and

inter-group violence by amplifying well-documented drivers of these conflicts such as poverty and economic shocks"; "Throughout the 21st century, climate-change impacts are projected to slow down economic growth, make poverty reduction more difficult, further erode food security, and prolong existing and create new poverty traps, the latter particularly in urban areas and emerging hotspots of hunger".

In these words, the IPCC report on impacts, adaptation and vulnerability identifies as clearly as in no other previous report, the possible breadth and depth of social impacts, recognizing the real possibility of extreme deepening of the problems of hunger, water supply, deaths from severe weather events, migration, conflicts, etc.

The report understands that the impacts on society are a combination of climatic factors and how much you are "exposed" and "vulnerable" to these factors. It is quite obvious that these last two aspects have to do with the deep inequality between rich and poor, between the central capitalist countries and the periphery.

But it is also evident that the report does not go all the way in their conclusions, saying only "transformations in economic, social, technological, and political decisions and actions can enable climate-resilient pathways" (in fact it goes almost nowhere). OK, what transformations are these? What are these pathways? How we can achieve them?

In addition to the unfairness in impacts, climate change is a matter of inequality, of class struggle at its roots. The extraction, sale and use of fossil fuels is dominated by a handful of companies (7 of the 11 largest companies in the world are petrochemical and their total annual revenues surpass France's GDP) and propelled the growth of the capitalist economy, accumulation and concentration to unimaginable levels.

Also, the wealth created based on the energy from fossil sources mostly benefited a minority of countries (mainly Europe and USA) and, of course, a minority within them. These countries have much

greater capacity to adapt to the serious problems inevitably arising from the warming of the climate system. Furthermore, the rich within them have much better adaptation potential than the poor. And the gap is only going to widen between global elites and the broad masses in impoverished countries in the periphery of capitalism, indigenous peoples, the African countries and island countries, etc. under a scenario of reduced freshwater availability and agricultural productivity, more floods, droughts and wildfires, increased erosion and coastal flooding. This is a reality that contrasts sharply with the illusions sold by "green capitalism" (two words that cannot go together), which says that we all inhabit "the same ship". Of course, this analogy is meaningless, unless it is based on Titanic, whose closed gates prevented third-class passengers from having access to lifeboats, while a good part of the first class escaped.

Finally, the accumulation of CO₂ in the atmosphere (along with the chemical and radioactive contamination of the global ecosystem) clearly demonstrates the "metabolic imbalance" between industrial production of material goods and the ability of natural ecosystems to process the wastes from this production.

Recognizing the material on the physical basis of climate change, the IPCC acknowledged the need to impose strict limits on fossil fuel use, to prevent an extremely dangerous and irreversible process, which turns out to be a spiral in which no adaptation is possible. But it does not state how we can enforce those limits, in a situation where the corporations own fossil fuel reserves that, if burned, would be sufficient to massively exceed the barrier of a 2°C global warming (or 450 ppm CO₂) and still madly open new sources of exploitation, whether the Brazilian pre-salt layer, the Arctic, the Alberta tar sands, Chinese coal or the world-wide gas fracking boom.

What policies are needed in face of dramatic climate change? ?

The climate crisis cannot be resolved within the framework of "market solutions": far from it.

The so-called "carbon market", in which the "right to emit/pollute" is treated as a commodity, was revealed as a total deceit. It does not make sense, given the necessary large-scale and accelerated restriction in emissions, to sell a "right" that no one has. It is not much more than a ploy to allow big capitalists in the core countries to benefit from preferential treatment compared to peripheral countries. As in any minimally fair agreement, restrictions on CO₂ emissions in the central capitalist countries must be much higher.

Regarding energy policy, it is also not possible to bet on false solutions like the construction of large dams (which, in addition to the emissions of CO₂ and methane due to the decomposition of organic material in the flooded area, produce a number of other deleterious socio-environmental impacts) or nuclear power (which is not renewable, produces waste that remains radioactive and dangerous for long periods, risks accidents such as Fukushima, and may promote the proliferation of nuclear weapons).

Also it is not sufficient to introduce renewable sources (wind, solar) in the energy matrix. Today, in most cases, they have simply been added to the matrix as part of the "eternal growth" of capital, rather than replacing fossil (and nuclear) power plants. Moreover, it is common that renewables are being adopted following the capitalist pseudo-rationality, sparking conflicts with traditional populations and/or damaging coastal ecosystems, such as the shoreline zone of Northeast Brazil.

For a successful exit strategy for the climate crisis, one needs to move beyond blending renewable sources generated in medium and large units (already installed hydropower, wave power, tidal, geothermal, wind and solar). Even adopting strict measures to minimize its impacts, they are often distant from the consumption site, leading to losses in transmission lines and other problems. Thus, one must invest in a decentralized system in which

cities generate a significant portion of the energy they consume, with a large contribution from solar photovoltaic generation at domestic/small scale (an association of producers/consumers, or a "solar communism").

Concerning transportation, the replacement of diesel and gasoline-powered vehicles, by agrifuel-powered ones or even by electric cars does not offer the slightest mirage of a decent solution. Corn and sugarcane ethanol as well as a large variety of biodiesel sources often come from monoculture and agribusiness, with strong effects on food security, invasion of small landowners, indigenous peoples and traditional communities, massive use of pesticides and fertilizers. The benefits of electric cars become clearly limited if electricity continues to be generated mostly by coal power plants (whose environmental impacts include not only CO₂ emissions, but also those from mining and other pollutants) and if traffic congestion is not addressed. The perspective is to break up the paradigm of individual transportation altogether, combining the struggle for free movement and the defense of mobility and urban quality of life, promoting a radical turn towards public, free, high-quality, non-pollutant, collective transportation combined with other modalities (e.g. bicycles) to serve the interests of the majority and at the same time drastically reducing the associated emissions.

It is clear that production by sectors such as fossil fuel industry, the automobile industry (not to mention the armaments industry), contributing to the myth of "GDP growth", identified as an increase in overall wealth and, worse, life quality, must be completely reorganized, so that they turn to meet the needs of restructuring the energy and transport infrastructure. We need to show that a real protection of workers' job security dwells in a thorough, profound shift about what is produced and how, along with a fundamental change from private, vertical, authoritarian capitalist management to collective, common, radically democratic socialist decision-making.

Given that most of the fossil reserves must remain untouched, a measure to be taken is the immediate expropriation of all fossil fuel companies as collective property with democratic management by society. In parallel, it is necessary that agriculture shifts from agribusiness to family farming and other small-scale food production, such as urban farming cooperatives, backyard gardens, etc., with strong encouragement to agriculture free of chemical fertilizers (great source of nitrous oxide, the third greenhouse gas in importance, behind CO₂ and methane). Deforestation, still the major source of emissions in many tropical countries, needs not only to get down to zero, but to be reversed by the recovery of degraded areas.

Is eco-socialism a petit-bourgeois thing? Is ecology the opium of the people?

Of course we disagree with any assertion of this type, but we regret that some who claim a "left" political position (or worse, a "radical left" position) spout this type of nonsense. Unfortunately, it shows that opinions that combine ignorance and bigotry and distance themselves completely from the concrete reality of capitalism in the twenty-first century are very much present amongst socialists.

The ecological crisis (of which the climate crisis is the most global expression) is a manifestation of a stage of capitalist development in which it advances over the last expanding frontiers possible within the Earth, in search of the resources it devours in the industrial process. Doing so, it exceeds natural limits and preys on the environment that sustains human society as if it were boundless. At the same time, it becomes more violent, as it inveighs unambiguously against the "obstacles to development" (indigenous people who "disturb" the expansion of agribusiness or mining, or poor populations located in places sought by construction and land speculation, in the cities).

The radical socialist left is very much aware that, in order to promote substantial changes in society, occupying positions in the bourgeois state (bureaucratic, impermeable to popular participation, with

elections dominated by economic power, corrupt, structurally constituted to serve the ruling classes) is not even close to a solution. But for a large sector claiming this political position, the perception that the state apparatus is not neutral and that one cannot just put it to work "in the service of workers" is not extended to the productive base of society. The transition to socialism would take place mainly (or mostly) via the simple exchange of ownership of the means of production, putting them to "produce in the workers' interests" as if technologies, methods of work organization, options for energy sources, etc. were neutral.

This is false. In addition to the more obvious contradictions (the armaments industry, for example), not all production now reigning in capitalism should be maintained, qualitatively (what to produce) or quantitatively (how much to produce). In the long term, Socialism should not produce goods that lead to environmental and climatic imbalance as we have now under capitalism, as this puts into question the permanence of our own species. It must be clear that fossil fuels and nuclear power have no place in a socialist society. The logic of overproduction of luxuries and planned obsolescence must also be overcome and the volume of production of material goods itself must respect the limits imposed by the flows of matter and energy in the Earth system. This involves the recycling of waste from the production process and replacement of materials and energy resources available for so that production in a sustained manner. The mere substitution of property relations without advancing this set of issues (and also in human relationships beyond the terrain of work and production, where prejudice and oppression, incompatible with Socialism, stubbornly reside), given the depth of the revolutionary changes needed, appears as a veneer of reform, rather than genuine social revolution!

One cannot reconcile capitalism and sustainability, but it is not permissible, for the sake of immediate and long-term interest of the social majorities, to have Socialism not address the ecological issues as

central. This is a necessary reckoning, not only with global ecocide promoted now by capitalism, but also with environmental disasters (Chernobyl, the Aral Sea, lakes of Siberia) perpetrated by the same "actually existing socialism" that murdered revolutionary leaders, massacred ethnic groups and created indecent bureaucratic privileges. Ecosocialism, in this sense, appears as a strategic goal for the rev-

olutionary left that is in tune with the needs of the twenty-first century. It is far more radical than traditional and dogmatic "left" thinking supposes it is.

LINKS:

IPCC Physical Basis Summary for Policy Makers:

IPCC Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability Summary for Policy Makers

Treacherous aggression of the forces of the counter-revolution

Treacherous aggression of the forces of the counter-revolution against the fighters of the People's Liberation Faction,

They are killing the revolution and revolutionaries in the name of Islam

We have already emphasized the danger that is threatening the popular revolution, which is being surrounded today by various counter-revolutionary forces (the regime one side and the islamists and jihadists reactionary forces on the other side). These latter work to abort and strike the popular revolution in every area of our country.

For example, a number of armed islamist forces have been trying to impose an Islamization of the revolution and of the minds by extremist, exclusionary and even Takfiri methods. With the of rise extremists and fundamentalists, they prepare and are trying to impose by force a form of religious extremism on the popular masses, instead of the popular moderate religiosity characterizing the Syrian society, in all the regions they are present. Moreover, they repress the revolutionary popular movement and its grassroots bodies, while trying to impose also a social behaviour of an obsolete era in an attempt to root out everything that the Syrian people has stood up and struggle for, we mean the overthrow of the ruling authoritarian regime and build a modern democratic State based on freedom, equality and justice for all Syrians.

What happened on April 12 2014 is a living example of the practices of the fascist forces hostile to the revolution and acting against our people and fighters who reject all forms of tyranny, injustice

and humiliation. A group of fighters of the « People's Liberation Faction», while traveling from Hama to Aleppo to support comrades in arms and of the cause to confront the continued attacks of the regimes forces, were stopped at a check point controlled by an Islamist extremist faction, said to belong to Jabhat al Nusra. Two of our fighters came to reach an understanding with the fighters of the check point, who asked them their names and affiliation and sects. Our comrades told them that they are « People's Liberation Faction» and that they were from various sects. Some of the fighters at the check-point then demanded to all the militants from religious and ethnic minorities to surrender their arms to them. The comrades refused this categorically. The fighters at the check-point started pointing their arms at the face of our fighters and then opened fire against them, which led to a clash between us and them. Three of their fighters fell during the clash, while two of our comrades were martyred, Ahmed and Rami, and a third was wounded.

This treacherous attack, from a fascist group that claims to be with the revolution while practicing these forms of ugly assault on the revolutionaries, on our people, its militants who carry the flag of the People's Revolution and the fighters who stand with all humility and are dedicated to carry the flag of our people's revolution, and who struggle for all the popular masses, without discrimination on the basis of race or religion or gender, for the liberation from the yoke of the Assad family's ruling regime, is an indication of a serious threat to our popular revolution and the future of our country. These actions can't just be scrolled on the organs of the revolution or tolerated. The claim to support the revolution on an autocratic, bloody and sectarian basis means killing the revolution, and resembles completely

the regime's behavior, against which our people revolted, and still are.

The people that revolted against one of the worst bloody regimes will not accept that new fascists, who do not differ from the other tyranny in anything, kill their revolution. Our popular revolution will overthrow the criminal regime and each counterrevolutionary fascist force.

– **No return to the era of humiliation, oppression and tyranny.**

– Glory to our martyrs and the martyrs of the popular revolution

– The overthrow and shame for the ruling regime and all the counter-revolutionary fascist forces

– The revolution continues

– We remain faithful to our pledge

– All power and wealth to the people

People's Liberation Faction

Revolutionary Left Current in Syria

April 14, 2014

*Translated into English and published on the blog
Syria Freedom Forever.*

INDIA

Resist the Sangh Parivar-BJP and their allies, build a working class alternative

RADICAL SOCIALIST ·

The Fascism of the Sangh Parivar

We call the Sangh Parivar fascist for serious reasons and not just as a term of abuse, and we argue that certain definite tasks follow from this analysis. They are an ideologically based formation, for whom an ultra-chauvinist Indian nationalism is to be built by presenting Muslims (and people of other religions) as enemies of the nation. They have created hostility to democracy within their cadres and followers as well, pushing a casteist, hierarchical social order as the best form, and creating an autocratic system within their own organisations. At the same time, they have consistently held out to the ruling class the offer of support for breaking down all working class powers, and the creation of a powerful bourgeois India. None of this is mere rhetoric. The consistency with which the Sangh Parivar has treated minorities needs to be understood and always remembered. In 1947-8, after having stood aside from the freedom struggle, the RSS launched a bid to turn the newly independent India into a sectarian Hindu state to parallel the sectarian Islamic state of Pakistan. It was only the backlash of the murder of Gandhi that stopped them. In 1989, Advani's campaign over the Babri Masjid led to riots in 43 cities and towns. In 1992-3, the destruction of the Babri Masjid, in flagrant violation of laws saying ancient historical/archaeological monuments are to be pro-

tected, was followed by frenzied rioting in many parts of India, attacks on minorities. In 2002, there was a massive pogrom in Gujarat, which was a key to the consolidation of the BJP electorally in certain parts of Gujarat.

And these are not aberrations but the tip of the iceberg. The BJP, wherever in power, has sought to marginalise all minorities. In Gujarat, where it has had a sustained stint, it has communalised education, it has extended deep roots in different levels of society over a very long period.

For example, it is well known by now that Gujarat has provided the greatest number of kar sevaks [1] over the years. It is well known that the VHP network is possibly the strongest component of all the arms of the Sangh Parivar in Gujarat. VHP activists are no longer in the category of "lumpens" or extreme fringes of the petty bourgeoisie. Rather, they include considerable numbers of people all the way to the upper middle ages. It is of course a case that communalism is a wider phenomenon and the RSS one organisation. The Gujarat riots of 1969, an entire generation back, had led to the deaths of some 2500 people, and it had been the proud boast then that more Muslims than Hindus had been killed. But the RSS has used riots in a consistent way, to mobilise people as Hindus, and to define the Hindu in a right wing militant manner, for a goal that involves the fascist seizure of power. This sets it apart from any other reactionary organisation, be it a party, a social organisation, which uses communalism as a possible tactic for short term gains.

Gujarat's transformation has had an effect on how the elite have manipulated and mobilised the lower caste and class Hindus. The nature of agrarian

change in Gujarat after independence had led to the steady rise of the Patel category. These were the people who benefited most by the Green Revolution and the White Revolution. The Patel-dominated rich peasantry developed close links with the Gujarati diaspora beyond India. A new axis, between politicians, bureaucrats and businesspersons, with no seeming stake in the preservation of civil society, increasingly became dominant. Also, a very narrow layer of dalit and *adivasi* [indigenous people] middle class, the sole result of over half a century of reservations, seems to have been enfolded by the embrace of this nexus. At the same time, the nature of industrialisation and its limits also needs clearer examination. In Ahmedabad, the rise of new production firms have meant the closing down of 50 and more mills employing some 100,000 workers. To this we should add the fact that much of Gujarat's industrialisation in recent years has been through sectors with no social security, such as the chemicals industry, where radical trade unions had to wage a two-pronged fight (agitation and court battle) just to get a formal declaration of minimum wages. Ankleswar, one of the fast growing areas, has very little civic rights. These frustrations, irregular jobs, lack of social solidarity among people surviving in the informal sector, all made those lower down also turn to alternative for solace. For different reasons, the new elite which was emerging also had no integral world view, and it, too, was seeking alternative moorings. In both cases, the Sangh Parivar provided alternatives. One could cite a Gujarati leaflet of 2002 calling for a boycott of Muslim owned shops and establishments, which claimed that if Muslim shops were boycotted 4 crore rupees would be saved in Kalol town alone, with which Hindu schools could provide free education. Of course, the **Reality** would have been simply a boycott of Muslim shops, as people would have bought the same goods from other shops, owned presumably by Hindus. But the RSS agenda could also be seen in the list, which included mutton shops, and carts selling omelettes.

Violence against the minority, portrayed as enemies, represents the core agenda of the Sangh Parivar. This core agenda has been pursued systematically in Gujarat for many years. At one level it has been pursued by government action aimed at putting minorities to jeopardy. At another level it has been pursued by intensifying hate campaigns within common people. And this long term planning puts paid to all claims, whether by hidden advocates of the Sangh Parivar, or by intellectuals who try to do a balancing act, to the effect that it was Godhra that sparked off the violence, or that without Godhra it would not have happened. The fact that leaflets in tens of thousands, printed in old fashioned treadle machines, were distributed calling on Hindus to kill Muslims within 24 hours, suggests that such leaflets had been printed in advance. The fact that vast stocks of liquefied petroleum gas cylinders had been hoarded and were used for the carnage, or that voter's lists and other official documents were used to identify Muslim houses, Muslim owned shops, and so on, likewise indicates long planning, not a sudden anger due to the Godhra incident.

Another aspect that has been remarked upon in connection with the Gujarat pogrom of 2002 is the adivasi-dalit involvement. There are several ramifications of the dalit-adivasi involvement, and we need to begin by stressing the need to avoid wishful thinking. To stress the troublesome side first: several reports pointed out that dalits, including dalit women, were aligned with the upper castes in the 2002 violence. The, chapter on women's perspective of the PUCL report, says: "Dalit women have, more or less, allied with the upper castes during the violence. This has been seen in areas like Baranpura, Navidharti, Navayard and Fatehpura. This has resulted in the Hinduization of Dalit women on a scale never before witnessed in Vadodara." Since the formation of the RSS was as much a reaction to dalit assertion as it was due to anti-Muslim views. So when in Gujarat, dalits and adivasis do the dirty work for upper caste, upper

class political agenda, it is certainly a gain for the RSS.

But there is the other side. The PUCL report quotes a dalit woman as saying how she has been coerced into not helping Muslims, because the police called her a traitor. Money was also used. But apart from money, there have been other issues. The Baxi Commission recommendations of the 1980s resulted in massive violence targeting not only OBCs but also dalits. Through these agitations, the Brahmin-Bania-Patidar combine came to have a distinct Savarna identity. But the VHP and the RSS were then able to penetrate this bloc and put forward the message that the Savarna identity was inadequate. With rising dalit assertiveness – expressed in many ways, including the revival of the Republican Party, the spread of the BSP through much of India, etc, there was a social threat which had to be neutralised. This was done through an apparently inclusionist, but in fact actually aggressively exclusivist strategy. At one level, as reservations created a small dalit and adivasi middle class, this stratum could be sought to be integrated into the Hindutva fold, made easier by a relatively similar lifestyle in the cities. For the dalit and adivasi middle class, indeed, Hindutva seemed to offer a route to cast off their inferior identity and appear as the equals of the Savarnas. Meanwhile, however, the collapse of Ahmedabad's older industries, commented upon earlier, meant the collapse of local class solidarities between dalits and Muslims even at lower levels. The result was, that even if half-hearted, there was dalit participation.

Finally, however, we need to point to yet another aspect – insecurity faced by dalits and adivasis, and support given by them to Muslims. That dalits and adivasis were not major gainers in the looting that accompanied the attacks has been confirmed by various people. In *The Survivors Speak*, it is recorded that: "The fact-finding team spoke on the phone with Anil Joshiara, an Adivasi leader (mentioned in Samad's testimony above). He confirmed that he had demanded police combing operations to prove that Adivasis have gained little from the looting ex-

cept a bad name. He claimed that the Adivasis who were involved in the violence were only misguided youth." The picture that emerges is thus one where the RSS has made inroads, communalised sections of the dalits and the adivasis, but where the battle is far from lost.

With all its complexities, therefore, a picture can be seen, of the systematic communalisation of both state and civil society by the BJP-RSS-VHP-BD for several years. At the level of the state apparatus, there has been gross and blatant interference and a profound communalisation of the apparatus. RSS and VHP figures dominate the entire administration. Police Officers of Muslim origin have been given the type of posting that moves them away from law and order maintenance. Many Muslim police officers are so insecure that they do not wear their nametags. When criminals are Muslims, they are asked specific questions, such as their attitude to Pakistan, their position during partition, etc. And tens of thousands of VHP cadres have been recruited into the Home Guard.

Penetration of civil society has been even more insidious. Since 1998, there has been a systematic development of hate literature. Using the print media as well as the electronic, including massive use of the Internet, cadres of the Sangh Parivar have been whipping up anti-Minority hatred. Circulars sent out by the DG intelligence asked the police to gather information about Christians and Muslims. It was later issued pertaining to Muslims only. This kind of state support emboldened the activists. One year before the mob violence, the Gujarati newspaper *Sandesh* prepared and published a list of names of Muslim hotel and shop-owners. There has been a considerable communalisation of health professionals. Issues in *Medical Ethics*, a journal concerned with ethical medical practice, wrote in its editorial : "The fact that the medical associations did not galvanise themselves for relief work indicates how deeply the medical profession has been affected by the sharp communal divides being promoted by political interests....Indeed, the medical community is becoming polarised, both in Gujarat

and elsewhere in the country. We hear doctors confide that the minorities "needed to be taught a lesson".

At the same time, Gujarat also shows the Sangh and its underlying gender vision. This requires addressing, because the BJP has not been averse to using rhetoric that makes it seem modern and progressive. It has talked about a Uniform Civil Code, and it has talked about supporting the demand for one-third representation of women in Parliament. But behind this polish lies a highly retrograde politics. The Gujarat pogroms of 2002 showed brutally that for the Sanghis, women who are Muslims are fit to be abused and then killed. The conviction of Maya Kodnani shows that women cadres were also trained in the same kind of politics.

The image of women created, and the politics behind it, needs to be understood clearly. Hindu women are shown, first, as victims of Muslim lust and eternal projects of rape. Even in Gujarat 2002, this was clearly present, when communal and totally false reports were published, to the effect that Hindu women had been taken off the train at Godhra and raped inside a Madrasa. This became the false plea for a so-called tit for tat attack, whereby women in numerous cases were raped, and then, in many cases, mutilated or murdered.

This gendered politics went back to the pre-2002 period. In July 1998, the Gujarat government set up a Police Cell for Monitoring Inter-Religious Marriages. Haren Pandya, then the minister of state for home, announced this in the assembly, and justified it on the ground that such marriages were not made of free choice but were forced on Hindu women for ulterior motives. Communalism Combat published a confidential document circulated by the Hindutva forces in February 2000. It said, among other things: "The main attack on Hindu Samaj is that our sisters of tender age are being abducted by offering them inducements and allurements and then they are made to sign the marriage register after getting converted by force. Hundreds of Hindu girls are being (converted to Islam) made Muslims like this in Gujarat state."

So if Hindu women were weak victims, what was to be done? On one hand, Hindu men were exhorted to avenge the women. They were told that raping and killing Muslim women was nothing more than what Islamism deserved. And on the other hand, Hindu women were exhorted to train themselves, to become warriors in defence of community –cum-nation. This had led, already in the past, to the formation of the Rashtra Sevika samiti, and in more recent times, to other organisations like the Durga Vahini etc, and role models like Uma Bharati, Suddhvi Rithambhara etc. Women have been massively inducted in the Hindu Right and pushed towards violence from the period of the Ram mandir agitation. But it was only this time, in Gujarat, that this bore fruit fully. The fullest report on the role of Hindu women has come from the PUCL, reporting on Baroda. The final version mentions a number of points, summarised below.

The years of hate campaign and propaganda about Muslims overtaking Hindus numerically, have resulted in women sanctioning and taking part in violence. They defended the violence saying that "they had it coming" etc. "They have 4 wives and 20 children, they will overrun us, they don't use contraception etc. They are taking away all our business, we are becoming poor." Taught from birth that Muslim men are all rapists and that Muslim women are their collaborators, they turned in increasing numbers to violent, with ample social sanctions. The line between hating Muslims to condoning their killing and encouraging it has been crossed, at least partly on account of the fear psychosis that centres around the notion of the 'dangerous Other.' Violence had targeted the Muslim female body in ways not seen previously. There was also terrible and sadistic violence directed towards children, including unborn children, in front of their mothers, before the mothers themselves were abused, tortured and killed and burnt. This says something about the Sangh's world view. It would be foolish to ignore this as acts of barbarism by a lunatic fringe, just as it would be generally self-defeating to reduce the politics of the Sangh to mere economic forces

and their hidden pressure. The rape and destruction of the Muslim female body, the orgy of violence on the children, show that the Sangh is serious in implementing Golwalkar's utterance about how the "foreign races" must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, "and must lose their separate existence", or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu Nation, claiming nothing, deserving ...not even citizen's rights." In the outlook of the Sangh and its cothinkers, women are breeders. The destruction of an "alien" race/religion/community is best brought about by destroying its breeders and its future – the women and the children. So it is silly to display any chivalry in times of war. And of course, in the Sangh world-view, the "Hindu Nation" is perpetually at war with the enemy.

Moving beyond the Gujarat 2002 pogroms, too, the Sanghi view on gender is retrograde. Their call for a Uniform Civil code is a play on words. For them, the key issue is uniformity, and gender justice. These forces had opposed tooth and nail the Hindu Code Bill when it had been pushed. So when the demand the UCC, what they mean is the imposition of a Hindu code on Muslims, not a gender just code for all, regardless of religion.

How far state organs, including the judiciary, too, could fall under the spell of this force was brought out by the Gujarat High Court stance during the Best Bakery Case. Best Bakery in Hanuman Tekri area of Vadodara had been one of the worst sites of violence, where, on 1st March 2002, a mob had looted and burnt the bakery and had killed fourteen people in a period of twelve hours. But this was also one case that was well-documented. When the occupants of the attacked building called the police for help a police van arrived about an hour and a half later, drive past the bakery without trying to stop the mob, and then a policeman got off and even incited the mob. The attack intensified thereafter. On 2nd March, Zahira Sheikh, then aged 18, recorded a statement at the site of the incident. She filed an FIR before the police thereafter. But when the trial began, in court witnesses, including

Zahira, the star witness, turned hostile. On the day of Zahira's court appearance the local BJP Member of Legislative Assembly, Madhu Shrivastava, accompanied her to court in a clear gesture of intimidation. The accused were found not guilty. Then came the drama, as Zahira alleged that her testimony had been consciously falsified because she felt threatened. The matter went to the Supreme Court, where the revelations about the nefarious role of the police and the state apparatus came out. A day before the Supreme Court was to hear the matter through a petition filed by the National Human Rights Commission, the Gujarat state government, prodded by the Supreme Court, filed an appeal before the Gujarat High Court challenging the acquittal of the accused, but without asking for a retrial. On 26th December 2003 the Gujarat High Court dismissed the appeal, and a 90 page judgement justifying the acquittal showed that retrial could not be ordered because the prosecution had failed to produce proper evidence. The judges also passed remarks against anti-communal and human rights activists like Mihir Desai and Teesta Setalvad, and against progressive social movements. Thus, the court stated "This very witness [i.e., Zahira] when examined before the court seems to have stated the truth before the court, but unfortunately, it seems that for some reasons, after the pronouncement of the judgement, they fell in the hands of some, who prefer to remain behind the curtain." And again, the radical activists who had been fighting since the beginning of 2002 to halt the fascists were attacked in no uncertain terms by bringing in a reference to their past roles: "Certain elements failed everywhere, at all levels, and to obstruct the development and progress of the state and trying to misuse the process of law, so far they have not fully succeeded. Sometime back in the name of environment, (a) matter was filed before the apex court in (the) Narmada matter, which was dismissed by the apex court. However, because of the ex parte ad interim order, they were successful in causing huge loss, running into thousands of crores of rupees to the state.... Once again, almost similar attempt is made not only to cause indirect financial loss to the

state, but to create rift between the two communities and spread hatred in the people of the state." Going beyond the specific case in hand, the judge also stated that: "It is most unfortunate that attempt is made to create a false impression not only in the other states but also in the world that Gujarat is a terrorist state, which is factually wrong." Eventually, on April 12, 2004, the Supreme Court ordered the re-trial of the Best Bakery case in Maharashtra, outside the control of Gujarat, and also directed that remarks against Desai, Setalvad etc should be expunged. The language used by the Supreme Court, though restrained as it should be, makes it clear that the SC found the High Court observations to be thoroughly partisan in favour of the Hindutva forces. "Observations should not be made by courts against persons and authorities unless they are essential or necessary for decision of the case. ... Courts are not expected to play to the gallery or for any applause from anyone or even need to take cudgels as well against any one, either to please their own or any one's fantasies." The main judgement was also a clear indictment of the Gujarat state. The Supreme Court held that "When a large number of witnesses have turned hostile it should have raised a reasonable suspicion that the witnesses were being threatened or coerced. The public prosecutor did not take any step to protect the star witness who was to be examined on 17.5.2003 especially when four out of seven injured witnesses had on 9.5.2003 resiled from the statements made during investigation.... The public prosecutor was not acting in a manner befitting the position held by him.... The trial court should have exercised power under Section 311 of the Code and recalled and re-examined witnesses as their evidence was essential to arrive at the truth and a just decision in the case." This is enough to show that the judicial apparatus as well as the executive in Gujarat had become sufficiently soft on the Hindutva forces, to put it in an understatement.

So the Gujarat Model that Modi boasts of contains in equal measure capitalist development unchecked by the least concern for the toilers, and a criminal

degree of communalization of society and state. This pattern, to lesser extents, has also been followed in other provinces, as RSS instigated violence in Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, etc show.

We have characterised the Sangh Parivar as a fascist force. However, this requires certain clarifications. Classical fascism arose in a period of revolutions and counter-revolutions. While the major ingredients of the Sangh Parivar have structural similarity, the fact that for over six decades, India has had a functioning bourgeois democracy has meant that the Sangh Parivar has functioned in ways distinct from the Nazis or the Italian fascists. Secondly, in Italy and in Germany, there was the very real threat of proletarian revolution. In India, the working class is not organised, and there is no significant revolutionary party capable of leading a proletarian revolution. This is a major reason why the ideology and organisation of the Sangh Parivar has not often been attractive to large sections of the Indian capitalist class. There have however been potentials for the RSS to use bourgeois democracy to force itself onto the bourgeoisie. Its long term strategy of penetrating civil society, and the fact that a good part of the Indian capitalist class has shared its upper caste and Hindutva ideology to a certain extent, has meant that there have been points of contact. As a result, from the 1980s, when it was clear that the Congress was in decline and there was a need to look for an alternative, stable bourgeois force, it could project itself in opposition to the motley crew of the Janata Party and the Janata Dal. The drawback lay in the RSS insistence on aggressively carrying out its communal policies, much as for the Nazis anti-semitism was not mere rhetoric to garner votes but a core part of their agenda. But what has been called the "soft hindutva" of the Congress meant that there was no major resistance within the mainstream of bourgeois politics. And from the bourgeoisie, whose appetite has grown with the successes of globalisation, the balancing acts of the Congress, which, under pressure from allies, from its own many-hued constituency, temporises, draws back from the extreme measures

demanding by the leaders of the capitalist class, the BJP, and the prospects of a clear cut victory of the BJP, appears a better bet.

Since the Sangh Parivar has been consigned by fate to operate within 'bourgeois democracy' for a far longer time than it had originally envisaged (in 1947-48 it had clearly planned for a fairly swift grab for power, creating a 'Hindu Rashtra' analogous to Jinnah's plan for a 'Islamic State'), it has been compelled to split its operations. The BJP, as the electoral arm, has to look "moderate". Of course, it is "moderate" only if one argues that a hyena is moderate compared to a wolf-pack. One should remember that the Mr. L. K. Advani, hailed these days as a "Statesman", was seen as aggressive as against the "moderate" Mr. Vajpayee back in 1989-1992.

So the issue is not as if there is a "fascist tendency" in the Sangh Parivar, but also a "developmental discourse". The issue is, how is the fascism of the Sangh Parivar going to be utilised for capital? This is where the 'Modi model' is crucial. It is Gujarat, a rapidly industrialising province that is showing, in a small way, what the Sangh Parivar is willing to do for capital.

The Gujarat Model of "Development"

This is the point to understand. Indian capitalism wants Modi, because Modi has shown in a small scale what the fascists want to deliver. In exchange, they are willing to accept the communal violence, the curtailment of rights of minorities, the war on dalits, on women, that may be generated. As for the destruction of democracy, that hardly bothers them, since their definition of democracy is one that does not involve people actually controlling governments. Over the years, the Congress, as well as various provincial governments, have reduced democracy. Now, they are willing to reduce it to even poorer levels, as shown by the entire orientation of bourgeois politics, which we need to also discuss.

The so-called Gujarat Model is based on some "Myths" and some realities.

Myth I: Modi has made Gujarat such a hospitable place, that auto industries are rushing in.

Reality: The Tata's relocated from Singur, where agitation was going on, to Sanand, because Modi offered massive financing and sterner policing. The policing component should be understood easily from the fact that toiling people find it so much more difficult to agitate in Gujarat. But the other component is equally important. The total sops to the Tatas have been estimated at around Rs. 30,000 crores. This included 1100 acres land, and against a Tata investment of 2000 crore rupees, an interest free loan from the Gujarat Government worth 9570 crore rupees. By contrast, the CPI(M) led government of West Bengal had offered to take away peasants' land but give it to the Tatas at a subsidised rate, and give subsidy on power, tax paybacks, and some 200 crore rupees soft loan.

Myth 2 – Gujarat under Modi has had exceptional growth.

Reality – Gujarat has been an industrially growing state for a long time. A look at Gujarat's growth over time, and a comparison with other industrial provinces over time, shows that this is not where Modi really shines. What makes Modi an attractive model is not simply Gujarat's growth, but the blunt way in which Modi has been willing to violate laws. In fact, there are conflicting data, some of which show that the rate of Growth in Gujarat had been higher under Madhavsingh Solanki. But Modi has shown his resistance to the Lokayukta, his willingness to flout environment related laws, and his willingness to take on labour and peasant rights head on. Ever since the crisis of 2008, which hit the developed world so hard, the Indian capitalist class has seen its own growth get curtailed. While the slowdown in growth in India is not as huge as in the advanced countries (indeed India and China remain the hopes for the capitalist world, with their large markets), the capitalists are unhappy at the decline. What the capitalists want is a strong state, which will ensure that there is a sharper shift of wealth from labour to capital, that it will be the relatively small sized well-to-do middle class that gets

a hike in its purchasing power while the toiling masses are exploited.

Myth 3 – 2002 was bad, true, but it was an aberration. Since 2003 Modi has kept Gujarat riot free for a decade. Charges of communalism are made with purely electoral motives and are not true.

Reality – There have been recurrent cases of communal violence in Gujarat. In 2006, with the UPA in power in Delhi, Modi was forced to accept military deployment when riots broke out in Vadodara. There have been recurrent communal violence. And more to the point, under Modi, there has been a systematic marginalisation of Muslims. The RSS goal, that if Muslims live in India they must live subordinated to Hindus, is being implemented as far as power in one province can manage.

Myth 4 – Gujarat is only state in the whole India to provide, under Modi, 24x7 and 365 days electricity to almost all of its 18000 villages.

Reality – 100% of Gujarat's villages were electrified by 1996. But there is still a good part of the population which does not get electricity. For 8 % of the population kerosene is still the primary means of lighting.

Why the Capitalists want the BJP

What we are arguing is not that Modi and Gujarat have no capitalist development. What we do argue, is that the Indian capitalist class in its search for a strong right-wing government, has chosen Modi and the BJP. Its historical choice has been the Congress, which was ruling at the head of a coalition for the last one decade too. The economic policies of the congress are often portrayed as centrist, or even centre-left. In fact, it is a deeply rightwing party. Between 1991 and 2014, after all, the Congress has ruled for 15 years, which is about double that of the BJP, or a bit more. In this period, India's economy has grown, and has done so at the cost of the toiling people, with the levels of inequality growing. But given the type of coalition on which the Congress had to rely in the last decade, as well as its own compulsions, it had to put for-

ward certain measures. These included the NREGA, the Food Security Act, and so on. Since the crisis of 2008, however, the bourgeois institutions have been predicting a slowing down of the economy, the need to cut "subsidies" (a word which in the bourgeois lexicon only means assistance for the poor, while subsidies to the rich, like the massive amount given to Adani, or to Tata, by Modi, are not subsidies).

The effect of calling upon the Sangh Parivar will be two fold. From the point of view of the bourgeoisie, the necessary component will be the use of force, without any hesitations, to push the economy to the right.

But at the same time, by pushing Modi, for indeed this time, unlike in 1989 or the 1990s, it has been the Indian capitalist class and not the RSS that took the initiative, the bourgeoisie has indicated its willingness to accept the fascist game plan as well. It was in Vibrant Gujarat summits that the high ranking figures of the ruling class called for making Modi the Prime Minister. It has been the bourgeois media that has portrayed the elections in the manner of a US presidential election, as a contest between Modi and Rahul Gandhi, rather than as voting by crores upon crores of people, constituency by constituency, looking at parties, candidates, past performances, and all that.

The so-called 'secular' or 'non-Hindutva' allies of the BJP, whether the Akali Dal, or Ram Bilas Paswan's LJP, the MDMK, or potentially the TDP in Andhra, by agreeing to form alliances with the BJP, have shown that for them, such changes in front are not major problems, and all rhetoric of resisting fascism can be dropped overnight.

There are, therefore, two aspects of any programme the BJP will promise to carry out. The first part will be a sharpened capitalist offensive involving:

- Destruction of protective labour legislation
- Overthrow of environmental protection laws
- Full support to agribusiness, whether Indian or foreign, in cornering markets, introducing geneti-

cally modified products

- Privatisation of public utilities like electricity and water
- Removal of control on banks

In all these areas, the Congress regime has taken strides. Between 2011 and 2013, collusions between the public sector bank managements and corporate have resulted in over 3 lakh crore rupees being transferred to corporate that have then been shown in bank balance sheets as non-performing assets. Equally, the Congress has changed two Ministers of Environment before finding in Moily a man who understands that in capitalism, especially in its current neoliberal phase, the task of an environment Ministry is to plan the destruction of the environment at the highest profits for capital, rather than for taking the environment seriously. The point is, Modi has shown that he understands all this so much better, and is willing to tackle directly any resistance from any quarters over these matters. The bourgeoisie wants an end to the least concession to the toiling poor, an abolition if possible of NREGA, an end to periodic declaration of pay scale revisions for the government and Public Sector employees, since that becomes a benchmark for the others to aspire to, an end to Dearness Allowance, reasonable rates of EPF interest, and the imposition of higher working hours at low wages in all sectors.

Bourgeois agencies and the campaign for Modi

In many ways, it is the bourgeois agencies that have been trying their best to prepare the country for Modi, to an extent even greater than what the RSS has been doing. We can mention, briefly, three or four modes.

First, there have been the opinion polls. These have been consistently showing that the BJP is ahead. And it is significant that one question constantly asked to people has been, would you prefer Modi as Prime Minister, or would you prefer Rahul Gandhi. As we have already said, this is a parliamentary election, not a Presidential style campaign as in the USA. Moreover, there have been serious doubts

about the value of the opinion polls. It has been revealed that results are being tampered to show the BJP in better light than the raw data really suggests.

In addition, there is the simple thing, that all talks about a "wave" for Modi, is false. Ananda Bazar group, who own ABP News and other TV channels as well as numerous newspapers and periodicals, has in recent times been an enthusiastic convert to the Modi cause. But its ABP-Nielsen opinion poll suggested the NDA would get 236 seats (out of 543), and the BJP alone would get 217. If true, this would of course be a big rise for the BJP. Let us remember, that in 2004 also, the ruling class had opted to support the BJP. That was one election when it was more flush with funds than the Congress. And at that time the NDTV-Indian Express opinion poll, carried out by AC Nielsen, predicted 287-300 seats for the NDA, while in **Reality** the NDA received 181 seats. In 2009, predictions had mostly favoured the Congress, but by a very small lead. In fact, the UPA got 262 seats, and enough outside support to ensure that even the TMC pulling out did not upset a full five year term. When a sting operation revealed in February this year how opinion polls are being manipulated, the ABP group's newspapers did not even report the news.

Second, the media has been used in ways beyond the opinion polls. So called national newspapers are upset at the electoral success of the Aam Admi Party, not for any particular stance of the AAP or Kejriwal, but simply because it threatens to upset the simple bipolarity and the consequent irreversibility of Modi's march to power that they have been "predicting" (actually, trying to prepare). Kejriwal's attacks on the Congress had been welcomed by this section of the media, for it thought the AAP would only eat into the Congress votes. But the Delhi elections showed that in some urban seats, the AAP had the potential to halt the march of the BJP. Then, during his Gujarat tour, Kejriwal started attacking Modi aggressively. And he pointed out, without being too polite about it, that sec-

tions of the media were helping Modi by projecting the false claims about Gujarat's phenomenal development. Immediately, there was a violent reaction. News reports about the AAP are coming with a totally negative slant, while certain TV channels are allowing BJP, Congress, and other party spokespersons to use even abusive language against AAP. This is not about the precise nature of AAP's politics. This is about the media baring its fangs because the spuriousness of its neutrality has been bluntly called into question by Kejriwal. The media is either owned by major corporate players, or it is dependent on them for advertisements. The big capitalist houses have a symbiotic relationship with the major bourgeois parties (secular, communal, all of them). Parties need bourgeois funding. Capitalists need governments who will do their bidding – and that includes the things like the Modi-Adani or the Modi-Tata linkage, not merely the Congress links with various corporate groups, or the Sahara-SP links. The media takes charges of being linked to parties or bourgeois groups, in its stride, when small revolutionary groups bring these charges. For after all, they can ignore such groups, and if necessary, talk about censorship in the former USSR etc. But they had expected the AAP to be a tame bourgeois player, and a minor one at that, and that is why they are showing their hand so plainly.

Regarding promoting the BJP and Modi, another way the media has been used (has used itself) is to create a focus on corruption and governance in a twisted way, as if it is not the bourgeois system that promotes corruption and it is not all the parties who rule in the interests of a narrow class and the party itself. Instead, they project the Congress alone as corrupt and lacking in ability to govern. What does ability to govern mean? The Congress has of course governed the country in the interests of the ruling class. But it has been unable, due to electoral constraints, to do as much as the more aggressive figures of the ruling class want. Its lack of governance means in effect, that it has not been able to stop the payment of Dearness Allowance to

government employees, or it has only reduced public spending on health and education instead of 100% privatization. The bourgeois media has consistently played down the corrupt linkages between the BJP and capitalist bosses, and the corrupt cases in which BJP leaders have been implicated. Let us remember: Modi amended the Lokayukta Act to bring it as an institution under the very government it is supposed to be monitoring. BJP governments have been as implicated in corrupt practices as any other bourgeois government. But they have been far less reported. All this is not surprising. The bourgeoisie wants to present the voters with a "choice" – in some years they highlight communalism to push the Congress. Now, with a need for a strongman tactics and a prime Minister who will promise to deliver that, they want to project "lack of governance" by the Congress so that people vote for the BJP and its allies.

The stress on "better governance" as opposed to "too much government" is a purely bourgeois stance. The traditional RSS stance is for tight government in certain social domains. But as of now, there is an alliance between the bourgeoisie and the RSS. The RSs knows it cannot simply overturn the Constitution. So it will settle for an NDA government headed by Modi. This is after all a signal that the pogroms of 2002 have been whitewashed by the bourgeoisie. The media are constantly blaring that nothing has happened since 2002 (a lie, as we have shown). So the aggressive face of Hindutva will be made acceptable, sold as the face of young India. And liberals on the right will set themselves the task of squaring the circle. For example, Ramchandra Guha, a supposed Gandhi admirer, who never loses the opportunity to attack communists, or Arundhati Roy, has written in *The Telegraph* that the victory of Modi will not mean any victory of fascism. Indian democracy is too strong. Thus are the liberals "fighting" the right. By throwing in the towel and by arguing that you do not need to fight, since "democracy" is an abstract entity that is so strong. The **Reality** is of course that the move to the right is affecting all bourgeois

parties. Kashmiri students are arrested for applauding the Pakistani cricket team, and the bourgeois parties keep silent. Some actually insist this should be done. Soni Sori is arrested, tortured, and Ankit Garg gets decorated. Democracy is being already restricted every day. The long struggle of Irom Sharmila against the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which enables criminals in uniform to rape and murder at will, is applauded by the bourgeois parties, who refuse to even dilute it, let alone abolish it, as any really democratic society would have done.

Finally, after the recent Cobrapost Sting operation, which showed that BJP leaders had given consciously false assurances to the Supreme Court and had planned the destruction of the Babri Masjid, the "national" media has played down the issue. Instead, it has reported the BJP's demand that the EC must block the sting operation and called it a Congress conspiracy. So it is not the BJP leaders who are criminal conspirators, but the Cobrapost journalists? The failure of bourgeois media in the main to stand by Cobrapost shows that when the bosses demand, the media forgets all talk of freedom of the press and displays a willingness to support the fascists.

What is the Alternative?

Many people are worried about the rise of Modi. But what alternatives do they offer? Both for the hypocritical leaders of the Congress, and for many well intentioned people, and also people who fall in between these two categories, the only answer is to vote Congress. We challenge this argument. Why do we want to oppose fascism? And what do we mean, stop fascism?

We, the working people, have suffered consistently under capitalism. We were exploited before globalisation began, and we were exploited after it, as well. But globalisation and the rise of Indian capitalism has in fact meant an intensification of exploitation. If costs are adjusted, India claims to be the world's third largest economy. But this has come about by increasing the exploitation of the

working classes. Globalisation has not come nicely. It has been made possible by breaking unions, by weakening unions, by creating union free areas. It has seen the widening of disparity between rich and poor. If we do not want to challenge this, if our definition of fascism is such that we are concerned only with keeping Modi anyhow out of power, we will be compelled to surrender repeatedly to the Congress, which, whether alone or in alliance with other so called secular and democratic bourgeois parties, can form an alternative government. But that will mean, they will carry out, even if a little flabbily, the agenda of the bourgeoisie. For the last fifteen years, that is exactly the choice the Indian people have been presented with – 1999, 2004, 2009. The experience of these years re-confirm the historic experience of the working classes everywhere – if in the name of stopping fascism, we accept the leadership of a so-called democratic bourgeoisie, with or without the cover provided by Communist party participation, the interests of the working class suffer. Equally, it is the experience of anti-racist, anti-communal struggles, that only when we take to the streets and confront the communalists and fascists, only when we mobilise working class and other mass forces to resist their thugs, will the state take any positive step. If instead we simply run to the state, shouting, "help, communalist", the state bureaucrats and the police conclude that we are weak, the communalists are strong, so they are better off ignoring the laws and helping the communalists. Moreover, in any bourgeois state, excessive reliance on law and the state machinery in the name of fighting fascism will more often hurt the working people. We do not deny the need to use law and the legal processes, and indeed we do so, but only within limits. This law, this legal process, after all says that to call for a general strike is illegal. Every time a law is passed to prevent violence, it is systematically used mainly against the powerless. It is well known, that as long as the POTA was in existence, its single biggest victims were Muslims. It was automatically assumed that Muslims are terrorists, and whenever one talks about Hindutva terror, there is a hue and cry that

Hinduism cannot be terrorism in any way. The unity among all bourgeois parties in how to use these laws is shown by the fact that over the use of violence in Kashmir and North-East India, the Congress, the BJP, all are in total agreement.

Above all, the Congress has been responsible for an economic policy whose contours are today absolutely clear. Since 1991, the Indian state has looked after Big Business through massive tax breaks and excise/import duty concessions. Indian companies pay an average of 17 per cent tax on their profits, less than one-half the rate in the west. Thanks to reduced taxes, cars and air conditioners cost less in absolute rupees than they did 10 years ago –• inflation notwithstanding.

The single-minded devotion with which capitalist policies have helped business is starkly evident in the growth of India's high net-worth individuals, whose disposable income exceeds \$ 1 million. Their number grew from 61,000 to 83,000 between 2003 and 2005.

Even more shamefully, India has, according to Forbes magazine, the world's fourth highest number of billionaires. India (with 36 billionaires) has just overtaken Japan (24). Their total wealth equals one-fourth of India's GDP! India has three of the world's top 20 billionaires, a number exceeded only in the US (five).

At the other pole, there is steady accumulation of poverty and destitution, aggravated by dispossession and displacement. The neoliberal years have seen the slowest reduction in poverty. But the true extent of deprivation is probably growing faster than before. India's global human development rank is a miserable 126. The cost of basic education and basic medical expenses have shot through the roof, with government withdrawing more and more from these. Only the rich can afford to take medical insurance, without which certain types of ailments cannot be treated, so expensive are they.

Yet, by pushing the Myth of the anti-fascist role of the Congress, the Myth that it is centrist, rather than a deeply rightwing party, its managers have

sought to get electoral support from Muslims, Dalits, Adivasis, toiling people. The last one decade has actually witnessed a rightwing economic policy with sops for the poor, and for marginal groups, thrown in contemptuously. Now, using the corruption issue, the Congress is sought to be dislodged. And the bourgeois solution to corruption is very clearly an undemocratic one. This solution consists of bureaucratic forces (institutions and persons, not elected, not accountable to the people, such as Lokpals and Lokayuktas, various Commissions with formal duties but which are effectively tied to parties and/or do not have effective powers, such as the Human rights Commissions, the Womens' Commissions, etc), law courts (without the jury system which alone can make courts really democratic) and so on. This is why the bourgeoisie has no objections to the BJP.

Only a determined struggle with clear social and political goals fit for toiling people can in the long run resist fascism and improve our lives. And that is why, not just the Congress, but also the other pretenders to the seats, like the Third Front and the Fourth Front, have little to offer to us. We need to look briefly at some of them.

The Bourgeois Oppositions to BJP and Congress

Several regional parties are currently in this position. In Bihar, obviously, the Congress cannot form a pre-poll alliance with both the RJD and the JD (U). so whoever is not in alliance with the Congress will project themselves as an independent option. In Andhra, too, not all the forces can form an alliance with the BJP, and some will not go along with the Congress. But above all, it is the Trinamul Congress, which is now developing hopes of becoming a not merely regional but an all-India party, that is trying to project this. Having decimated the Congress in West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee is aware that her main headache remains the CPI(M), much weakened though it is. And so, she continues to steal its thunder, by taking aggressive postures against the BJP. Yet, one has only to look at her social and economic policies. She has taken on trade

unions. Her government has declared that while it will go on spending sprees for all sorts of outlandish projects it will not give regular Dearness Allowance to government employees and others who get it from the government on the ground that she does not have the necessary funds. Her government, along with Modi's Gujarat government, has objected to the setting up of the Seventh Pay Commission, since when the Centre raises pay of employees, state government employees also demand the same, and this even raises expectations among private sector employees. TMC goons in West Bengal have repeatedly attacked the CPI(M) and other left parties. One does not have to be a CPI(M) supporter to understand the dangers this poses. In recent times, the Education Minister of her government declared that those college and university teacher who did not join the TMC sponsored WBCUPA were "harmaads", in other words, from a ministerial position, branded the overwhelming majority of College and University teachers of West Bengal as hooligan elements. Any independent unionism outside the TMC control is being attacked, while the police keep silent.

Mamata Banerjee's anger at the BJP has moreover been increased because the Gorkha Jan Mukti Morcha once again decided to repose faith in the BJP. They have announced, in opposition to the TMC candidate, footballer Baichung Bhutia, their support for the BJP candidate S. S. Ahluwalia. So the TMC attacks on the BJP are taking the form of : they want to pit Hindus against Muslims, they want to break up West Bengal. For toiling people, support to the TMC in opposition to the BJP is not an expression of any protest. These are both rightwing parties with projects that for the working class and poor peasants make little difference. In a different category are the Left parties and the AAP, and so we will have to discuss them separately.

The Left Front and the Third Front

The real Third Front, as opposed to the beautiful front imagined by the leaders of the CPI(M) and CPI, is a front consisting of lesser bourgeois parties,

whose aspirations are little different from the bigger parties. Some of them tie "secularism" on their masthead, while others push forward frankly regional identities. Still others highlight particular caste identities. They have no vision of an alternative economic policy for toiling people. At most, they throw out sops, such as low price for rice in some provinces. But this is charity linked to the assumption that only the "poorest" should get it, not a policy aimed to abolish poverty. This is proved by the fact that the most successful case of a "Third Front" government was the United Front headed by first Deve Gowda and then Gujral, with P. Chidambaram as the finance minister. This spokesperson of Indian big capital, was hailed by the UF, including the Left parties. And his budget was hailed as a "dream budget" by capitalists. Need we say more about what the real "Third Front" looks like?

The apparently progressive ideology of the Third Front is created by documents produced with left participation and encouragement. Only the Left parties believe in the **Reality** of these promises. What that means is, while the bourgeois parties simply wave these to entice the left and get left support during elections, it is the Left which constantly proclaims that now is not the time for a full working class programme. The parties of the Left Front, on paper, have more radical credentials, since they show a past as working class parties and even now have mass fronts like trade unions, peasant organisations, women's organisations, and so on to prove their radical moorings.

In **Reality**, they have long lost their radical, or even plain working class links, by and large. Hobbled by the ideology of class collaborationism, increasingly wedded to the practice of neoliberal globalisation through participation in deeply class collaborationist provincial governments and de-facto power sharing at times even in the central Government, the leftism of these parties is now mostly washed out. Just as the SP will trot out "secular" rhetoric during elections, just as the BSP will put up statues of Ambedkar, similarly these parties

will put in a lot of Marxist sounding rhetoric in their election manifestoes. They still have once Marxism trained professors in their ranks, who will do the necessary intellectual jugglery. The point is not what they will promise, but what they did when in or near power. In the Parliament of 2004 the Left had 61 MPs, the highest ever in Indian history. Yet it effectively bolstered the UPA. The Left Front did not present any principled opposition to neo-liberalism when in power. In West Bengal, it offered considerable breaks to Tata (Singer) and also to the Salim group (Nandigram).

The Left Front, especially its major component, the CPI(M), is politically unprincipled in a basic way. It does not use parliamentary institutions in the interests of the working class. In the outgoing Parliament, it has supped with both the Congress and the BJP, an unusually outrageous feat. It has supported the Congress on issues. For example, over the question of the election of the President, the Left chose not to put up a candidate. That a purely left candidate was bound to lose is not at all the issue. This was an occasion when the left ought to have expressed its independent stance. Pranab Mukherjee is not an abstract academic figure put up as a token candidate. He had been a major player in the Congress party, and had been Finance Minister in the UPA before putting in his papers for the post of President. His closeness with the Ambanis has been widely known. Yet, in the name of fighting fascism (what else?) the CPI(M) leadership decided to vote for him. If they had remembered precedent, they would not have done so. In Germany's last presidential election, the Social Democrats had supported Hindenburg supposedly because he would obey the constitution and would be a better bet than Hitler, instead of running an independent working class candidate. Then of course, Hindenburg did call in Hitler and even accepted the Enabling decree. We do not argue that an exact parallel will happen in India. But we do argue that lessons from both Indian and international history are there to show that in these cases one cannot trust bourgeois leaders. Not only did the

CPIM do so, but the party was ruthless in taking action against internal critics who questioned this class collaborationism.

And, to top that, the CPI(M) also allied with the BJP. In bourgeois terms, they merely carried out "floor coordination". But such purely bourgeois terms can only be used by people on the left when they have become utterly politically bankrupt. Floor coordination means, one forms blocs with the BJP to stall voting, or to ensure the passage or non-passage of particular bills. Since the effect, upon the working class, is that the workers see "their" party voting with the party it has been calling fascist, they are confused. The fascists, by contrast are not. It was perfectly possible for the Left in Parliament to simply declare their opposition to the Congress government and to vote against many measures. It was politically an act of utmost craven class collaboration, and one that went in the direction of legitimising the fascists, to go for floor coordination. The class struggle is not like a gentlemen's cricket match, where an impartial umpire rules on who is out, and at the end of the match the defeated and the victorious retire to the club house for tea. This kind of parliamentary behaviour depoliticises the workers who support such parties.

The Aam Aadmi Party and its Clean Capitalism

The AAP is a very different, and still evolving process. In origin it was to grow out of an urban, primarily middle class, "civil society" sentiment – opposing corruption, opposing political high handedness, fighting rape in Delhi. The Anna Hazare Movement, the struggle after 16 December 2012, years of suffering under corrupt governments, something made particularly foul in the capital where without connections not a file moves, all came together. Having won, Kejriwal went on to show that he was willing to keep some of his key promises, and to risk resigning over this.

The Aam Aadmi Party does not have a rounded programme. It represents a very specific segment of the population (the urban Delhi-ite) in its origin. Yet, precisely because of its formlessness, many

radicals have felt it possible to join it, in the hope that it can be given a positive, progressive direction. Whether Medha Patkar, or S. P. Udaykumar, or Soni Sori, some of the names closely linked with resistance, human rights, state violence, have gathered under the AAP banner. We do not believe that they have done so for personal gain. Far from it. They have done so, because they hope that AAP will indeed be the vehicle to clean up India. Leading activists of many radical forces, have joined AAP.

We however disagree respectfully with them. It is not that we are arguing, a priori, that AAP is bound to become corrupt in turn. But AAP's "anti-ideology" ideology means it does not take even a weak anti-capitalist line. Its talk of crony capitalism makes people assume that there is, or can be some kind of truly clean capitalism. In **Reality**, capitalism and the state are constantly in each other's pockets. The ruling class in capitalism has a division of labour. The people who are in the business of actually being in charge of capital and making money cannot spare time to carry on government. That is however given to people whose wealth, social status, all place them solidly in the camp of the bourgeoisie, or close enough so that they aspire to climb higher.

The Delhi elections showed AAP has tapped into genuine anger. And its role since then shows it is willing to challenge both BJP and Congress. Yet, as long as it lacks a clear social programme of anti-capitalism, its protests will serve only to create popular faith in a "true" bourgeois democracy, and nothing more. It is because a section of AAPs leaders/candidates are known to be honest and believe in this illusion that they can make the masses believe it. And that is why, we must explain, that we are not in favour of AAP. We call upon its leaders, as well as its members, to rethink their social programme.

What about the Practical Tasks

Those who disagree will say, "but elections demand practical tasks. A government must be formed". We do not want this bourgeois "practicality", which

tells us to vote between one bourgeois party and another. We need to understand that we have to fight for a programme of working class independence, and support only those candidates, voting for whom can have a positive effect on that goal. The Election Commission has fixed 70 lakh as the maximum a candidate may spend in an election campaign. We know that in **Reality** the figure goes up to crores. [2] But even 70 lakh, spread over 542 constituencies all over India, is evidence how difficult it would be, even if there was a united, multi-tendency working class party, for the working class to imagine it could simply contest elections and form a working class government.

Under the circumstances, we are often told to vote for the "lesser evil". But none of the evils we fight against can help us in our struggle for emancipation. Only by building revolutionary democratic parties and trade unions and other mass organisations that are accountable to us can we fight for our own emancipation. For this, we do not need election manifestoes promising honeyed lies. We want a programme that will sketch out the basic needs of the masses of people. Out of the struggles of the people for the last decade to two decades, we can propose some of the basic issues such a party/parties, such a campaign, must put forward. That is the truly practical task. Of course, a full programme can be developed only when masses of militant fighters from different sectors come together to really build a radical party committed to the overthrow of capital. But we have here a rough programme, which can be the starting point. It is by fighting for such programmes, by campaigning for them, and by building organisations stressing these issues, that a real alternative will be built.

A Charter of Demands

Political and legal issues

- Repeal the Armed Forces Special Powers Act
- Abolish all sedition laws.
- Repeal the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act, 2008

- Stop all private armies and stop the repressions on adivasis.
- Make the NOTA a positive vote, so if NOTA gets higher votes than any candidate the EC will declare "no one is elected".
- Ensure state funding of all parties on an equal footing and stop all corporate funding.
- Change the Representation of the People Act to establish proportional representation in place of the current unrepresentative system.
- Bring all public servants, elected representatives, office holders under the constitution and members of the judiciary under the ambit of anti-corruption legislation.
- Reform the judicial system to ensure time bound disposal of all cases.
- Abolish the death penalty.

Rights of the Working Class

- Raise the minimum wages for every person working in India to a need based minimum determined on the basis of the 15th ILC norms for setting the minimum wage along with subsequent Supreme Court orders for all employments.
- Non payment of minimum wages must be made a criminal offence
- Establish a 40 hour working week, without exception.
- Link minimum wages to Dearness Allowance with total neutralisation and half yearly revision of minimum wages keeping in accordance to the revision of Dearness Allowance.
- NREGA Wage must be above the minimum wage, with 100% inflation neutralisation raises every six months
- Take steps to progressively eliminate contract labour, first of all in the public sector and government jobs, with the absorption of contract workers into tenured workforce.
- For full employment of all adult persons.
- Repeal the Essential Services Maintenance Act.
- Compulsory recognition of all trade unions by employers.
- Compulsory secret ballot in all cases where there are multiple unions. Scrap all laws like the Bombay Industrial Relations Act 1946, which favour government sponsored unions.

Social Security, Health, Education

- All workers who are not covered by any PF scheme must be directly covered by the EPFO with no lower limit of number of employees.
- In cases of contract work, the principal employer must maintain an account for the PF of the contract workers
- Tax the corporate and the wealthy to ensure state funding of PF for the workers in unorganised sectors
- National Food Security Act to be universal
- No dilution of Supreme Court Orders on Right to Food
- Extend ESI model to all workers, including rural workers
- Legislate a national Healthcare Act to ensure a countrywide public healthcare system that will provide quality and affordable healthcare for all
- Enact a National Drug Policy that promotes generics and limits patents
- Restore PDS for every person
- Raise budget allocation for education to 10 per cent of GDP by 2019 to actualise the provisions under the Right to Education Act, 2009.
- Regularise all para-teachers under the SSA in the pay and grade as regular teachers based on their experience and qualification.
- Halt privatisation of education.
- Impose higher corporate taxes and higher levels of income and wealth tax on the rich. Restore the

inheritance tax. Use these funds to subsidise the social needs of the 90%.

Development Policies

- Impose a progressive income tax, higher wealth tax, and bring back the inheritance tax on the rich.
- End subsidies on the rich and impose higher rates of company taxes on corporate profits, whether Indian or foreign concerns.

Women/Gender issues

- Equal pay for women workers.
- Toilets for women in all workplaces
- Ensure dissemination of information on and proper implementation of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013
- Ensure women's right over community land and other natural resources
- Decriminalise sex work and recognition and legal protection of their right to work
- Decriminalise all adult consensual sex, scrap laws that impose compulsory heterosexuality
- Legislate a Domestic Workers Act to ensure a maximum working time, minimum wage, including a day off, for all domestic workers.
- Take action against all so-called honour killing and other violence on women, and take stern legal action against organisations like Khap panchayats that promote such actions.
- Not selective hanging of rapists but systematic punishment of perpetrators of sexual and other violence on women, including where it is the police or the armed forces.
- Apply Maternity Benefit Act for women of all sectors.
- Create a country where women can go out in safety for work or for leisure

Environment and Development

- Free, quality drinking water for all, not subsidized water for soft drinks companies and bottled water for profit
- Ensure livelihood security of the potentially displaced and a moratorium on land acquisition until livelihood security is addressed
- Heavy fine on all industries for first time violation of pollution laws and halt to production and confiscation of assets for repeat case of pollution
- Stop nuclear projects. Switch to renewable.
- Oppose Genetically Modified crops under monopoly control.
- Stop subsidies to corporate in agriculture.
- Ensure the implementation of all existing environmental laws and expand environmental laws to protect health and safety of workers, local communities and protect the global ecology

Oppressed Social and National Groups

- No destruction of local/regional culture and identity in the name of homogenized Indianisation
- Immediately clear all backlogs in recruitment in the reserved category
- Implement the recommendations of the Ranganath Mishra Report to include Christians and Muslims of Scheduled Caste origin for constitutional guarantees. The eligibility for membership of the Scheduled Castes should not be linked to religious status.
- Implement the recommendations of the Sachar Committee report to improve access to education, to increase employment share and participation in public bodies of Muslims.
- Repeal Freedom of Religion Act in the states where it exists that restricts freedom to choose religion
- Protect religious freedom using constitutional protection of freedom of conscience

This is not a programme for the Arnab Goswamis and the Barkha Dutt. But it reflects and concretises

es the struggles of toiling masses. And such a programme, to be implemented, needs first, a working class party committed to class interests above all. Class interest does not imply ignoring other interests of the oppressed. But just as capitalism underwrites every kind of exploitation and oppression, be it caste oppression, be it gender oppression, similarly, unless the struggles against such oppressions are linked through the logic of anti-capitalism, they will end up short of their goals. We will therefore be accused of utopianism by the bourgeoisie and the reformists. We reply, if to be a realist is to choose between two exploiting masters, and decide whether we will be slaves in saffron or slaves in tricolour, we prefer to be utopian. We agree to fighting unity in the struggle against fascism.

If the fascists come out on the streets and attack trade unions, we will not question whether the person resisting them, alongside us, votes for the TMC, BSP, SP, JD(U), RJD, or the DMK, or whoever. But we ask workers to have no trust that in parliament any of these parties will look after our interests. We therefore call for votes for only those candidates, supporting whom makes sense, at least even partially from the perspective of building a radical anti-capitalist party. In all other cases, we call for use of the None Of The Above button, so that our mass rejection of the system becomes the real wave, not the fake wave of Modi, which is so unreal that he has to file from two constituencies in the hope that one at least will be a guaranteed seat.

USA

The Most Important Social Conflicts of 2013

DAN LA BOTZ ·

Although the Occupy Wall Street Movement and a few large labor conflicts of 2011 and 2012—the occupation of the state capitol in Wisconsin, and the Chicago Teachers Union strike—had suggested a rising trajectory of social struggle, in the past year the arc of social conflict and particularly labor conflict descended. [1]

Though social conflict declined, there was a small political shift to the left in some regions, apparently in part as a result of the struggles of the past few years. The issue of economic inequality raised by the Occupy Wall Street Movement of 2011-12 was transformed into political action in 2013. Democrat Bill de Blasio was elected Mayor of New York by a landslide running on a platform opposing the policies of his predecessor Republican Michael Bloomberg that had led to an increase in economic inequality in *The Nation's* largest city. [2] In Lorain, Ohio the city Labor Council, angry with betrayal by the local Democratic Party, ran its own candidates for city council and won. Two dozen independent labor candidates were elected to the council. [3]

The Socialist Alternative candidate Khasama Sawant was elected to the Seattle City Council—a virtually unheard of election of a revolutionary socialist (not a social democrat)—running on a platform calling for an increase in the minimum wage to \$15, reflecting both the Occupy movement of 2011 and 2012 and the low-wage worker organizing of 2013. [4] Her election and continued advocacy of the \$15 minimum wage also pressured local Democrats to adopt her position.

Still, in contrast to these symptoms of political change, social struggle declined overall in 2013.

This decline of conflict, particularly class conflict, is seen most clearly in the strike statistics. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in 2013 there were only 15 major strikes or lockouts involving 1,000 or more workers that lasted at least one shift, down from 19 in 2012. Major work stoppages in 2013 involved 55,000 workers, down from 148,000 in 2012, with 290,000 workdays lost in 2013 compared to 1.13 million in 2012. The largest of the 2013 strikes involved public employees in New York and California. [5] In terms of union membership, there was no decline in 2013, but neither was there any increase. [6]

What was true of labor struggle was also true of social struggle more generally. The Occupy Wall Street Movement that swept the United States in 2011 and 2012 was severely repressed by local, mostly Democratic Party city governments and their police departments, with many beatings and jailings. The movement declined and then virtually disappeared. [7] No similar national movement arose in 2013, though an important regional movement, Moral Mondays, developed in North Carolina and subsequently spread to other areas.

Still there were in 2013 many other significant protests over environmental issues, racism, LGBT concerns, and labor issues. The largest protests were the Forward on Climate environmental rally in Washington in February, the fast food workers' and Walmart workers' demonstrations held around the country at various times during the year, the Moral Mondays movement that began in the spring, and the protests of over the July verdict in the Trayvon Martin case that took place in cities throughout *The Nation*. We list more than a dozen important social conflicts that took place here, choosing them for their size and political signifi-

cance, as well as to show the variety of conflicts that occurred.

The Moral Mondays movement that began in Raleigh, North Carolina, represented the most inspiring movement of 2013 based on its consistently large mobilizations, its continuing use of civil disobedience, the willingness of its participants to face arrest, and its growth and spread to other regions of the state and then to other parts of the South. We turn now to look first at the Moral Monday movement and then at the other movements chronologically and thematically.

Moral Mondays – April–December

Moral Mondays, mass protests accompanied by civil disobedience, began in April of 2013 in response to a series of laws passed by the Republican-dominated legislature of North Carolina and signed by Republican governor Pat McCrory. Elected in 2012, McCrory's party also won the majority of the state Senate and the House and proceeded to pass laws that restricted voting rights to reduce likely Democratic voters, cut social programs, eliminated teacher tenure and cut teachers' salaries, created new regressive taxes, repealed the Racial Justice Act that had allowed death row inmates to challenge their sentences on the basis of discrimination, and limited abortion rights. [8] The state also ended federal unemployment benefits for 70,000 jobless people. [9]

Financing the campaigns of the conservatives who won election and helping to set their ultra-conservative agenda was Art Pope, the wealthy chairman of Variety Wholesalers Corporation and the state budget director. Pope has been a supporter of rightwing think-tanks and Tea Party candidates and has come to embody in the public mind the connection between the wealthy and Republicans and their attack on the poor. [10] Pope, McCrory, and the Republicans thus provoked the Moral Monday movement.

Rev. William J. Barber II, president of the North Carolina National Association for the Advancement

of Colored People (NAACP), the inspirer of the movement, and other African American as well as white ministers initiated the protests on April 29, with hundreds of protestors going to the state capital in Raleigh, some entering and occupying the legislature and dozens being arrested for refusing to leave. Labor unions and many union members have been involved in the struggle from early on. The North Carolina AFL-CIO and the independent United Electrical Workers (UE) both mobilized their members for the protests.

The demonstrations taking place on Mondays involved an average of 2,500 protestors with a total of 900 people being arrested for occupying the legislature in 2013. Other demonstrations were held in other North Carolina cities, most of the demonstrations involving thousands and one in Ashville as many as 10,000 people.

The Moral Monday protests made religious and liberal arguments challenging the conservatives and the domination of the wealthy and calling for improvements in the lives of working people and the poor. The North Carolina movement adopted a fourteen point agenda back in 2007 calling for: quality education for all children, a living wage and economic support for low income people, health care for all, a reversal of the state's racist history and practices, same-day voter registration and public financing of elections, assistance for the historically black colleges, fair hiring and contracting practices, affordable housing, an end to racist criminal justice practices, the promotion of environmental justice, collective bargaining for public employees, protection of immigrant rights, strengthening of laws and agencies to protect civil rights, and bringing all troops back from Iraq now. [11] This agenda has provided a program for the movement.

The first Moral Monday March of 2014 held on February 1 in Raleigh brought out between 80,000 and 100,000 people while at the same time the movement spread to South Carolina and Georgia. The Moral Monday movement has led some of the largest social protest demonstrations in the South

since the African American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s. [12] Moral Mondays represented the largest, most sustained, and most significant movement of 2013.

There were no significant protests in January 2013

Forward on Climate Rally - February 2013

Forward on Climate, a coalition of environmental groups demanding that Obama take action on climate change and protesting the Keystone XL pipeline, brought 40,000 people to Washington, D.C. [13] Bill McKibben, the founder of 3.50.org told the rally, "For 25 years our government has basically ignored the climate crisis: now people in large numbers are finally demanding they get to work. We shouldn't have to be here — science should have decided our course long ago. But it takes a movement to stand up to all that money." [14] The mass demonstration had been preceded by smaller demonstrations of prominent people who engaged in civil disobedience and were arrested. Among them were: attorney Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., civil rights leader Julian Bond, Sierra Club executive director Michael Brune, environmental activists McKibben, actress Daryl Hannah, and NASA climate scientist James Hansen as well as 40 others. [15] While Forward on Climate was one of the largest environmental marches in the United States, it had no impact on President Obama or Congress, neither of which took any decisive action to deal with global warming and climate change or any other environmental issue.

Kimany Gray Protests and Disturbances - March 2013

On March 9, New York City Police Department officers shot and killed a 16-year old African American boy named Kimany Gray, claiming that he had adjusted his belt in a suspicious manner, leading them to believe he had a gun and to shoot him. Gray was shot seven times, three times in the back. Police reported that a handgun was found at the scene of the killing, though one eye-witness claimed the boy was unarmed. All agree that Gray never fired a shot. The shooting, so similar to many

others across the country where police officers have shot black boys and men, led to protests and riots in the Flatbush area of Brooklyn, New York City, New York. [16]

Following Gray's wake and funeral a few days later, rioters ransacked a drug store and broke police cruisers' window and were in turn pepper sprayed by police. A peaceful vigil for Gray soon turned into two more days of rioting, with mostly African American young men and boys throwing bricks, bottles, and garbage at the police. Police arrested 46 protestors. Peaceful protests by hundreds continued after the riots had subsided. [17]

Protests against Defense of Marriage Act at Supreme Court – March–June

From March through June 2013 there were many demonstrations altogether involving thousands outside the U.S. Supreme Court and at other locations to demand that justices overturn the Defense of Marriage Act, a 1996 federal law that allowed states to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages granted in other states and codified such marriages as not legal for all federal purposes, including social security benefits and joint income tax filings. [18] The Supreme Court ruled the part of the law dealing with federal rights and benefits unconstitutional in June of 2013. [19] The question of interstate recognition of gay marriages is still being litigated. The American gay movement, which through its continuing pressure had won an end the U.S. military's "don't ask, don't tell policies" in 2011, also succeeded in 2013 in overcoming parts of the Defense of Marriage Act in 2013. [20] The gay movement fighting for legal equality has been among the most successful of social movements in early twenty-first century.

Anti-Drone Protests – April 13, 2013

Hundreds of protestors participated in demonstrations at the White House in Washington, D.C. and in other American cities against President Barack Obama's use of drones to assassinate enemies of the United States in Pakistan. At the time Pakistan

alone had had over 2,800 people killed in drone strikes, over 280 of them civilians. [21] Demonstrations were reported to have been held in Washington, D.C., from across the East Coast and New England, while others participated in joint actions in cities and towns as diverse as San Francisco, Sacramento and Los Angeles, California; St. Louis, Missouri; Albuquerque, New Mexico; New Paltz, New York; Boston, Massachusetts; Tallahassee, Florida (on April 11); and Huntsville, Alabama. [22] Public pressure led Obama to adopt a more restricted policy on the use of drones, though critics alleged that he was violating it. [23]

Fast-Food Workers Strikes and Protests – April 4, July 29, August, and December

The United States has 200,000 fast-food workers; virtually none of whom are unionized. Turn-over among fast-food workers is about 75 percent, making them exceedingly difficult to organize. [24] Median pay for the almost 150,000 fast food workers in New York City in 2013 was \$9 an hour, or \$18,500 a year, according to the New York Labor Department, approximately \$4,500 lower than Census Bureau's poverty income threshold level for a family of four. [25]

Fast food workers organizing and actions first came to public attention on November 29, 2012, when workers from Burger King, Domino's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonald's, Pizza Hut, and Wendy's restaurants in New York City struck, demanding higher wages, better working conditions, and the right to form a union without retaliation from management. Many of the workers earned only the minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour. While only 100 workers struck, it was the largest strike in the history of the fast-food industry.

The strike, principally organized by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) had the backing of community organizations and NGOs. By April 4, 2013, the number of strikers in New York had grown to 200 while hundreds of others struck in Chicago on April 24, Detroit on May 10, St. Louis

on May 9 and 10, Milwaukee on May 15 and Seattle on May 30.

The movement culminated on July 29 when approximately 2,200 workers went on strike in all of those cities plus Flint and Kansas City. In August there were simultaneous nationwide strikes with hundreds of workers gathering at work sites in some of the larger cities and in some places occupying the fast food restaurants. [26] In December once again there were one-day strikes by fast-food workers in over 100 cities. [27]

While the union was able to mobilize only about 1 percent of fast-food workers, the efforts had an impact not so much on organizing workplaces as on the debate about the minimum wage. In December 2013 there was another round of strikes and demonstrations aimed principally at raising *The National* minimum wage to \$15 per hour. [28] Under the pressure of the movement, in February 2014 President Obama called for raising the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10.10 per hour. New Jersey voters voted to raise the minimum wage in November; altogether thirteen states raised their minimum wage in 2013. [29]

Workers Strike University of California Hospitals – May 2013 and November 2013

In May 2013 almost 25,000 workers struck the University of California Hospitals in the cities of San Francisco, Davis, Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Irvine, and San Diego. The principal strike by the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 3299 involved 13,000 respiratory therapists, surgical and lab technicians, nursing assistants, and licensed vocational nurses strike over pensions and patient care issues. They were joined by 7,000 cafeteria workers and housekeepers who engaged in a sympathy strike as well as by the Union of Professional and Technical Employees, representing 3,400 other UC hospital employees, among them social workers and pharmacists. [30] These same groups of workers, joined by graduate students and numbering altogether around 35,000, struck again against ha-

rassment and intimidation in November as they continued to negotiate a contract. [31]

Walmart Strikes and Protests – April-June-November

Walmart is the second largest public corporation in the world, the largest retailer, the largest employer in the United States and one of its largest corporations. Yet its workforce in the United States remains completely unorganized. Founded in 2011, Our Walmart (Organization United for Respect at Walmart), a group established by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW), carried out its first major action in 2012, including Black Friday protests, *The Nation's* big shopping day immediately after Thanksgiving. In the spring of 2013 workers and their supporters confronted store managers in 100 locations to pressure the company to make improvements in the workers' conditions.

In June, just before the company's annual meeting in Bentonville, Arkansas, Our Walmart tried to carry out a work stoppage or strike in the areas where Our Walmart was strongest. Walmart responded by firing or suspending more than sixty workers involved in the actions. [32] The firing of those Walmart workers led Our Walmart to organize in September coordinated protests in 15 cities, among them Dallas, Chicago, Seattle, Maryland, Orlando, Los Angeles, and New York. Thousands participated in the protests and 100 were arrested. [33]

On Black Friday 2013 thousands of Walmart workers and supporters held demonstrations throughout the United States. The rallies held at 1,500 stores in cities and towns across the country demanding salaries of at least \$25,000 per year, more full-time jobs, and an end to the retaliation against Walmart workers involved in union organizing. The company at the time employed two million workers of whom 800,000 earned less than \$25,000 per year and many Walmart workers were being supported by U.S. government social welfare programs because their earning were so low. [34]

In some cities, there were citations or arrests of Walmart protestors. [35] Walmart also threatened

workers who participated in the Black Friday protests and *The National* Labor Relations Board (NLRB) filed a complaint against the company for unfair labor practices. [36] *The National* scope and the thousands of participants in the Walmart demonstrations make them a significant event covered in all of *The National* news media.

Protests of Verdict in Zimmerman Shooting of Trayvon Martin - July

George Zimmerman, a self-appointed night watchman in Sanford, Florida, pursued, shot, and killed a seventeen year old high school student named Trayvon Martin. The shooting became a widely debated national issue and there were protests nationwide in 2012. When on July 13, 2013 a jury acquitted Zimmerman of the charges of murder and manslaughter, spontaneous, peaceful protests erupted once again in towns and cities across the country. [37] In many cities young African Americans, sometimes joined by whites and Latinos, marched in protest. Rev. Al Sharpton's National Action Network (NAN) then organized protests in 100 cities in which tens of thousands participated. [38]

Concert in Support of Pussy Riot – August

Amnesty International held its second international Pussy Riot solidarity concert in front of the Russian Embassy in Washington, D.C. Pussy Riot band members Masha Alekhina, Nadya Tolokonnikova and Katya Samutsevich were sentenced to two years in penal colonies on August 17, 2012 for their performance of a "Punk Prayer" in Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral. While Katya was released on appeal, Nadya and Masha have been imprisoned for more than 16 months at the time of the concert. Russian courts refused in July 2013 to grant parole to either of the two women. Following the Pussy Riot arrests, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a law providing for up to three years in prison for public support of actions aimed at insulting religious feelings. Amnesty International considered Masha and Nadya to be prisoners of con-

science and campaigned for their immediate release. The concert featured several bands, dramatizations, and visual displays as well as speakers. [39]

Anniversary March on Washington – August 28

Tens of thousands—as many as 200,000—participated in the Fiftieth Anniversary March on Washington, half a century after the historic march at which Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. made his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. [40] Participating in the march were many labor unions, church groups, African American civil rights organizations, and some leftist political groups. The march, however, was not only a commemorative event, and is included in this account of the social conflicts of 2013 because many of those who marched carried signs and banners that advocated for other on-going causes and struggles for social justice. Many carried placards calling for justice for Trayvon Martin, for ending racism, for ending the mass incarcerations of the "new Jim Crow," for creating jobs, for a \$15 minimum wage, for taxing the rich, for protecting voting rights, for immigration reform, for reproductive rights, for gay rights, for saving the planet, and for many other issues. [41]

Demonstrations against U.S. Military Involvement in Syria – August and September

Hundreds of protestors joined rallies against U.S. military involvement in Syria in August and September, though the motivations of the participants were often different. Joining the protests were pacifists who oppose all violence on principle, opponents of a U.S. imperialist intervention in Syria who also opposed Bashar-al Assad and the Baath Party, and others, both Syrians and some American leftists, who supported Assad and the Baath government because they believed it was a socialist regime. The demonstrations in cities like New York, Washington, D.C., Boston and Chicago numbered in the hundreds. [42] Some anti-war groups attributed the fact that Obama didn't launch military strikes against Syria to the power of the

protest movement; others noted that Obama was very reluctant to get involved and thus welcomed the Russian chemical weapons agreement as a way to avoid U.S. involvement.

Demonstration against the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) – September

Opponents of the Trans-Pacific Partnership that would create a new international trade agreement in the Pacific region protested on September 23 at the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. They carried banner calling for a democratic process and for the release of the text of the treat. The treaty being negotiated between the United States, Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam would cover approximately 40% of the global economy. Protestors fear that the agreement will not protect the environment and workers' rights and that it will transform and endanger existing agriculture. Organizers of the small but very visible protest included FlushTheTPP.org, the Backbone Campaign, Veterans for Peace, Codepink, and Earth First!. [43]

Gay Rights Protests against Russian Anti-Gay Law and Olympics – September - November

Gay rights activists demonstrated in front of the New York Metropolitan Opera House on September 22—where Tchaikovsky's "Eugene Onegin," was being performed by visiting Russian stars Anna Netrebko, the popular Russian diva and Valery Gergiev artistic director of the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg—to protest new anti-gay laws enacted in Russia before the Olympics were to take place there. LGBT activists, some in drag and dressed as opera divas themselves, held up the gay rainbow banner and distributed fliers about the issues. Inside just before the opera began, a member of a group called the Family Circle shouted out "Putin, end your war on gays!" and "Anna and Valery your silence is killing Russian gays!" Security guards ejected them from the theater. [44]

Some two dozen LGBT activists also attempted to disrupt the U.S. Olympic Committee's 100-day countdown event at Times Square at the end of October carrying a banner reading, "'Don't Buy Putin's Lies.'" [45] In November, Queer Nation gay activists took their protests to the New York Stock Exchange's Third Annual Russia Day celebration with a giant rainbow banner emblazoned "Thugs." [Mariah Summers and Matthew Zeitlin, [46]

Immigration Protests – October-November

Eight Democratic Party U.S. Congressional Representatives and 150 other protestors were arrested as thousands of demonstrators rallied outside the U.S. Capitol in October to demand action on immigration. [47] The arrests followed a larger rally on the Mall, an event that had initially been threatened with cancellation because of the U.S. government shutdown, but which was allowed to proceed. [48] The most recent fight for immigration reform began in 2004 and has continued for a decade but has failed to pressure Congress to act. [49] The demonstration in October 2013 also failed to move Congress.

A group of immigration activists, who had been fasting on the mall for several weeks, were visited by President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama in November. Obama told the activist that he appreciated their protest which had called attention to the issue and told them that he was hopeful that immigration reform would pass, though that proved to be misplaced optimism. [50]

Government Shutdown Protests

The United States government was shut down for 16 days in October because of the failure of Congress to pass a budget, resulting in the furlough of 800,000 Federal workers, a delay in pay for another 1.3 million, and reductions in services that affected businesses and workers alike, as well as programs serving millions from pre-school children to the elderly. The Tea Party Republicans and other rightwing Republican legislators had been principally responsible for the shutdown. Standard and

Poor's, the financial services agency, said that the shutdown cost the American economy \$24 billion dollars. Finally on day sixteen, Congress voted to fund the government and everybody went back to work.

The American Federation of Government Employees, *The National Treasury Employees Union*, and other unions representing federal workers organized protests in *The Nation's* capital and at federal facilities across the country. Thousands walked picketlines in various cities, towns, and rural areas. AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka stated, "Their actions remind us that government workers are proud public servants who often do selfless, courageous work. Because our government shut down, these people are working but don't know if or when they'll get paid." [51] In the end, Congress voted to pay the furloughed workers, even though they had not been sent home from work. The Congressional vote was less a victory for the unions than the recognition by Republicans that the government shutdown had divided their party and cost them public support.

Detroit Bankruptcy Protests - December

The economic crisis in Detroit, Michigan, devastated by plant closures over several decades leading to falling revenues from both businesses and workers, had led Governor Rick Snyder to impose an "emergency manager" to run the city. Then in July the city, with a debt of \$18.5 billion, filed for Chapter 9 bankruptcy, though the matter remained in the courts until Dec. 3 when a federal judge ruled that the city could declare bankruptcy and that the city's pension obligations to its workers were protected. [52] Unions, churches and community leaders organized demonstrations involving about a hundred union members and allies outside the court while hearings went on. [53] The small protests had no impact on the court's decision.

Illinois Teacher Protests – December

Teachers, nurses, and other public employees demonstrated in Springfield, Illinois, against a bill

that cut retirement benefits of current and future state employees. The teachers testimony against the bill and their protests failed, however, to prevent its approval. [54]The union announced that it would pursue legal challenges, and did in 2014. [55]

As the protests in Washington, D.C. over immigration reform and in Michigan and Illinois over workers' pensions indicated, social and labor movements carried out only weak challenges to authority in 2013; their attempts to pressure the government and its conservative and austerity policies generally failed. While the fast food workers and Walmart workers movement held some impressive national demonstrations and strikes, they mobilized a very small percentage of workers in those industries and failed almost completely in their efforts to organize workers into unions. Still, these were the first time unions attempted on a national scale to organize such low-paid workers in the food industry and retail stores. The Moral Mondays movement repre-

sents an exciting and growing movement for greater social justice, for jobs, higher pay, and a fairer and more egalitarian society, but so far it has not become strong enough to overturn the Republican Party in North Carolina, or in any other Southern state. Its spread throughout the South, however, suggests that it will have greater weight and more power in 2014, perhaps leading to movements in other parts of the country as well.

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Climate refugees: new social movements, new responsibilities of solidarity

PIERRE ROUSSET ·

As with many other movements involved in solidarity with victims of humanitarian disasters, we had to take more centrally into account the breadth of natural disasters (whether or not of human origin) after the tsunami which struck in the Indian Ocean in 2004. The following year, New Orleans in the USA was devastated by hurricane Katrina; then northern Pakistan and Kashmir by an earthquake.

It is in this context that I presented in 2006 an initial report seeking to begin a reflection on these disasters, treating them already at the time as an element of the world situation, analysing in their social bases the "aid policies" implemented by the powers that be, opening the discussion on our own responsibilities and tasks in this area.

This report showed in particular that the solidarity provided by progressive organizations "on the ground" was effective both in the emergency period and in the long term. For the emergency period, I notably took the example of Pakistan where the first "hard" houses rebuilt in Kashmir in the areas devastated by the earthquake were thanks to the campaign launched by the Labour Education Foundation and the Labour Party Pakistan. For duration, I notably referred to the action led by Areds in Tamil Nadu (India), where Dalits ("untouchables") and fishers were mobilized together, beyond caste barriers, and where the boats rebuilt in the coastal villages became the collective property of women: reconstruction should be not be "identical" – reproducing past inequalities – but "better", strengthening popular solidarities and combating dependency.

Reconstructing "better" is a struggle. Far from reducing social inequality and oppression, humanitarian disasters sharpen them, the elite seeking to benefit from the state of dependency and shock of the affected populations. The development of tourist complexes instead of the villages wiped off the map by a tsunami provides a classic example of this. An international "people to people" and "movements to movements" effort however helps the popular layers to better defend their rights in all stages from emergency aid to reconstruction (habitats, consciousness, economy and so on).

Eight years have passed since this initial report, with a new accumulation of experiences. The political conclusions drawn at the time seem confirmed to me. It is nonetheless important to now review recent developments and questions which were not approached or neglected in the 2006 report, notably concerning the rules of humanitarian action.

1. Some recent developments

We note among recent developments:

The extension and aggravation of extreme climatic phenomena

Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda, which hit the Philippines in 2013 is the most violent cyclone ever recorded to reach land. It should be class 6 (international classification) or class 5 (Philippine classification) – however these levels do not exist, the highest class being 5 (or 4 in the Philippines), which indicates the novelty of the phenomenon.

Global warming leads to an increase in the average temperature of water, thus its level rises – and thus the average gravity of inundations of marine origin, along the coasts. Thus, the elevation of the water

level is conjugated with the power of the winds (with speeds exceeding 300 km per hour) leading to destruction of a rare breadth in the central Philippines.

Extreme climatic phenomena are not confined to the South. This winter, France and Britain have suffered a very unusual succession of violent storms (with speeds exceeding 150 km per hour), leading to destruction on the coasts and repeated flooding. The USA has experienced according to the region drought or exceptional cold (the winter being on the contrary especially mild in Western Europe).

The interaction of "natural" disasters with other socio-humanitarian disasters

For a long time climate chaos has deepened conflicts, in particular for the control of water. We will look at three recent examples which illustrate to what point natural disasters can provoke (or combine with) other social and humanitarian disasters.

The most dramatic example is obviously north east Japan where, in 2011, on the basis of irresponsibility and the lack of preparation of the industrial lobbies and the government, an earthquake followed by a devastating tsunami led to the nuclear disaster of Fukushima, the most serious since Chernobyl. Remember that many nuclear power stations have been built along coasts, indeed in earthquake zones.

A significant part of Bangladesh is threatened by floods linked notably to tropical storms. Climate refugees, forced to leave their villages, are already numerous. Migratory flows, including across borders, are increasing in a context of social crisis which, in India as in Bangladesh, sharpens inter-communal tensions.

In the Philippines, typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda affected millions of families. The affected zones already included the most deprived peoples of the archipelago and the people risk plunging into a still greater durable, structural poverty. Numerous climate refugees went to the capital, in Cebu or

Mindanao, erecting shanty towns. A supplementary effort was demanded of Philippine migrants working – with or without papers – in numerous countries, who sent a lot of money to their families. The social shock wave of an extreme climatic phenomenon of great scope risks then extending well beyond the areas directly affected.

The countries of the North are generally better equipped to face climatic disasters and limit the propagation of their social effects. But with the rise of precarity in these societies and the increasingly drastic reduction of the resources devoted to public solidarity policies, it can be feared that in this are also there could be a "third worldisation" of a part of Europe or the USA.

Capital, from inaction to negative action

Faced with the global ecological crisis, continue as if nothing happened – such has been the philosophy of the capitalist lobbies and the governments who follow their order. Such action as there is concerns only the margins, or is often reduced to operations of communication.

The climatic crisis is an opportunity for immense capitalist profits. The mechanism is tested, on a small scale. One can ensure profits by producing in a polluting way – and new profits by selling systems of de-pollution. Geo-engineering seeks to elevate this logic to the planetary scale: dump iron filings in the oceans to capture CO₂ or disperse sulphur in the atmosphere to reduce the temperature, or put giant spatial mirrors into orbit to reflect the sun's rays.

Research and experimentation in climate and geo-engineering are already underway – with support from public finance. Their implementation will lead to chain imbalances in the atmosphere or oceans (from increased acid rain to the modification of marine ecosystems) whose consequences cannot be entirely foreseen. It will also involve a new leap forward in production, and its impact on climate chaos and more generally the global ecological crisis: an infernal spiral.

However, ecological rationality counts for little faced with the attraction of geo-engineering for capitalists: beyond immense profits, it promises the creation of new oligopolies benefiting from a profitable position through their control of planetary systems – with as counterpoint the strengthening of their dictatorial political power over society.

Haiti and the crisis of the institutional aid system

I will not expand on this question here, but the incredible morass into which institutional aid has fallen in Haiti, after the earthquake of January 2010, has had very profound consequences, revealing to what point the governmental policies and the intervention of certain NGOs could feed perverse logics, disqualifying durably calls to solidarity among many people of good will: murderous failure of the UN and governments, creation of a "market in aid" with competition among humanitarian associations, abandonment of the affected populations to their fate.

I didn't say in 2006 and don't say today that no international humanitarian association does good work! But it is necessary to contribute to creating conditions which allow those who do so – through good solidarity work – to cooperate more effectively with progressive social movements.

Conclusions

From all this, I draw three conclusions:

- The effects of the climate crisis are increasingly felt. The source of the problem must be attacked by opposing to the capitalist logic a public logic based on social and ecological needs, so as to limit then stop global warming, necessarily involving radical anti-capitalist measures. But we must also take fully into account the fact that the crisis is a present fact, that it already has consequences that we must integrate into the analysis of the world situation and the definition of our tasks.
- The first of these tasks remains the deployment of a solidarity independent of the established powers. That was the main conclusion of the 2006 re-

port. We cannot rely on the institutions or "aid professionals". Some progress has been made in this area, but it has been limited. Also, we cannot respond alone to the problem posed. It is very important to associate (or associate with) progressive organizations involved in this area of action, trade unions, peasant movements and so on.

- We must continue to learn from a still very recent experience and fill the gaps in the 2006 report. We need a genuine collective work of reflection on a field of intervention whose importance grows, but which remains largely new to us.

II. Recent lessons

Here again, we have not to reflect in a vacuum: we have to learn from the movements involved in humanitarian aid for a long time. But in some countries, as in the Philippines, our own experience is sufficiently rich to inform our thinking. I want in particular to approach three questions not addressed or insufficiently addressed in my report of 2006: the principles of humanitarian aid, the question of climate refugees as a new social sector, prevention policy – and stress the importance of the choices made in the area of reconstruction.

The rules of humanitarian aid

In 2006 I stressed the undeniable fact that humanitarian action was not above politics. The elites seek to profit from the crisis to strengthen their grip on society and favour their own interests. We seek to help the most deprived so that they are not forgotten from aid and can defend their own interests up to and including during socio-economic reconstruction. There, however, one could conclude that "everything is political" ignoring the rules of humanitarian action in times of disaster.

Let's draw a parallel with medical action. A group of progressive doctors choose to practice in a poor neighbourhood rather than a rich one; but where they practice, they treat everyone, rich or poor. We choose to prioritize aid to deprived communities, often where institutional aid is non-existent, insufficient or late; but the aid will be distributed ac-

cording to need (breadth of destruction to which each family has been victim and their state of deprivation, and so on) without making their respective political positions a priority.

This question is especially sensitive after a large scale climatic disaster: devastation is such that the social tissue is torn up and the survivors remain profoundly traumatized, losing their sense of being free actors. Beyond their relatives, the survivors have often lost everything: housing, property, but also means of existence (fishing boats, farming or de transport equipment, harvest or plantations, sources of employment and so on) – the economy itself is devastated. They must literally start from zero. The bigger the area affected, the deeper the feeling of abandonment – the feeling of having no future.

The social movements do not generally stand up to a major cataclysm and in the best of cases need some time to recover a capacity of action. For example, in Tacloban (the main port town of the island of Leyte), after the passage of typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda, the militant tricycle drivers union was atomized. It had to rebuild contacts and take care of the families of members plunged into distress, helping them to drink, eat and house themselves, well before the union could again play any role as social actor.

Emergency aid is aimed at those most in need, but also aims to recreate the conditions indispensable to the resumption of a collective activity. It is a very delicate moment where the established powers (big wealthy families, clientelist parties, identity-based churches and so on) will benefit by demanding a « debt of recognition) for the (more or less real) aid contributed.

What could for us be the link between humanitarian action with its "apolitical" principles (offering unconditional aid to the affected populations) and political engagement among the popular layers struggling for their rights in a time of crisis? Our own principles of self-organisation, conceived as the condition of self-emancipation. The established

powers seek to perpetuate the state of dependency of the affected population; we seek to favour its capacity for self-affirmation and independence; that is the difference.

Climate refugees: social sector, social movement

One of the main lessons of our recent experience is that in the countries struck by recurrent climatic disasters, a new social milieu, a new social sector, appears: the "surviving" populations, the climate refugees. If the rich have the necessary resources to rapidly regain their footing in society the same is not true of the poor (or families brutally pauperized by the disaster). In the absence of a massive and effective public intervention in their favour, they are condemned to suffer the consequences of such disasters for a long time; while other cataclysms create new surviving populations - or strike anew the victims of the previous one!

We can trace a parallel with the unemployed and marginalized in post war Europe. Yesterday, an unemployed person was generally an employee between two jobs; today, it is a social milieu which has permanence and is constantly renewed. Yesterday the status of precarity was marginal (even immigrants often enjoyed stable employment); today it is a norm. New social milieus appear (reappear), which requires (re)thinking, grasping their possible forms of organization, their dynamics.

Situations of humanitarian disaster are not new today in Mindanao, notably because of recurrent military conflict; and our comrades have a long experience in this area. However, it is only recently that high intensity cyclones have become more frequent in the Philippine south (previously they were more common in the centre or north of the archipelago). In December 2011, typhoon Washi/Sendong and floods devastated the coastal regions where they are active, notably in Iligan, in the popular neighbourhoods where they are based. For the first time, our comrades were directly confronted with the devastating psychological and social effects of such

climatic disasters – and the appearance of this social milieu we call climate refugees. They mobilized their activist networks in this province and those around: this was a "founding experience" which allowed them to be better prepared to act when a still more violent typhoon, Haiyan/Yolanda, hit the centre of the archipelago two years later.

Movements of "survivors" were created, self-organized and led by victims of climate disaster. Two years later, while the fight for their rights continues in Iligan (Mindanao), cadres emerging from this experience went to Leyte (Visayas) to bring aid to the victims of the super typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda: these movements are of a long term nature, and thus recognize each other, help each other, make links, and affirm themselves at the national – and why not international – level.

The affected populations have a right to hope for aid and solidarity – which is what concerns us primarily when we are in a position to offer them. But beyond this "elementary" level, we must respond to the emergence of a new social sector (climate refugees) demanding specific forms of organization – this could involve millions of people! From the very fact of the depth of the disaster, the classic questions we face in mobilizations is posed with a particular sharpness: inequalities of class and status, gender oppression, communal tensions, racism and religious intolerance, casteism (when there are castes), violence towards women, the situation and specific needs of children, and so on.

The point which I would stress is this: intervening in the direction of this new (for us) social sector is complex – it is necessary to learn from experience – and it is a major issue which concerns the whole organization. It is not a fleeting, marginal responsibility, the affair of an ad hoc commission and some "specialists" in humanitarian aid, full of good will. The whole organization must understand what is new in this area, be capable of mobilizing activist resources, supporting a long term action; it must know how to react without delay when a new area is struck and take a number of measures: redeployment of cadres, collectivization of experience, train-

ing in basic principles of emergency action and so on.

Also, this area should be integrated into the general programme of the organization. We have already evoked in the past many facets of this question and I would just wish to return today on two of them: risk prevention and reconstruction in the interests of the popular layers.

The policy of risk prevention

The 2006 report did not give the policy of risk prevention the importance it deserves. For countries affected by extreme and recurrent climate phenomena (and they are increasingly numerous), this is not a vague "principle of precaution": the said risks are known and often administrative departments are supposed to deal with them. If governments nonetheless prove impotent in the face of disaster, it is in full knowledge of the situation.

The reasons why a government fails in its responsibilities are multiple: indifference of the élites to the fate of the poor, corruption and so on. These reasons can be very profound. For example, in the Philippines, the distribution of funds and the implementation of national aid takes place via local authorities not to strengthen direct democracy, but because, in a clientelist regime, this strengthens at all levels the relationships of patronage or negotiation of alliances between "big families". Problems: a major climate disaster renders the local authorities impotent and the system seizes up.

More generally, prevention is not limited to a set of "technical" measures (availability of means of aid and so on). One cannot, for example, anticipate the risks of flooding linked to torrential floods or the elevation of the level of the oceans without taking on powerful economic lobbies: mines, agro-industry, real estate, tourism, financial speculation and so on. This demands that the state prioritize the common interest rather than private capitalist interests.

There is then in this area an especially close link between an emergency programme seeking to pro-

tect the population and a set of "transitional demands" whose legitimacy is evident (it is about avoiding humanitarian disasters!) and which for their implementation involve taking on the omnipotence of Capital.

Reconstruction policy

We find this link concerning the policy of reconstruction which we defend after a climatic disaster. The 2006 report stressed it already. We say, very summarily, that reconstruction poses us very directly with the question of agrarian reform in the rural world and urban reform in the towns. It amounts on the one hand to demands made on the authorities, but also things the survivors' movements can initiate themselves.

In the devastated villages, rebuilding habitations is not enough; the general conditions of existence need to be reconstituted. The authorities should thus endow the families affected with plots of land which will allow them to produce without for example waiting for new coconut palms to arrive at maturity. Also, the movements can on their own initiative reanimate a peasant agriculture which helps to stabilize the social tissue, to no longer depend solely on monocultures or landowners, ensure a healthier environment to children – and which participates in a programme of struggle against global warming. The exchange of experience is crucial here: peasants engaged for years in organic farming in Mindanao contribute their know how to disaster-struck rural communities in Leyte.

In the towns the reconstruction piloted in the popular neighbourhoods by the authorities can lead to disastrous situations when a great part of the funds allocated are diverted, when minimum architectural standards are not respected, when conditions of existence are not taken into account: expulsion of those affected by the disaster far from areas of work, public transport or health services; lack of intimacy inside buildings and children left without protection, when their parents are absent; creation of ghettoized, crime ridden areas and so on. The fight for the right to housing and urban planning

conceived in the interests of the poor thus take on an especially vital character against big real estate interests and land speculation.

The struggle of the climate refugees thus is linked to that of the peasant and urban poor movements, favouring convergences and the formation of territorial or sectoral coalitions from the local to the national level.

III. International solidarity

The coalition Mi-HANDs (Mindanao) was set up in response to the devastation produced by the super typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda. It has made a considerable effort to bring aid to the affected communities in the north of the island of Leyte. The campaign it launched rests firstly on its capacity to mobilize activist resources, but also the financial support that it has received on the international plane.

Not counting loans, Mi-HANDs has up until now received 32,000 euros – around 1,000 euros collected locally, 10,000 received from Belgium and 21,000 sent via the campaign initiated by Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF). I give these figures to show that even at our scale, what can be done counts effectively. And this support continues, while Mi-HANDs is involved in a new stage: rehabilitation and reconstruction of the devastated villages.

ESSF has received the support of number of persons and organizations, some of whom are in this room. However its resources remain far too limited. It can only initiate one or two financial campaigns per year, exclusively aimed at Asia. The amounts collected are greatly insufficient in relation to what is needed. ESSF cannot work with its local partners as long as is necessary (big solidarity associations undertake reconstruction programmes over a 10 year period). So the basis of solidarity must be widened.

We face a difficulty: the loss of traditions of "popular solidarity", of "movements to movements". Mostly, progressive organizations have not been involved for very long in this area, leaving it to spe-

cialized NGOs and associations (indeed para-governmental bodies). At best, a union, for example, will send aid to its sister organization in a country affected by a humanitarian disaster. Some progress has been made in recent years; ESSF for example has worked with the Union syndicale solidaires in France. Also, other movements defend conceptions quite close to ours in this area, like Secours populaire français.

We have ourselves much to learn – and that includes associations involved in solidarity actions for many years. We can also encourage other progressive parties and movements to participate on this terrain and encourage the taking into account of this question in activist networks like the Forum populaire Asie-Europe (AEPF). We have our role to play, modest though it is, in the development of this internationalist commitment or in the political reflection it involves. While continuing campaigns of financial solidarity – for now with the Philippines.

A campaign underway: financial support for the activity of Mi-HANDs (Philippines)

To send donations

Cheques

Cheques in euros only and payable in France made out to ESSF should be sent to:

ESSF

2, rue Richard-Lenoir

93100 Montreuil

France

Bank:

Crédit lyonnais

Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)

10 boulevard Chanzy

93100 Montreuil

France

ESSF, account number 445757C

International bank references:

IBAN: FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT: CRLYFRPP

Paypal: you can also make donations via Paypal.

We will keep you regularly informed via our site of the situation and the use of the solidarity fund.

TAIWAN

The Significance of Taiwan's Anti-Service Trade Agreement Movement

AU LOONG-YU ·

However, although the objectives of the movement were already set very low [1], which has had the advantage of being able to unite the masses through a common denominator, as long as the government/Wang Jin-pyng was prepared to make minor concessionary gestures it would not be difficult for them to end the occupation.

Nevertheless, the movement still has a historical significance. Although it did not set its aims very high, it made use of strong civil disobedience to occupy the Legislative Yuan for 22 days, which is something that the world rarely sees.

Complete reform from the bottom up is better than the other way round.

History has always shown that even great top-down reform means only limited social progress, since the ruling elite which unilaterally makes the reform can just as easily unilaterally withdraw it. Conversely, if the reform comes from the bottom-up, yet only makes a very small improvement, it is a progressive achievement of much greater significance. This is something that is true of Taiwan's anti-service trade agreement movement.

While the aims of the movement as a whole were set very low, each of the participants had their own agenda. For the right, the movement was only opposed to Ma Ying-jeou; it was not against the service trade agreement and definitely not anti-free trade. For the left, on the other hand, a few days ago 17 trade unions issued a joint statement opposing free trade. The statement gave the way that free trade agreements help big capital to exploit small businessmen and workers as reason for opposing

the service trade agreement. The statement pointed out that, "

In recent years, Taiwan's labour movement has also seen protests against the WTO, US pork and beef, the free economic zone and other liberalisation issues...The service trade agreement gives Chinese capital a competitive advantage to enter Taiwan and open up shop. Once there is an overall over-supply of the new capital in the service market, it is bound to lead to another wave of price cuts by vendors trying to survive the cutthroat battle, and labour will once again be sacrificed in the competition." [2]

No free trade agreement does not mean no trade.

Some unions have adopted the KMT's position and actively supported the service trade agreement, which is an argument that is not worth responding to here. There are also some who refer to Marx's support of free trade in the 19th century and use "leftist" rhetoric to defend the agreement [3]]But this needs scrutiny. Is the so called free trade of Marx's era and the so called free trade of today really the same? Ricardo's so called free trade only covers the trade of goods and basically excludes cross border capital flows. Today's free trade, however, covers both categories, allowing multinational companies free access to each country, and moreover the service industry is interpreted so as to include many public social services leading to their privatization. This has resulted in the so called "race to the bottom", in which, in order to compete to attract capital, countries drive down the level of labour rights and natural resources protection. This is why over the last 20 years, whenever countries have signed free trade agreements, social move-

ments have opposed them –although they have not, as some critics have claimed, opposed trade itself because even without these agreements world trade will still be conducted.

The majority of unions, however, at this time do not support the position (outlined above) held by the minority of unions. The majority of the movements' participants take part either due to a simple democratic consciousness and resentment towards the policies of the KMT, or from a simple people's livelihood position as they do not want to be oppressed by large capital, or due to feelings of fear and resistance to Chinese companies taking over Taiwan's market and China's unilateral unification agenda towards Taiwan. These three reasons are often mixed together. As for the position of narrow nationalist hatred (towards Chinese people), it has had a limited impact, although the slogan "Ma Ying-jeou is a Chinese beast" has attracted some attention.

The various trends continuing to ferment

As more and more ordinary people and social organizations, each with their own ideas, have participated in the movement, it might be said that the movement may have exceeded its original aims. Furthermore, Wang Dan, the student leader of the 1989 China democratic movement who has been teaching in Taiwan for many years, has also made an important observation that is worth noting. He said that politics has never normally seen so many

interested students actively involved in the movement and all kinds of discussion. If this is combined with the hundreds of thousands of ordinary people that have taken part, what does it mean? It shows that the new generation of civilians are politicized. Imagine if a simple majority of participants were to all take the progressive stance of the 17 trade unions. It would not only mean a big blow to China's attempt to influence Taiwan's economy and its politics through trade agreements, it would also be a big blow to the American government's attempt to lure Taiwan to sign the Trans-Pacific Partnership. This is why the United States has been quick to warn the people of Taiwan not to oppose free trade agreements in principle, and why Wang Jin-pyng has made concessionary gestures to divert the movement towards legislative procedure in order to see its collapse.

Even if now the movement is temporarily at a low tide, it has at least warned the two sides of crony capitalism that they cannot go it alone. It is not a trivial matter. Those holding negative views of the movement cannot see the wood for the trees. The movement has seen various undercurrents emerge after three weeks of confrontation and discussion by the masses on the streets. It is not impossible that this will continue to develop in the future and bring about change to Taiwan's political landscape.

April 9th 2014.

Translated by Bai Ruixue

China Labour Net

EGYPT

2011-2014: Egypt's Revolution at Three

NOHA RADWAN ·

It was a foregone conclusion that, since the referendum was presented as a vote of confidence in the leadership of General Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi, the country's minister of defense and vice prime minister for internal security affairs, it was guaranteed to produce a wide majority of "Yes" votes. The official 98% approval, however, must be considered with an eye to the 38% turnout.

Constitutions are at times important and crucial to the success of future governments, but this will not be the case in Egypt. In the absence of strong popular organizations, the constitution is likely to remain no more than ink on paper.

The rise of General Abd al Fattah al-Sisi as the savior of Egypt, since the ousting of president Morsi, can be traced to a complex set of conditions and events, all of which contributed to what amounts to a political counterrevolution and a return to Mubarak's regime.

It may be hard to remain hopeful about a revolution that seems to have been so badly defeated, but I argue for such hope. Having been among those who witnessed the Egyptian revolution from its early 2011 phase [1], I have been closely observing its ups and downs and unexpected turns, especially during my frequent visits there.

I was there during the last week of June and in early July 2013, and left with the heavy feeling that the revolution of 2011 had run its course. Forced to dissipate down the paths of parliamentary and presidential elections and motley constitutional reforms, it was derailed by a sterile conflict between secularists and Islamists, none of whom seemed interested in any revolutionary changes — and ultimately displaced by a hegemonic discourse of totalitarian ul-

tra-nationalism that has left an entire nation, except supporters of the Muslim Brothers (MB), enchanted with the soft-spoken General al-Sisi.

Al-Sisi, formerly chief of military intelligence, in 2011 defended "virginity tests" (ordered by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to be carried out on arrested women demonstrators — ed.). Now, to paraphrase one of his earliest communiqués, he takes it upon the armed forces to provide the Egyptians with the tender loving care the revolution has failed to provide.

Looking for the Revolution

I returned in December to a country where, for the MB and their supporters, death had become a daily reality following the Rab'a massacre of August 14. Not surprisingly, the massacre itself has become their rallying cry of the ousted President's supporters, despite the fact that merely alluding to it — through any use of the now infamous picture of four fingers raised against a yellow backdrop — had been designated a crime punishable by law, and that more frequently than not the punishment is meted through the barrels of a shotgun.

(Rab'a, where the massacre happened, is the name of the neighborhood mosque. In turn, the mosque takes its name from a 14th century female Sufi mystic. The word *Rab'a* is also Arabic for "fourth," hence the sign.)

What was surprising, however, was the complacency of the larger public with these horrors and more. Yet even a short stay in the country last December made this complacency easier to understand, though not to excuse.

Fear had become the most important state product since July. Fear of the MB's alleged terrorism was on the mind of many, and so they had nothing to

say against state terror. Egyptian state media had mastered the art of demonizing the MB. In the eyes of many, they had become nothing more than terrorists and enemies of not only the state, but the Egyptian people themselves.

My December trip to Egypt was primarily motivated by a search. I went searching for signs of hope for the revolution, for the smallest signs that the MB's defiance of state suppression was not all that remained of it. These signs were faint and hard to find, but they were there.

Strikes of the Egyptian workers who have resumed a valiant struggle in very bad times were making considerable victories. In September a small front, Thuwwar [2] was formed, with only 150 founders (28 of whom are women), but several demonstrations that it called for in November and December in downtown Cairo attracted 500-1000 participants.

The front was the result of incessant efforts of a small core of committed individuals and groups such as the Revolutionary Socialists, 6 April, the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights, and several others who remain committed to the goal of a civil government dominated by neither the Brotherhood nor Mubarak's old regime and his military.

The excessively reactionary and repressive measures of the post-July government under the leadership of prime minister Hazem al-Beblawi, a right-wing economist, and General al-Sisi are not serving it well. Failure to indicate any willingness to budge from Mubarak's neoliberal economic policies, and increasing levels of police repression, are leaving the majority of Egyptians with a bitter aftertaste.

It is becoming painfully clear to the masses that their lot will not improve with the present government, or the one that would emerge following the parliamentary and presidential elections anticipated in the next few months. One can certainly say that the objective conditions that precipitated the uprising of 2011 are still in place.

The conditions and grievances that produced Egypt's "revolutionary situation" remains as present today as three years ago, but as Lenin wrote, a revolutionary situation alone is never enough to give rise to a revolution but must be accompanied by the ability of the revolutionary class to take an action strong enough to dislocate the old government. What remains uncertain is when that "revolutionary mass action" will emerge.

The First Phase

Revolutionary change cannot be brought about by the military or under its auspices. Neither can it be delivered by a neoliberal religious-based organization that does not even shun the age-old repressive measures of the state apparatus. Clear as these facts may have been to some, it appears that Egyptians are forced to learn them the hard way.

In January 2011, the deployment of the Egyptian Armed Forces to the streets in the wake of fierce and bloody battles between the police and the protestors, which resulted in the defeat of the police forces and their complete disappearance from the streets, brought about the cheer that would last for the first few months of the revolution: "The people and the army are one hand."

That cheer and sentiment would become even more potent on February 11, when the spokesman of the Supreme Council of Armed Forces announced President Mubarak's resignation and the council's takeover of the country's government. In the following weeks, SCAF would announce that its governance would be a transitional phase during which it would oversee constitutional amendment, parliamentary, and presidential elections.

A nation celebrated and declared the victory of the revolution, and salutations flew in from around the world. Few were skeptical of this alliance of the military and the people, and it was these few who less than a month later returned to Tahrir to resume the sit-ins. SCAF quickly bared its teeth and in the continued absence of the police, subjected the protestors to massive repression.

The protestors' demands focused on more transparency and a clearer commitment to the goals of the revolution, namely social justice, and a real elimination of Mubarak's regime through the prosecution of the deposed president, senior members of his government and of the Egyptian business elite whose accumulation of wealth was augmented through corrupt dealings with Mubarak's state.

Little was done by way of meeting these demands and as is now clear, much of what was done to assuage the protests did not bring the revolution closer to its goals. For example, while Mubarak, his sons and several of their cronies were arrested and charged with corruption as well as assaulting and even killing the protestors of January 2011, the most serious of these charges have been dropped over the course of the trials.

Here one should note that while SCAF's Marshall Mohamed Hussein Tantawi was celebrated in the first half of 2011, for having "stood by the revolution and refused to attack the protestors," his testimony at Mubarak's trial obviously did not include any references to presidential orders of attacking the protestors. The Egyptian media passed over this paradox in silence.

In the summer of 2013, Mubarak and son were released from prison as was business tycoon and former head of the National Democratic Party's policies' committee, Ahmad Ezz, and others. While Mubarak's minister of interior Habib al-Adly received a life sentence for using violence against the demonstrators, time has shown that the Egyptian police has not changed its policies and procedures much. Furthermore, SCAF proved no less murderous than the police as was repeatedly demonstrated in March, July, October and November of 2011.

The Brotherhood and the Military

Ironically enough, the most concrete gain of the continuous protests against SCAF was expediting the plans to transfer the government to an elected president. Ironically, while the Muslim Brotherhood was nearly absent from these street

protests, amid claims of its complicity and secret dealings with SCAF, the organization finally emerged as the biggest winner with the election of president Mohammed Morsi in June 2012.

The broad base of the coalitions that came together to oust Mubarak in January and February of 2011 and the lack of a structured organization among them, two characteristics that helped produce this spectacular uprising, were among the reasons why these revolutionaries failed at the electoral process.

Morsi would spend a year in office, a year in which it would quickly become evident that he was more interested in courting Mubarak's "deep state" than in strengthening the connections between the MB and other forces of resistance to the former regime. Amnesty for General Tantawi, Mubarak's defense minister and former head of SCAF, a promotion of a SCAF member and chief of military intelligence to Minister of Defense, and Morsi's obsequious speech in praise of Egyptian police on the second anniversary of the revolution on January 25, 2013 were only the most glaring signs of this interest.

President Morsi also amply demonstrated complete unwillingness to budge from the established neoliberal economic policies of the previous four decades. His government announced plans to continue borrowing from the International Monetary Fund, privatizing government enterprises and seducing foreign capital investment through tax breaks and investment friendly legislation.

Needless to say, such plans conflict with any aspirations of setting minimum and maximum wages, empowering labor unions, and even adjusting the tax structure. An absence of clear signs of commitment to these aspirations was justified by the need to first "put the country back on its feet," with a focus on stability and regaining the higher levels of GNP that have dropped since 2011.

Morsi's year in office should have been characterized by popular pressure for his government to pursue the revolution's aspirations for a break with Mubarak's regime and its neoliberal policies, and for prosecution of those who have oppressed and

pillaged the country for three decades, but instead, the few who voiced such demands were drowned in a media orchestrated campaign to vilify the Brotherhood and their president in the most Islamophobic of terms.

The MB and its supporters were demonized as "Islamists" whose goal is to take over not only the country, but the entire region. A chauvinistic discourse of pride in Egypt's secularism, diversity, multiculturalism and modernity, and the endangerment of all these great characteristics by the Brotherhood's rise to power, dominated the country's "independent" media, primarily television.

Here it should be noted that even a cursory look at the ownership of this media would reveal that independent they are not, and in the service of the people's revolution they will never be. One of the largest and most widely viewed television channels, certainly one that has spearheaded the anti-Morsi campaign is owned by Naguib Sawiris (net worth \$2.7 Billion according to Forbes), owner of the country's largest telecommunications company.

Former military officer Suleiman Amer, who made a fortune building luxury residential resorts amid claims of corrupt means of securing the land at less than market value during Mubarak's era, owns another popular channel with the ironic name of "Tahrir."

Benefiting from the frustration of the majority of the population over the continued economic crisis and indeed a lack of political vision and aptitude within Morsi's government, the Egyptian media derailed the revolution into the inane conflict between secularism and Islamism, aided by a mix of myopia and opportunism on the part of the leaders of the opposition to Morsi's government.

Morsi's opposition crystalized into an alliance between Hamdeen Sabbahi, an avowed Nasserist in favor of state-controlled economy, and prominent liberal Mohammed al-Baradei whose party program advocates liberalization of the market and western style democracy.

The alliance became the nucleus of a front whose members were a hodge-podge mix of prominent figures including some, like Amr Moussa, who had served in Mubarak's regime. Naturally, the "pathetic front," as it was called by Sameh Naguib in the editorial of the Revolutionary Socialists' quarterly *Awraq Ishtirakiyya*, (No, 23, June 2013) could only articulate a single grievance against Morsi's government: They are Islamists, a threat to our secularism.

"The front helped transform the conflict into one over identity, between a civil current represented by the front and an Islamist front represented by the Brotherhood and their allies among the Salafists," wrote Naguib.

If the banality of this secular vs. Islamist discourse was not obvious then, it must have become obvious following President Morsi's ouster when the "secularists" allied themselves with the most conservative group in Egypt, namely the Salafists who had dropped their previous alliance with the Brotherhood like a hot potato, and the most regressive regime in the region, namely the Saudis.

"Then the liberals gave the Brotherhood another free gift through their alliance with the remnants of Mubarak's regime and their constant demand for the intervention of the military," continued Naguib, a demand that the Revolutionary Socialists categorically rejected.

Naguib articulated the conundrum of what transpired at the mass protests of June 30th: All the opponents to the Brotherhood would participate in these protests, but these forces had qualitatively differing goals. Supporters of Mubarak's old regime would be there alongside the liberal bourgeois opposition that only wants to replace the Brotherhood but not continue the revolution.

The revolutionaries would also be there, added Naguib, but for them ending the Brotherhood's rule is not enough of a goal. Rather, the goal was to pursue the revolution of 2011, to prosecute Mubarak's men in the military, the police and the business elite, and to replace the current state with another

that directly represents Egypt's workers and peasants and the poor and responds to the people's demands for dignity and social justice.

The "War on Terror" Revives

That the calls for military intervention overwhelmed its opponents through a mass frenzy against the Brotherhood, and that those who emerged as the winners of this intervention were none other than the representatives of the old regime, is now neither a secret nor even news.

The bulk of those who were opposing the MB in the name of the revolution are now eerily silent. The Egyptian ministry of interior is back in its full pre-2011 glory. Mass arrests, street shootings, torture and non-legal detentions are now part of everyday life, all in the name of a George W. Bush like "war on terror."

Egyptians today are making the same mistake that so many Americans made in 2001, giving up civil liberties and critical mindsets in the hope for an ever-elusive security. The pseudo-civil government that has been put in place under the auspices of General al-Sisi has secured the complacency of most of the Egyptian public as it goes through its witch-hunt for the leaders of the Brotherhood, and the massacres of its supporters, through the all too familiar mantra: You are either with us or with the terrorists.

Even activists clearly not allied with the Brotherhood, public heroes only last year, today face repression, albeit less severely than the "Islamists," with little or no public outrage. Alaa Abd al-Fattah, an activist and blogger who was imprisoned during Morsi's year in office, has been in police custody since the end of November following an unlawful arrest from his home.

In December, three activists, Ahmad Douma (also imprisoned under Morsi), Ahmad Maher, and Mohammed Adel (leaders of the 6th April movement), received three-year prison sentences on trumped up charges of assaulting police officers. Hundreds more have been arrested, detained, ha-

arrassed and released, without a legal record of such actions.

On December 18, the police raided the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights (ECESR), arrested all those present and led them, handcuffed and blindfolded, to a police station where they were harassed for several hours before their release. Reports of such acts of intimidation have become too many to even record.

Struggles of Egyptian Workers

One important revolutionary activity that has been instrumental in Egypt's revolutionary struggle and remains active today is the workers' movement. Not surprisingly, reports on this movement have been scarce and corrupted in the Egyptian media and absent from the Western media, which seem to be keen on representing the Egyptian struggle as a revolt against state corruption and repression and a quest for a western-style democracy.

This representation is at odds with even the most basic slogan that has dominated all protest actions: "Bread, freedom and social justice," with its emphasis on the basic needs of the poor and a more equitable distribution of wealth and resources.

The 2008 workers' strikes at Mahalla, one of the country's largest centers of textile industry and a complex with more than 20,000 workers, must be acknowledged as the precursor of what transpired in 2011. The strikers' demands showed a remarkable development by moving beyond their own specific issues to a demand for a minimum wage of 1200 Egyptian pounds for all workers, in both the public and private sectors.

This demand has continued to be on the agenda of all workers' movements since then, and only a few months ago the government was compelled to partially respond (as it stands, it is granted for the workers in the public but not the private sector).

The Mahalla workers' strike was the nucleus for the call for a partially successful general strike on April 6th of the same year, a strike that became the

springboard of the organization 6th April, which, with over 70,000 members, has been instrumental in all the protests.

According to the counts of ECESR, workers' protest actions numbered 447 in 2008, 487 in 2009 and 530 in 2010. Many of these showed the same kind of development in their demands that characterized the 2008 Mahalla strike, calling for the right to form independent unions and to prosecute and change corrupt management, in addition to the typical demands for higher pay. A few of them were carried out by non-manual (white-collar — ed.) labor, another important development in the movement.

One often ignored fact is that Mubarak's resignation on February 11, 2011 came less than 24 hours after the workers of Mahalla, together with those of the Iron and Steel Industry in Helwan (12,000 workers), and others in Suez, Alexandria and Cairo called for an open-ended general strike. The change of government in 2011 only temporarily caused the workers' protest movements to slow down, and by March the counts were up again.

According to ECESR, in 2011-2013 the total number of workers' protests was higher than in the ten previous years, in spite of a smear campaign in the mainstream media that accused the protestors of being unpatriotic and focused on their own demands rather than the well-being of the nation.

In fact, the workers' demands continued to go beyond higher wages or better work conditions. They demanded changes of administration, especially in the public sector where there was a deliberate effort under Mubarak's rule to overlook mismanagement and corruption in public enterprises, which would then be sold to private investors at low prices.

A long struggle by workers in a linen textiles factory recently forced a court order that reversed one of those privatization efforts, which had left the factory in the hands of a Saudi investor.

Some Reason for Optimism

One lesson that the post July 3rd government learned — which Morsi's had not grasped — is that the workers' movement must be appeased. (It is my personal impression that president Morsi may have conflated the workers and the poor, thinking that he didn't need to appease the former on account of the MB's base among the latter).

Thus, it was among the new government's first and most surprising decisions to offer a seat in the cabinet to labor activist Kamal Abu Eita, previously chair of the first independent federation of labor unions, formed in 2010, a man who had for years agitated against the regime [3].

Second came the granting of the demanded minimum wage of 1,200 pounds for workers in state-run industries. Yet much to the surprise of the government, the workers' struggles continued and their protests seem to stop in one complex only to begin in another. On August 12, an army tank showed up along with other security forces at the sit-in of the Suez Steel workers to end a strike and arrest its leaders [4].

Several smaller strikes and workers' protests followed, and in November the Iron and Steel workers once again picked up the baton. This time union leaders adopted a new strategy: Rather than striking, the call was for occupying the management headquarters, and the demands were not only related to wages and work conditions but also included a complete overhaul of the complex's management policy.

The Iron and Steel factory, they explained, is one of a kind in the country and as such represents one of the strategic national industries. It was conceived in the 1960s as part of a complex, which also produces the coke coal required for its operations. Under Mubarak's government, however, the coke factory was allowed to export its output, leaving the iron and steel factory able to run only one of its four furnaces. This resulted in reduction of the number of the factory workers from the original 25,000 to the current 12,000.

Although the workers' protests began with the demand for the payment of an annual bonus, which had been withheld in 2013, the demands quickly escalated to the change of management and a government commitment to run the factory at full capacity. After 23 days of the sit-in, and multiple negotiations with the aim of convincing the workers to compromise and accept partial solutions, the government agreed to all the workers' demands.

The struggle of the iron and steel workers exposed Abu Eita, the labor leader turned minister, and showed that the government had unfortunately succeeded in coopting him and securing his allegiance to its policies. But to coopt a leader is not to coopt a movement.

The victory of the iron and steel workers is quite significant. It is not going to bring about a change of the regime or the success of the revolution. Yet it is one of many indications that Egypt's revolutionary situation will continue and that the country's proletariat consciousness has grown.

Another workers' movement important to mention is that of the Noubaseed corporation, founded in 1976 as a state-run company for the production of seeds and fertilizers that grew to produce 60% of Egypt's seeds for agriculture. It was sold in 1988 to a Saudi investor, but in the wake of the January 2011 revolution, investigative reports were presented to the Egyptian judiciary with evidence of illegal transactions, including illegal acquisitions of land by the investor.

The investor, "Abdallah al-Ka'ky," in turn decided to close down the company, withdraw its bank accounts, and present the case to an international court. Mubarak's legislation had given foreign investments such powers against both the workers and the state. In response, company workers took over the entire production process, operating quite successfully with the help of experts from the min-

istry of agriculture and the local population of the Noubariyyah district where the company is located.

These days, two years later, the current government is moving towards a reconciliation with the Saudi investor and an agreement to drop charges and return the company to him. The workers are protesting to restore Noubaseed to its original status as government owned. The Noubaseed story is another proof of a rising workers' consciousness.

Last but not least of Egypt's workers' protests is an ongoing one among medical professionals, led by an organization called "Physicians without Borders," calling for higher pay and better work conditions for government-hired medical professionals. This consciousness, and an ongoing closing of the ranks between professionals and the traditional working class, represents today the flicker of hope for the revolution in a very bleak landscape.

There is no doubt that after the dust settles and the nation's fascination with the soft-spoken general subsides, it will become clear that Egypt's revolutionary situation has not changed, that the consciousness of its revolutionary class has grown, and that the ruling class will not be able to maintain the old ways. But once again, as Lenin reminds us:

"It is not every revolutionary situation that gives rise to a revolution; revolution arises only out of a situation in which the above-mentioned objective changes are accompanied by a subjective change, namely, the ability of the revolutionary class to take revolutionary mass action strong enough to break (or dislocate) the old government, which never, not even in a period of crisis, 'falls,' if it is not toppled over."

Obviously, the majority of Egyptians have been trying to topple the old regime for three years now. It remains to be seen whether they will succeed in the foreseeable future.

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EGYPT

Egyptian Women and the Revolution

NOHA RADWAN ·

One only has to look at the pictures, articles, tweets and other documents to see this and to follow the remarkable ways in which organizations have developed, aimed at the protection of female participants against sexual harassment. The Egyptian revolutionary protests were an egalitarian space carved out during the events themselves. It remains to be seen whether these events can grow into processes with lasting results.

DE JURE: Egyptian laws remain discriminatory on numerous levels. Not only do the laws of personal status give women little control over such issues as marriage, divorce, child custody and freedom of movement and work for married women, but civil, criminal and labor laws also reinforce women's subordinate status.

This may explain why Egyptian women have been at the forefront of revolutionary efforts. It remains for some of them to understand that regimes that uphold the neoliberal model, with its insistence on the separation of the public and the private and its reification of all social relations, are not capable, let alone willing, to accord women the liberation and equal status they have been demanding.

DE RIGUEUR: "Defending" women's rights is a *de rigueur* (obligatory) aspect of all liberal discourse, especially when it declares itself the guardian of secularism against religiously tinted discourse and organizations. In Egypt, paternalism has been a common feature of both liberal and "Islamist" movements.

While the constitution of 2012 was more explicit in its outlook on women as primarily wives and mothers and defining their rights only within the context of the patriarchal family structure, it is unlikely that the changes made in 2013 will translate into anything meaningful. One only need remember that the discourse of "women belong at home" was strongest in Egypt during the Sadat and Mubarak eras, due to the rise in the privatization of the ownership of work places and in unemployment — two trends that will not be reversed in the absence of the revolution.

The painful irony of the Egyptian situation is that the proclaimed savior of women from the regressive Islamists should be none other than the General cum Field Marshall al-Sisi, who in 2011 defended SCAF's atrocious "virginity tests" to which female revolutionaries were subjected in custody.

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On the Syrian Revolution and the Kurdish Issue

JOSEPH DAHER ·

Joseph Daher: Let's start with your involvement with the Qamishli uprising in 2004 and the Syrian revolution that began in 2011. Why did you participate in them and what was your role?

Shiar Neyo: I cannot really say that I participated in either of them, to be honest, because I was outside Syria and could not go back, due to being a refugee and wanted by the (Syrian) security apparatus. My role was limited to supporting some activists inside Syria with secure communications, setting up and managing some websites and, from time to time, writing and editing news under various pseudonyms – all by virtue of my modest experience in these things. Of course I also participated in demonstrations and events abroad in support of the Qamishli uprising and the Syrian revolution, like many Syrians in exile.

As to why, well, I don't think any activist or intellectual who really believes in the revolutionary slogans they pronounce could not participate in popular movements of this kind; movements that Syrians have been dreaming of for decades. I know many leftist activists and intellectuals who distanced themselves from both movements under the pretexts of violence, militarisation, the growing influence of reactionary forces, and other flimsy excuses. One can only say to these people and their likes that the world is more complicated than your idealistic notions of socio-political change, and if you don't get involved in major events like these and leave the arena to others, you only have yourselves to blame if the ultimate outcome is not to your liking.

Can you tell us more about the Kurdish uprising of 2004?

This is one of of very few occasions that I have agreed to talk about the Qamishli uprising and the Syrian revolution. Because, frankly, I'm rather embarrassed to talk about events that I wasn't actually involved in. There are many others who are far more worthy and qualified than me to speak about them. So everything I'm going to say reflects my own personal perspective in my capacity as almost an outside observer – even though my family and social connections inside Syria make both of these events more personal.

To me, the Qamishli uprising in 2004 was a classic example of the crystallisation of accumulated frustration and anger against the authority, which erupted spontaneously at an unexpected moment. It was in the same manner that the Syrian revolution kicked off in Daraa in March 2011. Both movements possessed all the essential elements that constitute popular uprisings of this kind, from the crystallisation of long-term social-political-economic suffering in a shocking incident, breaking through the barrier of fear, to a form of tribalism (ethnic, tribal, regional, etc.) that initially helps people stick together and move beyond the 'national' rhetoric imposed by the ruling regime as a deterrent or a bridle.

However, the security apparatus and the army, along with a number of mercenaries from local Arab tribes, succeeded – unfortunately – in quickly extinguishing the Qamishli uprising by resorting to extreme and widespread violence, killing, detaining and terrorizing thousands of people. But the regime would not have been able to succeed in this were it not for the cowardice of the Syrian-Kurdish political parties, who did their best, with the collusion of the security apparatus, to calm people down; and were it not for the impotence of the 'Arab' Syrian opposition factions and their hesitation to support

the movement as a legitimate Syrian popular political uprising. Indeed, many Syrian intellectuals and activists condemned the uprising at the time and levelled various accusations and negative epithets at it, such as 'violence', 'treason', 'separatism', 'racism' and so on. Ironically, some of these same activists and intellectuals are today blaming European and international leftists for their lack of support for the Syrian revolution under similar pretexts: 'stability', 'resistance', 'anti-imperialism', 'the Islamist spectre' (which is similar, to some extent, to the Kurdish bogeyman) and so on.

Let us elaborate further on this point. How do you view the position of the Syrian opposition on the Kurdish issue?

First allow me to emphasise that I don't believe that there is one single Syrian opposition but many, just as there are many Kurdish issues that may vary depending on your moral and political position vis-à-vis these issues, from believing it's merely about cultural and democratic rights to acknowledging or denying the right of Syrian-Kurds to self-determination.

To me, and to many Syrian-Kurds, this position that I have just talked about (the position of many Syrian-Arab dissidents and intellectuals on the Qamishli uprising) summarises their historical complex towards the 'Kurdish Issue': on one hand, they insist that Kurdish political forces should work within a 'unified' national framework but, on the other, they don't make any effort to re-constitute this framework so as to include and guarantee the national rights and demands of Kurds and other minorities in Syria. Of course I'm speaking here of tangible political and economic rights and demands, not symbolic, generic, rubber-like slogans.

The least that can be said of this position is that it is double-standard and opportunistic. But the problem runs much deeper than that, in my opinion. It seems to me that the problem lies in the inability of these Arab-nationalists to imagine an inclusive national identity based on diversity that is neither reductionist nor assimilationist. Of course the Ba'th

Party's policy towards the Kurds (from oppression and discrimination, coupled with obfuscation and semi-complete ignorance about anything Kurdish, as well as the closure of all public spaces of debate and dialogue that could have countered this ignorance) played a big role in the deepening of this Arab-Kurdish rift. But we cannot blame the Ba'thists for everything. The position of many Arab-nationalists, who consider themselves 'progressive', on Kurdish issues in Syria is no less chauvinistic.

We can add to these factors the insularity of the Kurdish nationalist movement in Syria, since 1950? s at least, and their inability to imagine forms of struggle other than one closed off on itself, so to speak. This phenomenon has complicated historical causes that can be observed in many national liberation movements across the world.

This chasm between the Syrian Kurdish and Arab oppositions began to subside to some extent after a number of Syrian-Kurdish political parties – particularly Yeketi and Azadi – opened up to some of the 'Arab' opposition factions and started to participate in their events and meetings, notably under the framework of the so-called Damascus Declaration. However, this was a partial and largely pragmatic opening, in my view, as evidenced later, after the revolution broke out, by the fundamental differences between the two sides within opposition groupings regarding the name of the Syrian Republic, for example, (whether or to include 'Arab' in the name), or how to define Kurdish rights... and many other disputes of this kind.

A much more important process, in my opinion, in this regard was the outbreak of the revolution in 2011, in all that it meant for Syrians regarding a re-discovery of themselves and a discovery of the others who ostensibly shared this 'homeland' with them yet they did not know anything about them. The revolution meant the reconstruction of a Syrian national identity that is more colourful and diverse and less exclusionary. It was very significant, for example, that protesters in Kurdish and Arab areas raised slogans and banners and placards carrying

messages of mutual support and solidarity. Like the slogans carried by protesters in Amuda and Qamishli and other Kurdish-majority towns in solidarity with Deraa, Homs, Aleppo and other places. Or the banners raised by protesters in Idlib, Aleppo, Homs and elsewhere expressing solidarity with Amuda and Qamishli and other predominantly Kurdish areas; banners and placards congratulating their Kurdish comrades during the latter's national festive occasions, or consoling them during their 'special' tragedies (such as the assassination of Mesh'al Tammo). This phenomenon can be read from the perspective that I spoke about earlier (the building of a new national identity) and not merely as an expression of symbolic, mutual solidarity as a matter of reciprocation or sharing in the sense of victimhood.

However, it seems this radical, creative process has not yet had an impact on the established Syrian opposition groups – both Kurdish and Arab – which remain captive to their outdated identities and rhetoric.

How has the situation in Kurdish areas developed since the start of the revolution? How has the Assad regime dealt with the popular movement in these areas? What is the relationship between the various Kurdish groups and Syrian revolutionaries, the Free Syrian Army, the Islamist forces, etc.?

Many accuse the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the Syrian wing of the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), of collusion and co-operation with the regime. I don't believe this narrative is very accurate. What happened, in my reading of events, was a pragmatic convergence of interests between the two sides in 2012.

For the regime, the primary aim of this 'understanding' (i.e. the withdrawal of the regime apparatus from the predominantly Kurdish areas and handing their administration over mainly to the PYD) was the neutralisation of the Kurdish areas in the revolution, both militarily and politically (so as

to not open up another major front in the north-eastern part of the country and to divide the opposition along ethnic and sectarian lines). The second aim was to use the PYD as a trump card against Turkey, the most significant supporter of the the Free Syrian Army at that time, in the hope of brokering a future deal with Turkey like the one in which the Syrian regime sold Abdullah Öcalan in 1999. And it appears the regime has failed in some of these aims and succeeded in others, for complicated and intertwined reasons that we cannot really go into here.

From the PYD's point of view, this was a golden opportunity to impose its authority and expand its sphere of influence in the Kurdish areas in Syria. This political pragmatism and thirst for power are two important factors in understanding the party's dealings with the regime, the revolution, the FSA, and even the Kurds themselves. They also help explain many phenomena that seem to bewilder some commentators and analysts, such as the suppression by PYD forces of independent activists and those critical of the party's policies, in much the same vein as the Baathist regime did. By way of example, one can cite in this regard the Amuda massacre in July 2013, in which the People's Protection Units (YPG) opened fire on unarmed demonstrators, or the closure of the new independent radio station Arta in February 2014, under the pretext that it was not 'licensed'. The PYD's forces have also assaulted members of other Kurdish political parties and arrested some of them under a variety of excuses; they have been controlling food and financial resources in the Kurdish areas and distributing them in an unjust manner on the basis of partisan favouritism, and so on and so forth. Such practises remind people, rightly, of the oppressive practises of the Assad regime.

After armed Islamist factions – the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) and Jabhat Al-Nusra in particular – started to attack Kurdish areas in mid-2013, igniting a war that continues unabated between them and the PYD forces, many Syrian-

Kurds started to change their position towards the PYD and the YPG forces that it dominates.

The Islamist factions are fighting this battle under an Islamist banner some times and under an Arabist banner at others. But the real engine behind them is the Turkish government, the arch-enemy of the Kurds, in addition to the strategic position of these regions on the Turkish and Iraqi borders, as well as their richness in oil. The combination of these factors has pushed many Kurdish-Syrians to accepting the PYD's authority out of self-defence or out of fear that the radical Islamists might win and subsequently impose their rule and their values that are alien to the local population, like what happened in al-Raqqqa. In addition to all this, Syrian-Kurds on the whole are less religious and less religiously extreme than a lot of other Syrian social groups. Despite everything else, the PYD continues to talk about secularism, democracy, women's rights, etc. Even those most critical of the party started to see it as the "lesser of two evils". I know many Kurdish activists in Qamishli, Amuda and other areas who, before these developments, used to organise demonstrations and write against the PYD, but have now suddenly started volunteering in the ranks of the YPG, which is largely controlled by the PYD, to fight against the Islamists for the reasons previously mentioned.

This change in the attitude of many Syrian-Kurds towards the PYD was bolstered by the double-standard position of the Syrian opposition, particularly the National Coalition and the Islamist factions, towards the ISIS, even after the FSA declared a war against it. While many opposition pages and websites overflow with critiques of ISIS and lampooning their practises, when it came to the fighting between the ISIS and the PYD forces and their allies in the Kurdish areas, the ISIS suddenly transformed into "the Free Syrian Army" and the entire talk became about a conflict between "the opposition forces" and "the separatist Kurds".

I personally do not believe that such mistakes are always intentional. They are, for the most part, the result of the Kurdish bogeyman and the inability to

imagine a non-exclusionary national identity. I have already touched upon both points. It is my belief that, if the performance and rhetoric of the Syrian opposition factions does not improve as far as Kurdish issues are concerned – radically and meaningfully, and not in terms of dubious pragmatism – it will only lead to the strengthening of the PYD in Kurdish areas, both at the expense of other Kurdish popular revolutionary forces and at the expense of any hope in one Syrian homeland for all.

What do you think of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in general? And what do you make of the self-governance/autonomy experiment in Syrian Kurdistan?

As I have already said, the practices of the party, both past and present, recall the practices of the Assad regime and others oppressive, totalitarian regimes like it. And it is a resemblance that has objective reasons. The PKK is a nationalist party that is highly ideological and based on a strict military regime and blind loyalty, as well as the apotheosis of the leader and the notion of one party that leads society and the state. In this sense, the PKK is not very different to many Arab leftist parties that have been riddled with these Stalinist-Leninist plagues.

As for the experience of self-governance, we first have to distinguish between the aspirations and rights of a group in seeking independence and autonomy and between a specific model that claims to embody these aspirations and rights in practice. So if we are talking about the right of Syrian-Kurds to autonomy and self-determination – provided that this is what they desire – then, of course, I support this right, as should anyone who claims to be a leftist or progressive. Anyone who says otherwise is either a hypocrite or a fascist. I am personally against nation-states and states in general. However, if a group of people, or a majority of them, aspire or seek some aim – regardless of whether or not I agree with it – or if a nation-state was the only possible framework that can currently achieve greater freedom and justice for them, then of course I support these aspirations and endeavours.

But if we are talking about the PYD's current project in the Syrian-Kurdish regions, then the matter becomes more complicated. On one hand, it seems that the experience has begun to achieve commendable gains, such as secular management of the state apparatus, ensuring greater rights for women and the participation of minorities in administration, a greater participation and more agency for the local population in the management of their affairs, especially with the absence of a strong, established state. And we should remember here that the PYD is leaning against a rich experience of self-governance that their comrades in Turkish Kurdistan have been living through.

On the other hand, however, the experiment may well end with the strengthening of the PYD's dominance and the increase of oppression in the name of protecting these gains, along with their gradual squandering in return for narrow political interests. This is a real and possible danger.

I imagine that, if I were living in one of the three Kurdish cantons that are currently under the rule of the self-governance administration, I would have participated in the experiment in one form or another, but I would have tried as much as possible to work with other activists and actors in order to save it from the dangers that I've just mentioned.

Do you think it is possible to build a Third Force, that is democratic and progressive and guarantees the fulfillment of the original goals of the revolution, and that is independent from the regime and the backward Islamist forces?

I don't really like the label "Third Force", which is being used to describe Syrian-Kurdish forces or the PYD to distinguish them from both the regime and the 'Arab' or 'Islamist' opposition. Because the label assumes, or imposes, the homogeneity of Kurdish forces and the unity of their aspirations, just as it

assumes the homogeneity of the opposition factions.

In any case, I believe that what has been happening in the Kurdish regions – despite all my reservations and criticisms of the PYD – is a step forward if we are to compare it to the other alternatives that could have dominated the region (the regime or the radical Islamists). But I do not think that the PYD and the PKK are the right political carriers that are capable of achieving true freedom, democracy and social justice, which are being sought by many in Syria.

I do not doubt for a moment that the PYD – if things carried on like this – will re-produce an oppressive, totalitarian regime, just as what the Ba'th party or the two ruling parties in Iraqi Kurdistan did – bearing in mind the differences in their experiences, of course. The same applies to many of the other Syrian opposition factions, from the radical Islamist forces to the nationalist leftist parties that lean towards fascism. The hope is that the revolutionary movement will continue and give birth to different forms of organisation and self-organisation, and to new structures that are more consistent with the original values and goals of the revolution.

But as long as blind violence continues (mainly from the regime and its supporters), and as long as leftists continue to focus their energies on civil society activities and leave the arena of political and armed struggle to others, the chances of fulfilling these hopes become weaker and weaker. Of course, it is not easy, after all that has been happened, to go back to the days of the absence of democracy and freedoms, at least in the short term. But the achievement of true social justice is a whole other matter.

Translation from Arabic to English: Saroujah Sakran for Syria Freedom Forever

Original article in Arabic.

RWANDA

A look back at the 1994 genocide

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

In this context, it is crucial to investigate the role played by international financial institutions. Everything we know leads us to believe that the policies imposed by these institutions, the main financial backers of General Juvénal Habyarimana's dictatorial regime accelerated the process resulting in the genocide. In general, the negative impact of these policies is not taken into consideration to explain the tragic unfolding of the Rwandan crisis. Only a few authors highlight the responsibilities of the Bretton Woods institutions [1]

]], which have rejected any kind of responsibility.

At the beginning of the 1980s, when the debt crisis exploded in the Third World, Rwanda (like its neighbour Burundi) had very little debt. Whereas in other parts of the world, the World Bank and IMF were abandoning their go-go loan policy and preaching abstinence, they adopted a very different attitude with respect to Rwanda to which they granted major loans. Between 1976 and 1994, there was a twenty-fold increase in Rwanda's external debt. In 1976, it amounted to \$49 million, while it was nearly \$1 billion in 1994, increasing especially rapidly as of 1982. Its principal creditors were the IFIs or International Financial Institutions — the World Bank, the IMF, and similar institutions, and the WB and the IMF played the most active role in this debt process. In 1995, IFIs held 84% of Rwanda's external debt.

The dictatorship in place since 1973 guaranteed that there would be no progressive structural changes in the country. That explains why it was actively supported by Western powers such as Belgium, France, and Switzerland. In addition, it

could be a rampart against the countries in the region that were still mulling over thoughts of independence and progressive change (for instance, neighbouring Tanzania where there was the progressive President Julius Nyerere, one of the African leaders in the Non-Aligned Movement).

Throughout the 1980s and up until 1994, Rwanda received many loans, but the dictator Habyarimana embezzled much of them. The loans granted were supposed to be used to better integrate Rwanda's economy into the world economy by developing its capacities to export coffee, tea, and tin (its three main export products), which was detrimental to the crops cultivated there to satisfy local needs. This model worked until the middle of the 1980s, when the price of tin, then that of coffee, and finally tea, collapsed. Rwanda, for which coffee was the main source of hard currency, was hit hard by the breaking up of the coffee cartel at the beginning of the 1990s by the United States.

Using international loans to prepare for the genocide

Only a few weeks before the Patriotic Front of Rwanda launched its offensive in October 1990, the government of Rwanda signed an agreement with the IMF and the WB in Washington to implement structural adjustment measures.

When they were implemented in November 1990, the Rwandan currency dropped by 67%. By way of compensation, the IMF granted strong currency loans for quick disbursement so that the country could keep importing goods. The funds were used to artificially improve the balance of payments. The prices of imported goods skyrocketed: for instance, the price of petrol went up by 79%. Selling imported goods on the domestic market made it possible for the government to pay the army's wages, and the number of recruits increased in staggering pro-

portions. The structural adjustment measures included a decrease in public spending, wages were frozen, and there were massive layoffs in the civil service, but part of the savings were used for the army.

Whereas the prices of imported goods increased, the price at which producers could sell coffee was frozen, as imposed by the IMF. As a result, hundreds of thousands of small coffee producers went bankrupt [2], and together with the most deprived layers of city dwellers they became a permanent supply of soldiers for Interahamwe and army recruiters.

The following measures were among the ones the WB and IMF imposed in Rwanda: an increase in consumption taxes and a decrease in corporate taxes, an increase in direct taxes on low-income families through a reduction of fiscal advantages for large families, and restrictions on credit facilities to farmers.

To account for its use of loans from the IMF/WB, Rwanda was allowed to submit old invoices for imported goods. This practice made it possible for the government to pay for the massive purchase of weapons intended for the genocide. Military expenses increased three-fold between 1990 and 1992. [3] Over this period of time, the WB and the IMF sent out several missions of experts, who highlighted the positive consequences of the austerity policies enforced by Habyarimana, yet threatened to discontinue payments if military expenses increased further. The Rwandan government then used various ploys to conceal military expenses: Lorries bought for the army were accounted for in the budget of the transport ministry, a significant portion of the petrol used in the army or militia vehicles was part of the budget for the ministry of health. The WB and the IMF eventually stopped providing financial support in early 1993, but they did not expose the existence of bank accounts the

Rwandan government had in foreign banks on which there were substantial amounts of money still available to buy more weapons. It can be said that they failed in their duty to control the use of the funds loaned. They should have stopped their loans in early 1992 when they learned the money was being used to buy weapons. They should have warned the UN at once. As they went on supplying support until 1993, they helped a government that was preparing a genocide. As early as 1991, human rights organisations had tried to draw international attention to the massacres that paved the way for the genocide. The World Bank and the IMF systematically supported a dictatorial regime, with the help of the US, France, and Belgium.

Exacerbated social contradictions

For the genocidal project to be achieved, more than just a government was needed to devise it and acquire the necessary tools; the people also had to be impoverished and driven to a level of desperation at which they were ready to do anything. 90% of the population in Rwanda was living in the countryside, and 20% of farm families owned an acre or less. From 1982 to 1994, most of the farming population fell into poverty, while a few others at the other end of the social spectrum were accumulating a huge amount of wealth. Professor Jef Maton states that in 1982 the richest 10% of the population made 20% of rural income; in 1992 they had grabbed 41%, in 1993 45%, and in early 1994 51%. [4]

The disastrous social consequences of the IMF and WB enforced policies combined with the plummeting price of coffee (itself a consequence of policies applied by the Bretton Woods institutions, and the US doing away with the cartel of coffee producers at that time) played a key role in the Rwanda crisis. Habyarimana's regime exploited the widespread social discontent to carry out the genocide.

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TUNISIA

"Bitter victories, but real ones"

PETER DRUCKER ·

In any case Belhadj is pleased that the government dominated by the fundamentalist Ennahda party was ousted from power and that a constitution was adopted that puts a brake on threats to secularism and women's rights.

According to Belhadj, it was absolutely necessary to conduct the struggle against Ennahdha. "I believe in moderate Islam, with progressive interpretations, but not in moderate Islamism." Despite its heterogeneity, Tunisian Islamism with all its different tendencies wants to govern in the name of religion, and to enforce the Islamization of society, with an "Islam which intervenes in the details of personal life," which "rules in the name of Allah" - and from the moment a political player monopolizes religion and governs in its name "it's all over".

Tunisians had a year and a half to form an opinion about fundamentalism in power: its neoliberal economic policy and the agreements that were concluded with the European Union and the IMF, its corruption and its incompetence led to a severe economic crisis, a high cost of living, unemployment, inflation and debt, and it is the poorest social layers that are paying the price. As a physician Belhadj witnesses daily "public health services that are crumbling." Instead of reforming and saving the system, Ennahdha ministers overloaded it with "a huge number of advisers" from their own ranks, and sold off state enterprises at low prices to their relatives. In any case Belhadj sees no economic solution "except in a new development model that will include the entire Maghreb."

The Ennahdha government was ousted by popular protests because of the economic crisis but also because they attacked women's rights and artistic freedom, and they want to impose a model of soci-

ety that is foreign to Tunisians, such as the agreements concluded with the EU and the IMF. It was ousted because of all these faults - and also because of the violence over which it presided, culminating in the murders of Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahm, leaders of the Popular Front. Even though Ennahdha did not itself kill them, according to Belhadj there are a considerable number of links between Ennahdha and the Salafists responsible for the violence against the Left. She cites the example of Ennahdha ministers whose sons are well-known Salafist militants, the Ennahdha militia (the "League for the Protection of the Revolution") which attacked the trade-union movement, and a video that is in circulation where Ennahdha members are seen saying to a Salafist gathering: "Be patient."

The Popular Front

Belhadj believes that it is the lack of theoretical and political clarity concerning the articulation of democratic and social tasks in the revolutionary process and the type of alliance needed (united front?), but also to a great extent the Salafist threats, that led the leaders of the Popular Front - which was in the beginning so promising, bringing together almost all the radical Left - to make an alliance with the liberal bourgeoisie, including many of the key figures of the former Ben Ali dictatorship.

The violence and the threats of the Salafists were real, expressing a "well worked-out policy of instilling fear." But the choice made by the leaders of the Front was to respond by accepting the protection of the police, who are always seen as a force of the former dictatorship - because "transitional justice based on truth" remains a task that has scarcely been addressed.

Consequently, the Popular Front, whose formation was "a major achievement", appears, in the eyes of the poorest layers, less of a possible third way, of an alternative to the fundamentalists as well as to the secular bourgeois forces. It quickly became integrated into the dominant order, symbolized for example by it being received by the U.S. ambassador.

Moreover, the fear of Salafist violence is not in fact the only explanation for the rightward evolution of the Popular Front. Belhadj cites other aspects: the organizational weakness of almost all the components of the Front, and especially the "old traditions that had not been revised". Among the parties of the Popular Front you can find everything, including former pro- Albanians, Maoists, Stalinists and nationalists who were admirers of Saddam Hussein. This leads to an ideological confusion that people are not ready to question. Instead, the confusion strengthens the tendency to support a supposed "national bourgeoisie".

The expression of this confusion was the formation of the National Salvation Front by the Popular Front and a bourgeois party, *Nidaa Tounes*, which was open to elements from the former regime. So Belhadj sees the victory over Ennahda as "bitter, very partial, but real." If the result is "to go towards a liberal government," it will turn out to be a "sad victory."

The League of the Workers' Left (LGO), the group of the Fourth International in Tunisia, condemned the Popular Front during its recent congress, while choosing to remain there to fight the battle. Belhadj does not see much hope. Three or four other organizations that opposed the National Salvation Front have left the Popular Front, leaving only the LGO as a small and isolated critical force. A few dozen members, especially young people, have even left the LGO to form another group outside the Popular Front and to try and to try to create a really independent left alliance – but Belhadj is not very optimistic about this perspective either.

Belhadj fears a "difficult electoral process. The level of abstention may be very high, especially among

young people." And taking into account the still considerable strength of the Islamists, based on a well-prepared infrastructure - mosques, Coranic schools and generous funding - they remain among the favorites for the upcoming elections with a "risk of regression on election day".

The social movement

There remains the "lively" social movement, especially the powerful trade union, the UGTT. Despite the fact that a large part of the former leadership of the UGTT was a pillar of the regime, Belhadj sees that the confederation is today "the main social force in the country" and that most of the UGTT leaders were activists who resisted Ben Ali. But now it "does not play an independent political role and does not defend the idea of a political power that would represent its base. It is thanks to it that the liberal democrats are now in power."

There has been no reform of the internal functioning of the UGTT - and as a woman in its middle-level leadership Belhadj often sees the consequences of that. The UGTT is "a very sexist sector," she says: 44 per cent of the union members are women, but only between one and three per cent of union leaders are women, and there is not a single woman in the Executive Committee. For demanding parity within the UGTT, Belhadj was called all sorts of names during the congress.

On the other hand, Tunisia has a rather strong feminist movement, including the ATFD of which Belhadj was president. With the new constitution, feminists have "avoided the worst." The constitution affirms women's right to work, to protection against violence, to parity within the various elected bodies and to equal opportunities. But it "does not guarantee true equality and leaves the door open to different interpretations of women's rights." For example, feminists lost the debate in the Constituent Assembly on the family: they wanted to affirm the right of individuals to freely form families, but the final text asserts that "the family", as the basic unit of society, must be protected by

the state. "That is why women accept violence", to "preserve the family."

In Tunisia, the husband remains the head of the family, paternal guardianship remains the norm and there is discrimination against women in the sharing of inheritances. The feminization of poverty continues and is accelerating. And violence remains a huge problem that affects nearly one in two Tunisian women, with no real strategy to fight against this phenomenon. Tunisian law still allows men who rape minors to escape being convicted by marrying their victims - even girls who are 13 or 14 years old.

Furthermore, the Islamists have also seen in the demand for the implementation of the International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women an attempt to introduce gay marriage, and they are making that the basis of a campaign against feminists.

This demand is not on the agenda in Tunisia, although the ATFD has demanded the decriminalization of homosexuality and some small LGBT groups and defenders of personal freedoms are beginning to emerge, in spite of intimidation.

Tunis, 15 February 2014

VENEZUELA

The Debate Today is How to Stop The Violent Offensive of the Neoliberal Right-Wing

FRANCK GAUDICHAUD ·

How can you characterise the current situation in Venezuela? What is the issue here?

Franck Gaudichaud As a starting point, we must recognise that we are in the midst of a tremendous global media war against the Bolivarian process. It's therefore essential to create spaces of counter-information. To start with, in front of so much misinformation, we must again emphasise that the Bolivarian process is a long term process of broad social gains (health, education, reducing inequality), democratisation (the new constitution), growing empowerment and inclusion of the popular classes, in a very tense relationship with the charismatic leader that [Hugo] Chavez had been.

This process has also been instrumental in the establishment of new popular national sovereignties in the creation of ALBA, UNASUR and CELAC. Thus, a relapse and a neoliberal regression in Venezuela would have important, immediate collateral effects on the entire region. All this seems obvious, but it is essential to stress the essential relations and geopolitical forces, [particularly] at a time when the mainstream media, and the Venezuelan opposition are talking about a "Castro-communist dictatorship" and a "genocide in Venezuela ..."

The current situation is extremely tense because the most reactionary sectors of the opposition have wagered on violence and destabilisation from the street. In this context, there is a tendency within the rank and file of the leftists to simplify our understanding of the circumstances, expressing opposition to imperialism or support of the coup against the "fascist" state. To me, this binary reading [of the situation] seems disastrous. Of course, the unit-

ed manner of the right-wing's "insurrectionist" intentions must be denounced and opposed.

We know that the United States has clear geopolitical interests in this destabilisation. The link between Washington "hawks" and the faction of the opposition led by Leopoldo López in Venezuela isn't a conspiracy theory, but is an objective fact. There is also a real intervention from Colombia and Uribeismo, and paramilitary incursions, especially in the border state of Táchira. These factors are important. Now, is there a coup in the style of April, 2002? [...] I think not. Firstly, the real power relations differ from 2002. The armed forces and military chiefs clearly support the government without division – for now – and the big bourgeoisie aren't betting on the violence or an unconstitutional exit [from the Maduro administration]. Fedecámaras and its masters (like Polar's [head, Lorenzo] Mendoza) are participating in the peace conference with Maduro and condemning the violence in the streets. In other words, the key elements of the situation of April, 2002 aren't part of the current situation today. Mind you, there is a sector of the opposition around Leopoldo López that clearly is betting on street violence [and] calling to overthrow Maduro. Worryingly, this sector has succeeded in holding very significant demonstrations – in the state of Tachira, in Merida with the student movement, but also in the streets of Caracas. It's true that the participants of these demonstrations essentially come from the wealthy neighbourhoods, from the upper and middle classes; but now [protesters] also come from the less wealthy middle class. Violent sectors have gained space in society, using violence against the workers and barrio militants, constructing barricades (the "guarimbas"); they're responsible for the majority of killings in re-

cent weeks. The neoliberal opposition is partially fragmented, but each [faction of the opposition] plays its role against the [revolutionary] process; from Henrique Capriles or COPEI (Political Electoral Independent Organisation Committee) that say they back dialogue after successive electoral defeats, to parties like Leopoldo López's Voluntad Popular or like the organisation Súmate and the legislator María Corina Machado. [The latter] back the creation of a semi-insurrectionalist climate without awaiting the next elections. Other analysts like Ignacio Ramonet have noted the existence of a "slow coup" based on the destabilisation theories of Gene Sharp.

However, I think from the anti-capitalist left, the key issue isn't just to denounce all this, without also continuing to think "downwards and to the left" in a manner both critical and dialectical; [and] who are the elements within Chavismo that allow such expression of discontent in various strata of society – not just from the student movement. In this sense, we also have to explore the contradictions and weaknesses of the Bolivarian revolution and listen to the critical voices of the popular and revolutionary movement, within and outside of Chavismo. At Rebelión, we have published various Venezuelan authors that go in this direction: Roland Denis, Simón Rodríguez P., Javier Biarreau, Gonzalo Gómez, etc.

What are these main weaknesses of Chavismo?

FG: First you have to differentiate between the governmental Chavismo and the working Bolivarian people. I understand there are tensions here, especially a year after the departure of the central manager of the [revolutionary] process, Hugo Chavez; [who was] capable of oscillating between the vertical leader and the horizontalness of popular participation. In the era of "Chavismo without Chavez", Maduro has the legitimacy of electoral democracy. He won the [April, 2013] presidential election in a just manner, and the [December, 2013] municipal elections confirmed a new Bolivarian victory at the ballot box (with 17 victo-

ries in 18 elections). But, Maduro doesn't have the charismatic leadership of Chavez, while at the same time a degradation of the economy accelerated. Of course, much is said about insecurity, particularly from the right-wing, though this is also a significant, daily concern for the popular classes. [However,] most of the recent problems appear on the economic level. The Central Bank of Venezuela [BCV] acknowledges a scarcity level of [consumer] goods above 28% and in 2013 inflation of 56% eroded the salaries of the workers. Poor economic and [currency] exchange management reinforces speculation, the black market and hoarding on the part of the bourgeois consumer on a greater scale. Other Marxist economists like Manuel Sutherland or Víctor à lvarez speak of the greatest capital flight from South America. Several Marshall Plans are escaping to Miami. It's true that inflation and scarcity are products of an offensive from the ruling classes, but they're also [caused by] inefficient economic policy. Corruption is another underlying issue after 15 years of the Bolivarian process. How to pretend to build "socialism of the 21st Century" in these conditions of bureaucratic corruption? Faced with a phenomenon of this nature, a model of petro-rentier capitalism is still hegemonic. [1] It's not enough to have a ministry of "popular power". [2] I don't see a solution other than to create control from below, [with] participatory democracy, workers' councils [and a] strengthening of the existing communal councils. Otherwise, how is the right-wing offensive to be lastingly stopped? With dialogue and peace with the ruling sectors, with the Democratic Unity Roundtable [MUD], with [Venezuelan-born media mogul and billionaire Gustavo] Cisneros and the boli-bourgeoisie? [3] Moreover, remember impunity that continues today for those responsible for the coup of April, 2002 and the April, 2013 killings. The impunity facing the anti-unionist killings that take place in the country are also very concerning, along with the the level of repression against some labour strikes and the growing militarisation of some regions (which caused distress and the distancing of the public from the Bolivarian governor of Tachira).

These days, President Maduro and the Attorney General have acknowledged the responsibility of the National Guard and the Bolivarian Police in the death and mistreatment of demonstrators. Hopefully this doesn't go unpunished, because the state has to be the guarantor of basic [human] rights.

Here you have referred critically to the path being taken by the government to stop the right-wing's offensive. For you, what is the most effective way to confront the right-wing?

FG: Without doubt, as proposed by some Venezuelan anti-capitalists, the best defense for the deepening of the revolution and the achievements of the [revolutionary] process is to strengthen a critical, popular and independent view of the bureaucracy or the boli-bourgeoisie, pointing to an empowerment from below. I think this perfectly justifies the intent of the government to pour cold water on the street violence, [and] call for dialogue and peace. Now, dialogue and peace, yes, but for what and with whom? Hopefully, the dialogue prioritises the mobilisation of the popular sectors, the organised workers that search for the paths of popular power, the ... [rural poor and agricultural workers] that want agricultural reform, the indigenous people, together with more concrete announcements to improve the economic situation. Of course, Maduro has already announced a front to face the "economic war", but as well as the "law of just prices", positively, were measures to adjust [economic policy] and devaluation. To the contrary, small [political] currents like Marea Socialista and others outside Chavismo (libertarians, Marxists [and] Trotskyists) propose dealing with the neoliberal right by taking revolutionary measures: for example, taking control of foreign trade, but with citizen oversight (to prevent corruption), strongly combating speculation and centralising foreign currency exchange, intervening to bring the banking system under social control so that oil revenue isn't partially captured by hoarders, supporting more decisions by the communal councils, [supporting]

national food production, [creating] a national, democratic system of planning etc. I emphasise, I'm only reiterating the declarations of Bolivarian collectives and anti-capitalist Venezuelans.

Certainly, progress in this direction also means starting to think about the internal contradictions the popular movement – its weaknesses and limitations, as well as the weight of the political bonapartism present in the PSUV, for example.

What similarities and differences do you find between the process of Chile during the Allende government and that of Venezuela? More than anything, the role of the relationship between the spaces of popular organisation and a state that – despite all the changes – remains a capitalist state.

FG:First, this seems essential to me: there still exists a capitalist state in Venezuela, though with a new institutionalism that's more democratic. Predominantly, [there is] state-rentier capitalism and more than 70% of GDP is in the private sector. To strategically orient [ourselves], first we must know where we stand. Like in Venezuela, in 1973 Chile the Unidad Popular signified great democratic and social conquests, empowerment from below, as well as support from a very well organised working class on the union and political level. Actually, the big deficiency in Venezuela is the inability to build a democratic movement that is working and union class-conscious, independent of the state bureaucracy. Another interesting aspect of the Chilean experience is the tense relationship between the popular movement and the Allende government. I studied the industrial ties [4] as sui generis [unique] forms of popular power, and, at various moments, elements were able to stand against Allende and claim revolutionary measures. Another point of debate is just how much we can trust the institutions, the possibility of "using" the state to reform society from above. That is, if we build socialism from the state or build socialism from the popular constituent power, workers' control and citizen participation. When in Venezuela, for example, joint management initiatives [between

the state and workers] such as Sidor have been rapidly suffocated. It's the same with the extremely complicated issue of political violence, the role of imperialism and the armed forces.

The fact is that in Venezuela, unlike the Chilean way, the process has been thought as "peaceful, but armed". In Venezuela there is a very different civil-military dynamic [compared] to the Chilean experience. Beyond that, the Bolivarian revolution updates an unresolved debate of Unidad Popular:

what can we do with the state, and what kind of state? To what extent are the government [and] elections tools of democratic conquest, and how to support this using grassroots organising to advance. How to deal with the rightists and imperialism from the best relationship that's as strong as possible?

Translated for Venezuelanalysis by Ryan Mallett-Outtrim.

CHILE

The student movement and the reconstruction of the radical left.

FRANCK GAUDICHAUD ·

What's your assessment of the candidacy and results of Marcel Claude and the movement "Todos a la Moneda"?

The movement "Todos a la Moneda" has been a big political apprenticeship. The conditions of this project were special since it arose at a time when the social movements were beginning to raise their profile and with a program and content of a break with the neoliberal model installed in our country. In this context there was the possibility of putting forward our political references with the purpose of projecting a left of combat in view of the new scenario that was taking shape with the new government from 2014. Our objectives were therefore very concrete especially if it is considered that this project is being conducted without the Communist Party after its turn to the Concertacion.

First, we have sought to make visible a program of profound social transformations which highlights the fact that what was expressed in recent years in the streets was in rupture with the system. Secondly, we wanted to show an alternative on the national political scene. Thirdly, we sought a space of construction for the Chilean revolutionary left which allows us to strengthen links and projects.

As a political process, we believe that the objectives have been met to the extent that it has meant a great apprenticeship, the construction of a program, the possibility of developing leaderships and so on. Nevertheless, these advances have been obscured by the electoral results which in our view

have been a failure. 2.8 per cent was a harsh confrontation with the reality, especially if we consider that the expectations of all political sectors, the media, and ourselves were much higher.

In all this there is an important process of evaluation that we must achieve to understand the causes of such a low percentage. For us, it is essential not to focus on external responsibilities - the objective conditions will always be unfavourable in relation to the candidacies of the dominant bloc - and above all, we must look at what we have done wrong. We still have a lot to learn about the electoral level, this project having been established by organizations without electoral experience or with results well below those achieved today.

That leaves us the difficult task of seeking to build a left of combat, especially in the light of the social struggles to come. We have now acquired a quantity of experiences, as well as new leaders like our comrade Sebastian Farfan or Luis Soto (a water activist) who, in the parliamentary elections, have obtained good percentages.

After the intense cycle of student struggles in 2011-2012, how do you see the program of "deep" educational reform promised by Bachelet and the arrival in parliament of several leaders of the movement?

As to the reforms of Bachelet, we believe that the new government of the Concertacion, today called the New Majority, represents an attempt to co-optation of the social movements by a part of the elite. Basically what they are seeking is to put the social movements "in the pocket", isolate the left and reduce the levels of social conflict in the country. In conclusion the main objective of Bachelet is to recover the consensus of the elite. For this reason

also, the government of the New Majority matches the expectations of the large employers and it is for this reason that many of them have supported it. The proposals of Bachelet are full of eye-catching headlines but are without content, something that the Confech has already denounced. We have no illusions about the government of Bachelet and we are saying clearly that the government of the New Majority is not our government.

It is for this reason that in particular the reform of education is mainly a slogan which in its content does not attack the central problem that we denounced from the student movement, which is the prevalence of a private profit-making system over a public system. We can achieve a certain percentage of free education but if this is not accompanied by a policy is not accompanied by a policy of strengthening the public system with the allocation of necessary resources to these public institutions without leakage to the private system, the free sector will eventually be a formality and a new mode of transfer of money to the private sector. The program of Bachelet will then be an ill-intentioned distortion of the demands from the street and the universities.

As to the arrival of several ex-student leaders in Parliament, this is not the guarantee of advance, given that Camila Vallejo and Giorgio Jackson have been elected to a parliament held by the New Majority, with an explicit support for Bachelet. Only Gabriel Boric was elected independently to parliament but his solitude will be hard and his role will be especially essential for the link with the student movement. In this sense, to speak of a "student wave" is an illusion - and the CP itself has closed the door to this possible articulation - given that it depends on their respective groups. If today everything is going well for them, tomorrow they will have to pay the bill. Even with this critical vision, we believe that their arrival in parliament and the support that they have obtained is a sign of a new wind blowing in Chile. Implicitly, the people voted for them in the illusion of change, it is therefore also a political sign.

What role could the student movement play in reactivating anti-capitalist social struggles in the coming months?

Inevitably in 2013 the electoral battle "swallowed up" the political agenda, and we had predicted that this would happen in a country such as Chile, making it even more important and necessary to participate in this battle by raising our flags from the left, circumstances that we could not understand without the cycle of previous mobilizations. In 2011 we were able to change the focus of debate in our country and, after the recomposition of forces in the higher spheres with the arrival of the Bachelet government, it is time for the social movements to resume. And for this the student movement will be essential.

Now we again have the prospect that in the next few years the social movements and the workers resume their struggle. We will have to raise a higher the flag of education as a right, by seeking to be the ones to decide the political agenda and not leave it to the government. There is also a need to have a better relationship with various social movements that are developing in the country and which will begin to go out on the streets with force. The movement around water access, under the impetus of Rodrigo Mundaca, has announced a first mobilization in April 2014. The student movement must be present. The copper workers and dockers have constituted themselves into a political force with a large level of organization and ability to put pressure on the bosses. The students will have to be with them.

Finally the relationship of internal forces for 2014 in the main student organization - the Confech - indicates that an orientation of struggle against the government of President Bachelet is ensured. In this task, the National Students' Union will play an important role in the Confech. We must put all our forces into the struggles of students and thus strengthen the popular struggle, which will facilitate the construction of a more consolidated anti-capitalist alternative at the centre of the political scene in Chile.

CHILE

The social movement and future convergences

FRANCK GAUDICHAUD ·

Can you say a few words on the Igualdad (Equality) party and its history?

The Igualdad party began its process of legalization in 2010 and became a party on a national scale in May 2013. It is present in eight regions: Arica, Iquique, Antofagasta, Coquimbo, Metropolitan, Valparaíso, Concepción, Coyhaique. It participated in the municipal elections of 2012 and the presidential elections of 2013.

Igualdad defines itself as an instrument of the social movements to bring about a revolutionary transformation from below. It is anti-capitalist and its slogan is "Que el pueblo mande" ("Let the people decide").

What balance sheet do you make of the candidacy and results of Roxana Miranda?

First, we should say that from the beginning we thought that the presentation of our candidacy did not enter into an electoralist logic. The success or failure of the campaign could not be measured in numbers of votes. But nor did we want a symbolic act or a candidacy of witness.

Our political objective in this electoral context was to use the conjuncture to project at the national level a revolutionary political alternative breaking with the discourse and practices of the traditional left. To propose and support the candidacy of Roxana Miranda had as its objective posing popular collective and independent action as one of the structural elements of this new period.

That is why in terms of a balance sheet, if we are absolutely aware that a result of 1.3 % is low or marginal in terms of those who calculate politics with the eyes of power, we think that our reception was much better than we expected.

The discourse of Roxana Miranda was affecting in its simplicity and sincerity, breaking with the "technocratic" framework of the very narrow club of those who are authorized to speak and practice politics in Chile. She has confronted the powerful and unveiled the cruelty with which the economic system treats millions of Chileans. We have not sought to theorise or temper the discourse but to reveal that a section of this population is tired of the system of the political parties and its servile role in relation to the big enterprises. The simplicity but also the strength of the candidacy has entered into the heads and hearts of hundreds of thousands of Chileans the "crazy" idea that maybe the people can decide in this country. A germ of rebellion which should yet develop but in which from now on Igualdad is considered as a significant actor.

On the other hand one of Igualdad's objectives was to make part of this electoral conjuncture in the context of a political convergence with all the anti-capitalist actors located outside of the Concertación plus Communist Party axis. This objective was not realized, because the anti-capitalist forces as a whole bear the heavy weight of lack of confidence and objectives specific to teach. Many of the collectives and movements of the anti-capitalist left have preferred the old conceptions of politics and have engaged in electoralist strategies.

Another negative element has been the incapacity of the structure of Igualdad to maximise the immense media impact of the candidacy at the national level. Igualdad, which has not yet completed its process of national implantation, could not project itself as a real political force except in a few places and it remains still to develop a real national structure.

What role could the Pobladores movement play in the reactivation of social struggles

and the constitution of an anti-capitalist movement in Chile?

The recent electoral process has given us some insights on how to achieve a convergence among the different anti-capitalist collectives. And without any doubt it is up to us in the first place to agree on some essential elements for the coming period. We think that in the period to come the role of the social movements is central. The promises of Bachelet and the New Majority (Nueva Mayoria) will not be kept. Our role will then be that of the motor of discontent and de-legitimization not only of the gov-

ernment but also the whole political system. In the concrete practice of mobilization we will find the confidence necessary to the creation of alliances with the sectors in struggle of the Mapuche people, high school students, workers, people in the neighborhoods. We need a common project which emerges from these processes of struggle and from there we will build leaderships and legitimacies.

The future convergences should be built on the basis of all sectors in struggle. The challenge for Igualdad and the movements which make it up is to be present there.

TURKEY

The "New Turkey"

MARAL JEFROUDI ·

There are a couple of days left for the municipal elections in Turkey. On Sunday, 30th of March, 52 million people will vote for the mayors, district and neighbourhood municipalities and their councils. However, each day it becomes more like a referendum than local elections. This atmosphere is fuelled particularly by Prime Minister Erdogan.

Since 17 December, when an extensive corruption scandal in the government erupted by means of leaked telephone conversations, the political scene in Turkey has become as polarized as it has never been before since at least the coup of 1980. Stimulated by a crack in the power block ruling Turkey for more than 10 years, the leaked tapes and the repressive measures of the government against any kind of opposition escalated a highly tense pre-election medium. The corruption scandal erupted in the midst of an already eventful political agenda. The Gezi movement that started in May 2013 and survived with greater or lesser intensity until today and the years long Kurdish struggle and the peace process that it led to have constituted the contours of the political discussions and have succeeded in breaking the mainstream media blockade.

Despite the alleged accusations to the Kurdish movement of not actively supporting the Gezi movement or the Gezi movement to be a middle class, "non-political" movement, the riots of summer 2013 intensified the connections of struggles all over Turkey. This is not only a spatial connection linking the west of Turkey to its east, but also a temporal connection linking the years old struggles of the politically organized working class neighbourhoods with the newly politicized participants of the summer riots. Twitter messages indicating the empathy of the participants of the Gezi move-

ment with the Kurdish movement after facing the media blockade were very symbolic. They stated that this made them aware of how their channels of information regarding the eastern part of Turkey were blocked.

However, it was not only the Kurdish struggle that could not make it to the mainstream media. There have been struggles in the working class neighbourhoods in the centre of Istanbul, which have been under attack of urban transformation for years. These neighbourhoods, particularly Armutlu, Okmeydani, 1 Mayıs, and Gazi have been under police siege since 1990s. There have been clashes between the locals of the neighbourhoods and the police that would systematically harass and attempt to exert control on the highly organized inhabitants of these neighbourhoods. These are not only working class neighbourhoods but also neighbourhoods populated by Alevi, Kurdish and leftist people. This is not surprising as a short review of the contemporary history of Turkey, marked by systematic suppression of the ethno-religious minority groups and forced migration, clarifies the link between class and ethno-religious identities in these neighbourhoods. Moreover, the locals of these working class neighbourhoods have been struggling with drug dealer gangs who are operating in neighbourhood under police surveillance. It is not the police but some leftist organizations that are supporting their cause and fighting with them. The March 1995 massacre where 23 persons died in the clashes between the police and the protestors in Gazi neighbourhood during the protests after three coffee-houses were shot by automatic rifles by "unknown" people is an important milestone in the histories of police violence in these neighbourhoods.

Today when we are speaking of Gezi movement it is not only the riots that were aimed to protect the

Gezi park that we are speaking of. It is the process of interconnectivity of struggles against oppression, police violence and corrupt relations everywhere in Turkey. Among the eight young people who have been killed since summer 2013 during protests, three are from these neighbourhoods and all of them are Alevis. This is not a coincidence; it does not point to a conspiracy theory but to a sociological reality. Berkin Elvan's funeral in Okmeydani on 12th March, who died after spending 269 days at coma as a result of being shot from his head with a teargas canister was attended by hundreds of thousands of people from various walks of life and the march towards Taksim was attacked violently by the police. Berkin was on his way to buy bread in the morning when he was hit with the teargas canister. He was a young activist at the age of 15 born and raised in Okmeydani. He was at the age of Alexis Grigoropoulos who was killed by police in Athens during riots in 2008. The neighbourhood entered the horizon of many people living in Istanbul with his funeral.

Prime minister Erdogan did not give a message of condolences to his family and called him a terrorist in the election rallies he participated. Erdogan is fighting in various fronts these days. Against the Gulen movement who have burnt the bridges with AKP and the people protesting on the streets despite the heavy usage of tear gas and water cannons. The tapes that are leaked illustrate not only corruption but also his obsessive personal control on media, on football, on the sale of social housings among others. Although it is a municipality election, he is much more on the scene than the municipal candidates and escalates the tension each day at the rallies. It is not only a fight with words, tear gas, and water cannons but also a fight fought in the realm of law by not only discharging the ones who are interrogating the corruption cases, but also changing internet laws by a "bag bill" of take it all or leave it. There is everything in the bag, forests, hunting, import of LPG, cooperation of state and private sector in health and internet among others. In fact, this way of legislation has become a norm

during the rule of this government. This change in the internet law enables the Communication Directorate under the ministry communication to ban sites in 4 hours due to ill-advised content. Quite a number of sites have already been banned and the sites that have been actively used for disseminating the leaked tapes, twitter and youtube are added to this list recently.

It is not only Erdogan who has turned the local elections into a referendum but also the main political opposition party CHP, the People's Republican Party. Candidates shown by CHP in major cities are far from being leftist or social-democrat. In fact, CHP acts like a catch all party. They are well-known names coming from years long experience in district municipalities and employ a populist discourse. Apart from the usual electorate of CHP, and more liberal segments of the right, a group of people who are not supporters of CHP are campaigning to vote to it for being able to block AKP. The other significant party in the elections in the major cities is the newly found HDP, the Democratic Party of the Peoples, which is a sister party to the BDP, the party active in the Kurdish struggle. They claim to be built on the experience of Gezi movement and embrace all the peoples of Turkey.

Despite all the tapes, corruption scandals, and the furious tone of the Prime minister, the polls early this week show an increase in the votes of AKP. According to a 23 March poll by well known KONDA research company, which is conducted with the participation of 3 thousand 67 people AKP gets the 46 per cent of the votes, CHP 27, the per cent Nationalist Action Party, (MHP) 15 and BDP 7 per cent. In the previous local elections AKP had 38 per cent of the votes.

There are only a couple of days left to the elections and if the poll results prove to be correct, given the attitude of the government, the new term that will start from Monday onwards will be much more authoritarian and the opposition will be under severe repression. However, the temporal and spatial ties that the struggles have knotted with each other on the streets from Istanbul to Diyarbakir, from

Okmeydani to Kadikoy since summer 2013 cannot be subsumed by these elections, and what Erdogan repeatedly coins as "New Turkey" is in fact a Turkey that will be remade by these knots. Thus it

will not be surprising to expect a new wave of riots while approaching the first anniversary of Gezi movement.

SYRIA:

Three Years of Revolt in Syria

JOSEPH DAHER ·

It has now been three years since the Syrian revolution started. Over the past few months, Governments and mainstream media, whether in the West or in the Middle East, have constantly portrayed the Syrian revolution as dead. They claim either that it has become a sectarian war between the Sunni Majority and the religious and ethnic minorities, or that it has led to a renewal of the old opposition between jihadists (Islamic fundamentalist militants) and the Assad regime.

Both claims are far from the truth. The Syrian people reminded the world of this by celebrating the third anniversary of the Syrian revolution on Friday March 14 with the slogan "It's a Popular Revolution, Not a Civil War." Despite mass killings and destruction provoked by the Assad regime on one side and the threats posed by the Islamist reactionary forces to the revolutionary process on the other side, the Syrian revolutionary masses are still struggling for the objectives of the revolution: democracy, social justice and an end to sectarianism.

But before analysing the various forces at work in this struggle, let's first observe the current economic, social and humanitarian situation in Syria.

Socio-Economic Disaster

Since the beginning of the uprising, more than 140,000 people have been killed, more than 500,000 injured and half of the population have become internally displaced or refugees outside the country. According to the Syrian American Medical Society, 200,000 people died of chronic diseases due to a lack of access to medical treatments. Diseases such as measles and meningitis are com-

mon, and polio, which was eradicated in 1995, now affects up to 80,000 children.

The level of unemployment has reached 50% and half of the population is now living below the poverty line, including 4.4 million in extreme poverty. The Syrian Gross Domestic Product has attained \$34 billion in 2014, far from the \$60 billion recorded in 2010.

Oil production has plummeted from 385,000 barrels per day to 14,000. To cope with its estimated 150,000 barrels per day domestic consumption, Syria must now import Iranian oil, for a value of \$400 million per month.

The contrast between territories under regime's domination and "liberated" ones should also be noted. In most of the areas under the control of the forces of the Syrian regime in Damascus in particular, on the coast and in the governorate of Sweida (or As-Suwayda) in the south of the country, many public services, such as water and electricity, schools and health services continue to operate more or less normally. Commodities such as bread, fruit and vegetables, gasoline and oil, in addition also to some imported foodstuffs such as sugar and rice are always provided to the population.

At the same time, in the areas controlled by the opposition forces, which represent between 30% and 40% of the total territory of the country, the situation is very different. The state services do not work, formal economic activity is almost completely stopped, electricity is only available few hours per day, telephone communications are nearly completely halted, many commodities, especially medical drugs, are not available, most of the children are not in school and often not vaccinated, and poverty and hunger are widespread. According to ESCWA, an organization affiliated with the UN

based in Beirut, some 29% of the Syrian population was without access to safe drinking water in late 2013.

In these regions, which are initially among the poorest in the country – especially rural areas of the north around the cities of Aleppo, Raqqa and Idlib – the consumption of elementary products and services is limited. According to recent reports, fruits and vegetables, not to mention meat, are no longer eaten.

Many Faces of Counter-Revolution

The Syrian revolution is still very much alive, but is facing many threats and counter-revolutionary forces are at work against it.

The most important section of the counter-revolution is from the Assad regime and its allies. Assad's regime has been able to regain the lead on the military field, as we can see with the conquest of Yabroud this month. The military superiority of the regime is notably the result of the assistance of its allies. Iran and Russia have delivered huge military, political and economic support to the Assad regime.

For example, in July 2013 Iran opened a credit line of \$ 3.6 billion with the Assad government. In December 2013, Russian oil and gas company Soyuzneftegas signed a \$90 million deal with Syria's oil ministry for oil exploration and production in a 2,190 square kilometer block of Mediterranean waters off the Syrian coast between Tartous and Banias. In January 2014, Russia stepped up supplies of military gear to the Syrian regime, including armored vehicles, drones and guided bombs.

We should not also forget the increased participation on the military field of Hezbollah particularly, and of Iraqi and foreign sectarian Shia groups on the side of the regime. The number of foreign Shia fighters fighting alongside the Assad regime was estimated at 40,000 at the beginning of the year.

Hezbollah's involvement has been increasing continuously, starting with interventions mostly concentrated at the Lebanese Syrian border to "protect," according to Hezbollah, Lebanese-populated villages in western Homs Governorate in early 2012, both in an advisory and training role and as an active military force. Starting in May 2013, Hezbollah acted as the spearhead for an offensive in Qusayr and Homs. Lastly, they were the leading force in the occupation of the city of Yabroud, while the Syrian regime's troops were only assisting Hezbollah.

Iraqi sectarian Shia militias started appearing in Damascus' southern Sayyida Zeinab suburb and eventually elsewhere further north. The regime also welcomed, on a very small basis, Greek Neo-Nazis, who call themselves "Black Lilly," fighting alongside Assad troops. This military superiority and foreign assistance has enabled army's regime to regain number of regions and territory from the armed opposition.

The Assad regime and its allies remain the most important counter-revolutionary force. But the influence of the Islamist and jihadist reactionary forces that opposed the objectives of the revolution and want to build a new dictatorship has also grown, especially in the military field. They are massively funded by private and state sponsors from the reactionary Gulf countries.

Meanwhile, the opposition Free Syrian Army (FSA) has lacked economic, political and above all military support, which has led to its weakening and its division. The FSA has also been the target of jihadists and some Islamic extremists groups that have assassinated few officers and attacked some of its brigades.

The reactionary Islamist forces are nevertheless not a unified camp. Differences and even opposition exist, especially since the beginning of the year after popular and military revolts erupted against the jihadist group Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS, also referred to as Da3ech), mostly constituted of foreign jihadists.

In this counter-revolutionary camp, the most important actors are the Islamic Front, Jabhat al Nusra (Al Qaida affiliated) and ISIS. The Islamic Front was formed in November 2013 following a process that began in September, when several of these groups jointly distanced themselves from the National Coalition exile opposition and its exile government. The Islamic Front is one of the most powerful armed opposition actors on the field today.

The Islamic Front has declared that they will not oppose the FSA, but they do condemn the Syrian National Council (a coalition of Syrian opposition groups based in Istanbul, Turkey) and call for an Islamic political system in Syria. The Islamic Front has the financial and political support of reactionary monarchial regimes in the Gulf. Funding from these groups has attracted many opposition fighters, not merely on a religious basis, but rather because they are better equipped and provide better salaries these groups compared to the brigades of the FSA which lack everything. This is why we should not assume that the fighters of the Islamic Front share the same ideology as their leaders.

It should be remembered that most of these Islamist and Salafist (a sect within Sunni Islam) leaders were actually freed by the regime in the first amnesty given by the Assad regime in June 2011, while democrats and other civil activists were targeted, imprisoned, and assassinated by the security forces.

On the other side, we have jihadist groups divided between ISIS and Jabhat al Nusra, which is affiliated with Al Qaida. ISIS has progressively been the main group welcoming jihadist foreigners instead of Jabhat al Nusra. Both groups share nevertheless a reactionary and sectarian ideology.

In this respect ISIS was far worse than Jabhat al Nusra in imposing the burqa on all women, forbidding smoking in the streets, imposing the jyzia (Islamic tax) on Christians, etc. They have arrested, kidnapped, tortured and assassinated civil activists, FSA soldiers and Kurdish individuals, while issuing

a Fatwa against Kurds, allowing for their killing and calling Kurdistan "Kafiristan", the land of the infidels.

Many demonstrations have occurred against Jabhat al Nusra and especially ISIS because of their authoritarian practices and reactionary understanding of Islam. In the eyes of the people from the liberated areas living under ISIS domination, their authoritarianism and their reactionary ideology represent just another face of the Assad regime.

Popular anger against ISIS has been mounting for months. At the end of 2013 and beginning of 2014, the popular frustrations and anger exploded following new acts of violence from ISIS. A banner displayed at a demonstration on December 27 in Mara'at al-Numan in Idlib expressed popular sentiment: "The majority of us have become wanted by two states (the Assad regime and ISIS)."

On January 3 2014, demonstrations occurred in different locations where ISIS was present to demand its departure and overthrow. Chants "Assad and Da'esh are one" or "Da'esh, get out" were heard everywhere – these chants have been widely used in liberated areas of Syria for awhile now.

Military members of ISIS were arrested in some villages, while other ISIS battalions were kicked out after popular protest and military fights. ISIS had to leave many areas, often after killing the people, including activists, women and children, who were held in their prisons.

The pressure of the popular masses has pushed military battalions to act against ISIS, especially the Islamic Front, which was initially unwilling to take military action against ISIS. Popular protests and military attacks against ISIS by FSA and Islamic Front battalions are still happening as we speak.

The differences between the Islamic Front and jihadist groups as we explained should not lead us to consider the Islamic Front to be a democratic group reaching to achieve the objectives of the revolution: democracy, social justice and a secular state that treats everyone equally, regardless of religion, gen-

der, or ethnicity. On the contrary, the Islamic Front is actually seeking an Islamic State and has not hesitated to attack some democratic groups and individuals.

Islamic Front military chief Zahran Alloush has made threats against the Douma civil council, as well as sections of the FSA. They also share with the jihadists a sectarian discourse against Islamic minorities, especially against Shias and Alawites. Groups of the Islamic Front have recently declared responsibility for the kidnapping of 94 Alawite women and children in the summer of 2013 in order to exchange them against 2,000 prisoners.

Recently, a jihadist speaking on behalf of fighters from Jabhat al Nusra and groups of the Islamic Front said that any person or group fighting for democracy and secularism are their enemies and that they will fight them. In this same video they were upholding a sectarian discourse and calling for an Islamic State.

A clear understanding of Islamic Front politics does not mean that they are to be ignored. There can be unity of action with the FSA on the military field against the regime and the jihadists, but there should be no illusion that they achieve any objectives of the revolution.

The Syrian revolutionary masses refuse any kind of oppression, whether from the regime or the Islamist reactionary forces, just as they refuse attempts to divide the Syrian people by using sectarianism or national chauvinism. We have to politically oppose both of these counter-revolutionary forces and continue to struggle for the original objectives of the revolution: "democracy, social justice and no to sectarianism."

Imperialist Rivalries

Regional and international imperialist actors, despite differences and rivalries, are ready to agree and share a common position regarding the Syrian revolution.

The Geneva II conference has shown once more the will of the US, the West and the Gulf countries on one side, and Russia and Iran on the other side, to reach a Yemeni solution and put an end to the Syrian revolution in order to maintain the structure of the Assad regime, whether or not Assad remains in power.

The various imperialists and regional powers, despite their rivalry, have a common interest in the defeat of the popular revolutions in the region, including in Syria, and in maintaining the status quo. Rivalries and differences between the US and Russia or Iran have led many to describe the latter two countries as anti-imperialist powers. This is completely wrong on many levels.

China and Russia might have different tactical aims or choose to back separate actors than the US. But they are all bourgeois powers that are and will always be enemies of the popular revolution, solely interested in maintaining the status quo.

No regional and international state power can be the friend of the Syrian revolution, but only the people in struggle in the region and elsewhere.

Despite Everything, the Popular Movement is Still Alive

On March 14, many demonstrations were held across the country to celebrate the third anniversary of the revolution, and various campaigns have been organized in various liberated territories.

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.

A number of events and actions took place in the free territory of Aleppo. An exhibition of pictures and of drawings by children in memory of the martyrs of the revolution was organised, in addition to a theatrical performance about the history of the

revolution. Other actions included covering a square with 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 neighbourhoods.

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 Revolutionary Left Current in Syria, despite its modest capacities, has not once faltered in its engagement with the revolution, calling for democracy and socialism, has announced the establishment of the "People's Liberation faction" for the third anniversary of the revolution. This faction empha-

sized 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".

A Path to Freedom

A banner raised in the city of Kafranbel in December 2013 summarized very well the situation of the Syrian revolution: "Enemies are many ... the revolution is one... and continues."

Despite the difficulties, the multiple dangers and threats, the killings and destruction, the Syrian people continues its path towards freedom and dignity. As a banner put it on March 14: "Three years of hunger and suffering, but three years of pride and dignity." These past three years have opened a new era for the Syrian people.

We need to oppose both these counter-revolutionary forces, and build a third radical movement struggling for democracy and social justice, and against sectarianism. No solution can be achieved if the democratic and social issues are not dealt with together. Social demands cannot be separated from or subordinated to democratic demands. They go in hand in hand.

The Syrian revolution continues, despite all the threats facing it.

*First published by the **New Socialist Webzine**.*

CHILE:

The social movement and future convergences

CHRISTIAN CEPEDA ·

Can you say a few words on the Igualdad (Equality) party and its history?

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Another negative element has been the incapacity of the structure of Igualdad to maximise the immense media impact of the candidacy at the national level. Igualdad, which has not yet completed its process of national implantation, could not project itself as a real political force except in a few places and it remains still to develop a real national structure.

What role could the Pobladores movement play in the reactivation of social struggles

and the constitution of an anti-capitalist movement in Chile?

The recent electoral process has given us some insights on how to achieve a convergence among the different anti-capitalist collectives. And without any doubt it is up to us in the first place to agree on some essential elements for the coming period. We think that in the period to come the role of the social movements is central. The promises of Bachelet and the New Majority (Nueva Mayoria) will not be kept. Our role will then be that of the motor of discontent and de-legitimization not only of the gov-

ernment but also the whole political system. In the concrete practice of mobilization we will find the confidence necessary to the creation of alliances with the sectors in struggle of the Mapuche people, high school students, workers, people in the neighborhoods. We need a common project which emerges from these processes of struggle and from there we will build leaderships and legitimacies.

The future convergences should be built on the basis of all sectors in struggle. The challenge for Igualdad and the movements which make it up is to be present there.

INDONESIA:

Social struggles in Indonesia, women workers and the Left

ALEX DE JONG ·

Indonesia saw at the end of 2013 one of the biggest working class movements of its younger history. What happened?

Yes, it was the largest one, in term of scale and determination, since the dictatorship of Suharto took power in 1965, 1966 after a massacre of 500.000 to 1 million communists, leftists and sympathizers.

The strike happened for several reasons. First, unions have started to contest the cheap labor policy. They asked for a 50 per cent increase of the national minimum wage in 2013. They had already won 40 - 60 per cent increases on average in 2012. The Indonesian national minimum wage is the third lowest in South East Asia, after Cambodia and Myanmar and is almost the same as that of Vietnam. In Asia it is the fourth after Pakistan. The battle for a raise in the minimum wage happens every year in the run up to the determining of the minimum wage by national and local governments in November. It's always an important battle but for the last two years activists also succeeded in building a national movement around it.

Second, the call for a national strike and the strike itself united almost all of the important trade unions in Indonesia. It broke the barriers between different kinds of unions and build a common campaign for all workers. It, temporarily, put aside old disagreements and criticisms. For the leftist trade unions it was important to support the call from the second biggest trade union in Indonesia, the Indonesian Trade Union Confederation (KSPI) and to work together to expand the call and organize the strike nationally. In only one month, the organizing alliance (National Conference of Labor Movement - KNGB) succeeded in bringing together movements in 20 provinces, 150 regencies and 40

industrial zones. There's no exact data of the strike in 2013, but it is believed to have involved 2,5 million workers from all over Indonesia.

Third, there is an increasing level of workers militancy and movements against the employers and the state. The relative freedom of unionism in Indonesia since 1998 is important, even though many labor activists are still criminalized, and some of them were jailed. Thousands of factory level unions were established (more than 12.000 according to Said Iqbal, the president of KSPI) there are hundreds of federations, and four confederations. In 2009 it was noted that more than 8 million people, or 9 per cent of all the labor force in the formal sector, is unionized in some way. There has been no survey yet, but there are reports that thousands of workers joined unions or established new ones in the last two years.

What is the role of women workers?

In every trade union they're active and at the forefront, together with their male counterparts. Labor-intensive manufacturing industries, which are mostly contractual based (such as electronics, footwear, leather, textile, garment, automotive, food and beverages, and chemical industries) are the dominant industrial sectors in Indonesia. And women are dominant in those sectors, particularly in garment and textile.

In those sectors women have been struggling against many obstacles put up by patriarchal norms and against obstacles in the union as well. Women have to return home late after all the meetings, the distributing of leaflets, organizing discussions, negotiations etc, and then they still have to do all the domestic work. Many women workers are prepared to sacrifice since they understand that the move-

ment is important. And being active in the union is also an opportunity for them to feel free, to gain confidence and escape from the domestic burden, even if only temporarily.

In the garment and textile industries in the Nusantara Bonded Industrial Zone (KBN) in Cakung, North Jakarta, for example, where of 100.000 workers 95 per cent are female, only one federation (Across Factory Labor Federation - FBLP), is lead and managed by a majority of women workers; the others are still led by men. FBLP is the smallest federation in the zone but is famous for its determination and militancy in defending workers and women workers rights. It is also famous for being the only consistent labor federation in that zone, free from corruption and bribery by the bosses. FBLP lead the garment and textile sectors strike in the zone on 2010 and 2013.

In the whole of Indonesia, there are only two women workers leading trade unions: Jumisih, the chairperson of FBLP, and Nining Elitos, the chairperson of Congress of Indonesia Unions Alliance (KASBI). FBLP is the only federation in Indonesia that advocates for, and is heavily involved in, defending specific women worker's and LBT's rights. Together with the women's organization *Perempuan Mahardhika* (Free Women) they campaign for specific women and LBT demands.

What are their special working conditions?

Women-dominated sectors such as the textile and garment sectors are the lowest paid sectors since it is considered low-skilled work, even though the work is very labor intensive. Women are still considered as earning only secondary incomes. The food and beverages sectors are similar. In the age of labor market flexibility, we hardly find any permanent status in these sectors. After the significant increases of the national minimum wages since 2012, these workers were the first who experienced "suspension" of the wage increase. The Indonesian government has given bosses in manufacturing industries the opportunity to apply for a "suspension" of the wage increase on the basis of supposed "finan-

cial inability" to fulfill their obligation. So now, even though the minimum wages rose with 40 per cent and 30 per cent consecutively, most workers in those sectors still receive the same amount as in 2012.

In KBN Cakung particularly, for many years women workers experienced the so-called "skorsing" system which basically means unpaid overtime. Bosses and manager set a particular target of production for a 8 hours working day, and if the workers can't accomplish the target they need to work more hours, without payment. They work more than 48 hours a week, and often work overtime during weekends to earn a bit more money for living. To earn a little more, some bake simple foods to sell in the factory or sell electronic vouchers for mobile phone credit. Many of them had their bankcards confiscated by moneylenders who take most of their earnings.

In many cases there is no paid leave for maternity. Women workers are laid off because of pregnancy and maternity, there is no breastfeeding corner, no reproductive health checks, no clean water, air, or toilets. The workers live in slums-area in rooms of 6 or 8 square meters. They live there for decades, even with family.

We conducted a limited survey in 2012 among KBN workers on sexual violence and found that at least 1 out of every 5 workers had experienced one form or another of sexual violence. It is common knowledge that many contractual women workers experience sexual abuse when they apply for a job or want to renew their contract. Among the leadership and organizers of FBLP, most have experienced some sort of sexual violence. Some of them had to bear a child from rape, were victim of polygamy without legal marriage, were victim of domestic violence for more than 15 years, were forced into marriage, etc.

Workers in those factories produced things they could never afford, like clothing for brands like Zara, Gap, Old Navy, Victoria's Secret, La Senza, PINK, JCP, Kohl's, C&A, H&M, Express, Mango, Limited, American Eagle Outfit, Under Armour, Juicy Couture, Justice, Adidas, Reebok,

Abercrombie & Fitch, Hollister Gilly Hicks and Walmart.

What are their forms of resistance?

I'd like to concentrate on the experience of women workers in KBN Cakung, since we work with them on a daily basis. In KBN direct action and strike have since a long time been the main methods of struggle. It has been very difficult to rely on lobbying and negotiations since the bosses and government get away with breaking agreements and laws. There are hardly any Collective Labor Agreements at the factory level. The "skorsing" system and the violations of working periods in the zone are clearly against the labor law, and the labor ministry and office know it. But without direct action there will be no change this situation.

Jumisih and FBLP organizers play important leadership-roles in KBN Cakung. They are always in the front line of any protest in the zone. They confront and negotiate with the police, security and the bosses, but also help women workers deal with violence at home and in the factory.

But they can't organize direct action and strikes everyday. FBLP has continuously worked hard to build confidence among workers, no matter their working status. They distribute leaflets and a bi-monthly bulletin called *Worker's Voice*, organize regular "mimbar bebas" (open platforms for workers), theater performances, movie screenings, a community radio, etc. These are all aimed at raising the confidence and consciousness to fight and at the same time to provide a platform to be creative, self-aware human-beings, not "just" submissive factory workers. Now they are preparing to be able to force the company to have a CLA.

What about their organizations?

Strong organizations are needed to confront the systemic problems of the workers. As the consciousness of the specificity of women oppression increased, we understood the need for an autonomous women movement that links various struggle against exploitation and oppression. All

women leaders in FBLP are members of *Perempuan Mahardhika*. FBLP comrades help build *Perempuan Mahardhika* and recently supported the formation of the first LBT group in Cakung area, called *Pelangi Mahardhika* (Mahardhika Rainbow).

They also formed a community radio called Marsinah FM, as a tool to reach more women workers and convince them to join the union and fight for worker's welfare, and to get involved in the struggle for women's rights. Marsinah FM has helped women workers to develop skills as journalists, broadcasters and technicians.

FBLP was initiated in 2009 and has branches in two cities in Central Java. They are open to joining with other federations or confederations as long as it would support the campaign that they have built. They are aiming to be a less hierarchical union, and promote initiative from their rank and file members.

Can you tell us about your educational work?

Since 2009 *Perempuan Mahardhika* has organised a "Feminist School" for female students. We trained ourselves to be able to integrate a gender analysis with the class question and to analyze women's specific oppression. We developed a course dealing with the daily-life problems of women, with issues of gender, sexuality and reproductive rights, women and religion, and the systemic characters of women's oppression. The course includes an introduction to the history of the women's movement, and how to organize for change.

In the last two years we also developed a feminist course for women workers, with a similar module but more specifically oriented to women's rights in the work place, discussing women's double burden, women and the workers movement, and how to integrate women's issues in work place movements. Our dream is to further expand this course in the future.

Through this course, we succeeded to train the FLBP women leadership in integrating women's specific demands and struggles in their trade union activities.

Which are the current projects and campaigns?

In relation to the struggle for women's liberation, the first month since its foundation (March 2013), my organization, *Politik Rakyat* (People's Politics), has made it a priority to defend feminism by strengthening its politics of women liberation. The attacks of the Indonesian capitalist regime and right wing movements against women rights are increasing. Our work is to build the consciousness of women workers as women and as workers and to support the fight against sexual violence. We are helping to organize a campaign against sexual violence. We work towards building the movement in such a way as to have a real participation of women at the grass root level. The struggle against sexual violence is a priority but we also build the movement for women's right in general. We work with *Perempuan Mahardhika*, the Accross Factory Labor Federation (FBLP) union, women workers community radio Marsinah FM radiostation, and Jakarta Volunteers Against Sexual Violence (Relawan KawanKu).

For the coming Mayday, the Joint Committee of Popular Politics for Marsinah (abbreviated as Marsinah Torch) has called on all popular movements to support a convoy of people from Jakarta to Porong, East Java, starting on May 1 to May 10. Marsinah was a woman worker found dead, sexually abused and tortured, in 1993, after she paid visit to the army command and asked them their reasons for detaining her fellow workers for organizing a strike to demand a pay rise. The convoy will go to the place where she worked. Several Marsinah Torch committees have been established in Central Java.

The factory where Marsinah used to work in Porong, Sidoarjo, East Java, was destroyed in a mud-flow caused by gas drilling by the company PT

Lapindo Brantas. At the time, Lapindo Brantas was owned by Aboerizal Bakrie, one of the richest men in Indonesia and chairman of the Golkar party and its next presidential candidate. Golkar was the party of Suharto. By ending the convoy in Porong the organizers aim to show solidarity to all the victims of the mud-flow and demand responsibility from the bosses of Lapindo, as well as to keep the memory of Marsinah as a worker's hero and demand justice for her.

We're aiming to establish links among worker's struggle in Java island, to maintain the momentum of the workers movement and to campaign for more welfare and democracy for all people.

The workers movement in Indonesia seems to be growing but so far this has not found any political expression. Why is this? What can you say about the relationship between the workers movements and the organized political Left?

There are attempts to give a political expression to the workers movements worth mentioning. The first is the "workers go political" approach of FSPMI, the metal workers union. They encourage their members to be parliamentary candidates for any political party that agrees with a platform put forward by FSPMI. The agreement includes that the FSPMI candidacy will only obey the union, and not the political parties on whose ticket they are running. This in fact is not a new approach, several workers and even Said Iqbal himself, the chairperson, did the same in the last election in 2009 but they failed to win any seats. The difference today is that such candidacies are part of a more coordinated plan, and aren't just individual initiatives.

But their "workers go political" campaign is actually quite un-political: basically, they are saying more workers should be involved in politics and be candidates but they don't raise demands regarding what those worker-candidates should do. Some of those candidates are very sincere in their commitment to defending the interests of workers but the parliament is dominated by bourgeois politicians

with a lot of experience and power. Without any program and without a strong workers party that can back them up, even the most sincere workers-candidate will either be co-opted or be isolated and made irrelevant.

Workers, and in particular FSPMI rank and file members, are increasingly militant and their class-consciousness is growing but this campaign will only result in the loss of valuable activists.

There is also an attempt by *Rumah Rakyat Indonesia* (RRI, Indonesian People's House), a political initiative by KSPI — also joined by FSPMI — to create a space for workers to discuss politics. There are continuing discussions that workers need their own party but Indonesian law makes it extremely difficult and expensive to be recognized as a political party and participate in elections. RRI so far has not developed any serious plans to overcome this and some of the major forces that support RRI have chosen to follow the "workers go political" approach instead.

And then there are the radical, "red" unions that are linked to various left-wing political groups. Those have formed a front called Joint Secretariat of Labor (Sekber Buruh), but this front has so far not succeeded to grown into a insignificant political outlet for workers. The groups that form Sekber Buruh are often quite inward-looking and they have failed to draw in support from other layers. The radical left is far less organised than for example KSPI and is unable to form an alternative leadership. In August last year, Sekber Buruh published a Manifesto against the 2014 elections and they recently launched a call to "resist bourgeois elections" but they don't have significant activities to, for instance, organize a boycott..

I personally don't think a call to reject elections is the best propaganda, in a country like Indonesia where even bourgeois democracy is weak it can even be a danger. But it is difficult for the left to develop slogans that can relate to the increasing distrust people feel toward the established parties and give this distrust a progressive direction. The num-

ber of people that bothers to vote is declining. Among some intellectuals and students there is some talk to try and politicize abstention but there is nothing concrete so far. The major problem is that we, the left, failed to provide a political alternative in a context where there is a great potential for such an alternative, even larger than parts of the left sometimes think. But this failure is admitted only hesitantly. Without real political project on the ground, without ongoing activities and participation by all the groups within Sekber, its programs will remain largely propaganda. At the moment, Sekber is only capable of holding periodic protests, not build a real movement.

This failure is made worse by the fact that in elections established parties have succeeded in co-opting many activists as candidates. Some of these former activists are pure opportunists but others are sincere. Since all the attempts to build a political alternative have failed and new laws have made this even more difficult in the meantime, good activists turn to the mainstream parties.

The turn-out for presidential elections is higher than for parliamentary elections. In 2004, the current president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (known as SBY) was elected because people were eager to see a new face in politics. But since then, the enthusiasm for elections has declined. Of the many, often militant, protests around the country only very few find any echo in the parliament.

Since there is no political alternative, people's disappointment can go two ways; abstention or support for individual candidates that manage to present themselves as new and somehow better on the tickets of established parties.

The only left force that was able in the past to be visible on the national level was Partai Rakyat Demokratik (People's Democratic Party, PRD). In 1999, 2004 and a few years before the 2009 elections it tried to form an alternative political party but it failed. The PRD has now adopted a nationalist discourse and some of its activists support right-

wing parties like those of the former generals and Human Rights violators Prabowo and Wiranto.

So, the left in general has no significant political outlet anymore.

The Governor of Jakarta, Joko 'Jokowi' Widodo, is one of the prominent candidates for the presidential elections in July. With his populist image he has attracted quite some support. Can the workers expect anything from him?

Joko Widodo is a product of the discontent I described. So far, he has managed to keep his credibility as a man of the people - not because he has taken progressive steps on social-economic issues or even because of his politics, but because he is not corrupt and takes more distance from the Suharto regime and its remnants than the other presidential candidates. A few independent left activists have joined his campaign.

But the workers' movement in Jakarta and its satellite cities that led the strike last year has seen Jokowi side with the bosses and oppose the demand for a 50 per cent increase in the minimum wage. And Human Rights activists are skeptical about Jokowi's capacity to resolve a number of major Human Rights violation cases. Right from the start, Jokowi had been promoted by media like the *Financial Times* and the *Economist*. In office, he has proved to be a friend of big business. If he wasn't, he wouldn't now be the candidate for the PDI-P, the second largest political party in the country.

But compared to somebody like Prabowo, another prominent presidential candidate, Jokowi suddenly seems a lot more appealing. Prabowo is an ex-army general who is responsible for Human Rights violations in East Timor when the Indonesian army organized a campaign of bloody violence there at the turn of the century. Before that, he organized the "disappearing" of left-wing activists in the 1990s and he is a major capitalist himself.

If the election turns into a race between him and Jokowi, it will certainly attract more attention and foster even more illusions in Jokowi. The Indonesian elite is so corrupt and ridden with remnants of Suharto's 'New Order' regime that any candidate who takes his distance from them and is seen as being free from corruption can win significant support from the people. Such illusions are dangerous but it is interesting to see how people's overblown expectations of him are at the same time creating difficulties for Jokowi – to only way for him not to shatter those illusions in the future is to confront the army that is protecting Human Rights violators and political crooks, but he is not able to do that. In 2001, the president was Gus Dur, a moderately progressive liberal, and many people hoped he would confront the New Order remnants but he betrayed their hopes. I don't think Jokowi or anybody from the political elite will succeed where Gus Dur failed and really confront the New Order remnants and army.

Politik Rakyat is trying to build various outlets for the popular classes to speak for themselves. We're not in favor of the call of other Left groups to campaign on the platform of "reject the elections", we rather seek to build up a wide campaign around people's issues and build a network of people's initiatives. We want the people, mainly the workers and women we work with, to create popular political initiatives — no matter how small those are — and to put forward their own demands. The Marsinah Torch campaign is one example. We realize we are in a difficult political situation, we need to confront the illusions people have in somebody like Jokowi. Meanwhile, New Order representatives are making a political come-back. We need a political alternative and we have to build and maintain an independent political position of the popular classes. The capacity for self-organization has developed enormously, amid all limitations given in the existing democratic space, and we have to build on that.

Some prominent political supporters of Suharto's New Order regime are making a

political come-back, army officers are playing a prominent role in politics and progressive organizations are harassed by far-right groups like the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and Pemuda Pancasila. Do you think the soc-called democratic space is shrinking and that the gains of "Reformasi" are in danger?

Yes, for sure. This has been happening for some-time, since Gus Dur stepped down in 2001 and Megawati came to power. Already starting then, political figures associated with the Suharto regime and the army made a successful comeback. SBY, who as an ex-general has ties to the New Order regime, won the elections in 2004 and 2009 and now there is a serious discussion to declare Suharto and general Sarwo Edhie, an important organizer of the massacres of 1965-1966, national heroes. Ex-generals like Prabowo and Wiranto formed their own political parties to run in the 2009 elections and both won significant numbers of seats. It feels like the familiar faces of Suharto's regime are back.

SBY failed to bring to justice those who organized the killing of the most well-known and well-respected Human Rights activist, Munir, who was murdered in 2004. It's commonly accepted that army and intelligence officers organized his murder. This was followed by the ignoring of the National Human Rights Commission's recommendation to further investigate the 1965-1966 mass killings and recognize these as gross human rights violations. Any time the army is accused of Human Rights violations, the case hits a brick wall.

The come-back of New Oder politicians and army goes together with new laws that limit democratic rights, such as the bill on mass organizations that requires you to have a permit to set up a mass organization and hold activities. There is a bill on 'social conflict' that enables the army to be used during demonstrations or land conflicts, there is a proposal to organize a new state militia (a 'state-defense reserve component') and to use the army to protect the security of investments. Considering women's rights, more than 350 "moral" and religious bylaws

on the provincial and municipal levels regulating women's social behavior have been passed. There are laws on what women are allowed to wear, at what times women are allowed to be outside of their homes, if they can be in male company in public et cetera.

We have to resist such anti-democratic laws and at the same time we have to campaign against the threats and activities of vigilante groups as FPI and Pemuda Pancasila. We can't rely on the law to put them in prison for attacking Christian churches, peace demonstrations, LGBT's or other minorities. That is because those groups are related in one way or another to Indonesia military in the first place, they do the dirty work of the army generals and politicians.

The movie *The Act of Killing* has made the Pemuda Pancasila militia famous, clearly showing their ties with important politicians. Can you say anything about the impact of this movie on Indonesian society? Has it helped to break the taboo on "1965"?

The most important thing is that the movie succeeded in introducing the dark history of Indonesian society and politics back in 1965-1966 to ordinary Indonesians, particularly to young people. While there are still no official screenings in Indonesian theaters, the organizing of semi legal screenings is widespread and still ongoing. I think it has not destroyed the taboo yet, but it helped to challenge the general acceptance among the youth of the New Order's version of the history of the 1965-1966. The movies also confronts people with the difficulty of bringing the murderers to justice, due to the pro-New Order nature of Indonesian politics.

A grass-roots campaign for justice for Munir has some success among young people, and this movie deals with closely related subjects like role of the Indonesian army in politics. Indonesia sees more than ever young people starting to question the official interpretations history. They do this through art, music, writings, protest actions, et cetera.

That's an important step forward, even if we can't really speak of a movement yet. The continuing line from the 1965 killings to the impunity of Human Rights violators and the daily repression of social protests by the police and army today needs to be made visible so the role of the army can be challenged.

Finally, what can people do to support your fight?

The first and foremost thing is keeping in touch and updating yourself about our struggles. There is always something immediate or urgent that you can follow up in solidarity in your respective countries.

But right now there are two important initiatives that need support. First is the Marsinah FM community radio station in Cakung, North Jakarta. FBLP doesn't have enough money for maintaining

the work and the infrastructure, let alone to develop it further. They are now working to expand themselves to Internet radio streaming but need support. You can contact them through freshreborn@gmail.com. FBLP collects membership fees but this isn't enough. They have started producing various merchandise and a bakery to raise funds but they still need support.

Second is to help the campaign of Marsinah Torch by spreading the news and if possible donate.

Please contact the committee for the Marsinah Torch campaign at: obor.marsinah@gmail.com. If want to donate you can send money through our paypal account or Bank transfer to BANK CENTRAL ASIA (BCA) KCP TEBET TIMUR, Jln. Tebet Timur Dalam Blok GG No.97, Jakarta Selatan Jakarta, 12820, ACC No. 62-90-28-37-34, Acc Holder: Titin Wartini, SWIFT CODE: CENAJDJA.

SYRIA

ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Sham): An enemy of the revolution and an ally of the Assad regime

At the end of 2013 and beginning of 2014, the popular frustrations and anger exploded following new acts of violence from ISIS. On January 3 2014, demonstrations occurred in different locations where ISIS was present to demand its departure and overthrow. Chants: "Assad and D??ish (ISIS) are one" or " D??ish (ISIS), get out", which have become widely used for a while now in liberated areas of Syria, were heard everywhere. Military members of ISIS were arrested in some villages, while other ISIS battalions were kicked out after popular protest and military fights. ISIS had to leave many areas, killing often the people, including activists, women and children, who were held in their prisons.

Popular protests and military fights between FSA and Islamic Front battalions against ISIS are still happening as we speak. The pressure of the popular masses has pushed military battalions to act against ISIS, especially the Islamic Front recalcitrant in the beginning to engage military against ISIS.

Despite several setbacks, ISIS is still nevertheless occupying various regions, and notably the city of Raqqa. In this latter, ISIS imposed the burqa on all women, in addition to gloves, women are not allowed to raise their voices in the street or walk at a late hour without a male guardian, women were also deemed guilty of donning a face veil that was too transparent, having visible eyebrows or wearing a hair clip under her hijab, music and smoking have been banned, Internet cafes were frequently raided, the jiziya (Islamic tax on religious minorities) levied on Christian residents, they were also

barred from building or rebuilding churches, wearing crosses or engaging in public prayer, etc... They arrested, kidnapped, tortured and assassinated civil activists, FSA soldiers and Kurdish individuals, while issuing a Fatwa against Kurds, allowing for their killing and calling Kurdistan "Kafiristan", the land of the infidels. Public executions take place for offenses including accusations of cursing the prophet Muhammad or God.

The occupation of Raqqa has a special importance because it was the first capital of province to be liberated from the Assad regime, and it was a living example of how people in liberated areas could self organize democratically and oppose both the regime and Islamist reactionary forces.

Raqqa was actually completely autonomous for few months and it was the local population that managed all the civil services for the collectivity. The popular organizations most often led by the youth developed importantly. They multiplied, to the extent that more than 42 social movements were officially registered at the end of May 2013. The popular committees have organized various campaigns. One example is the "revolutionary flag represents me" campaign, which consists in painting the revolutionary flag in the neighborhoods and the streets of the city, to oppose the Islamists' campaign to impose the black Islamist flag. On the cultural front, a play mocking the Assad regime was played at the center of the city and, in the beginning of June, the popular organizations have organized an exhibit of art and local crafts. Centers were established to take care of the youth and treat psychological disorders as a result of the war. The end of the year Syrian baccalaureate exams, in June and July, were entirely organized by volunteers.

These types of experiences of self-management are found in many liberated regions. It is worth noting that women play a great role in these movements and in the protests in general.

For instance on 18 June 2013, in the city of Raqqa, a mass protest led by women was held in front of the Islamist group Jabhat al-Nusra's headquarters, which will later let its headquarters to ISIS in the city, where the protesters called for the liberation of the incarcerated prisoners. The protesters hailed slogans against Jabhat al-Nusra, and denounced their actions. The protesters did not hesitate to hail the first slogan used in Damascus in February 2011: "the Syrian people refuses to be humiliated." The group "Haquna" (meaning our right), of which many women are part of, have also organized many gatherings against the Islamist groups in Raqqa, hailing among other things "Raqqa is free, down with Jabhat al-Nusra."

During summer 2013, there were solidarity gatherings require the liberation kidnapped activists held in Islamist-held prisons. The protests enabled the liberation of some activists, but numerous others remain in jail to this day, like the famous Father Paolo, and others including the son of the intellectual Yassin Hajj Saleh, Firas. In September 2013, following the attack by the ISIS against the Church of Our Lady of the Annunciation in Raqqa end of September, youth popular groups and activists organized a demonstration to condemn ISIS actions, and in which they brandished a big cross in solidarity with the Syrian Christian community of the city.

They also issued a statement saying that "they demand the respect for religions, Christian and Muslim are one, we have lived and will live as brothers. The people who practiced these action only represent themselves and the Islamic religion is innocent of such acts".

In the popular organizations resistance to the Islamists groups in the city of Raqqa, like elsewhere, women have played a leading role. Suad Nofal, a school teacher, for example has been protesting nearly on daily manner for months against the authoritarian practices of the ISIS and to demand the release of political prisoners imprisoned by the Islamist group.

ISIS's occupation of Raqqa and other liberated areas makes this group an enemy of the revolution by denying the Syrian people to establish a new democratic and social society and therefore an ally of the Assad regime that has the same objectives. Both are enemies of the Syrian revolutionary masses and it struggle for democracy, social justice and no to sectarianism.

A banner raised in the city of Kafranbel in December 2013 resumed very well the situation of the Syrian revolution "enemies are many ... the revolution is one... and continues" Yes the revolution continues, despite the difficulties, the multiple dangers and threats, the Syrian people continues its path towards freedom and dignity sweeping all oppressors.

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FEATURES

In-depth analysis from International Viewpoint's Features section



FEATURES

The roots and grassroots of the Syrian revolution

JOSEPH DAHER · 26 April 2014

Introduction

For nearly three years now, the majority of observers have analyzed the Syrian revolutionary process in geopolitical and sectarian terms, from above, ignoring the popular political and socio-economic dynamics on the ground. The threat of western intervention has only reinforced this idea of an opposition between two camps: the western states and the Gulf monarchies on one side, Iran, Russia and Hezbollah on the other.

But we refuse to choose between these two camps, we refuse this logic of the "least harmful [evil]" which will only lead to the loss of the Syrian revolution and its objective: democracy, social justice and the rejection of sectarianism.

Lately, mainstream medias, whether in the west or in the Middle East, and western and regional governments, have been wanting us to believe that the Syrian revolution is dead and has transformed itself into a sectarian war between the Sunni majority and the religious and ethnic minorities on the other side, or in a similar trend, in an opposition between jihadists vs the Assad regime. This last perspective has actually pushed many to join the camp composed of people who range from the conservative right wing to ill-informed anti-imperialists, who argue that Assad is a lesser evil to the Jihadists. In fact we should oppose both, because they nurture each other and are both seeking to establish an authoritarian system.

A similar comment could be made to a section of the left that has abandoned the Syrian revolution because it was allegedly hijacked, or those who have even not supported it since the beginning. For

example, Tariq Ali has declared that he believes the popular movement has been,

"overtaken by the Muslim Brotherhood and groups to its Right, backed by Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Deserters from Assad were taken over by Turkey and France. So the character of the uprising changed by the end of the first twelve months. How can one not register this fact? The relationship of forces today does not favour any secular or progressive groups. To pretend otherwise is to be blinded by illusions or the requirements of intra-sectarian left politics."

But there is no going back to the era of the Assad regime before the beginning of the revolution and to other forms of oppression. There is no alternative to the continuation of the revolution. One of the main slogans in Syria chanted by protesters is, "Rather death than humiliation".

At the same time, we have to be clear that Islamist reactionary groups are a threat to the revolution. If they attack revolutionaries they must be condemned and challenged in whatever way it takes.

We need to oppose these counter-revolutionary forces, and build a third radical front struggling for the objectives of the revolution: democracy, social justice and no to sectarianism.

The role of the revolutionary is to be on the side and struggle with these popular organizations struggling for freedom and dignity and to radicalize as much as possible the popular movement towards progressive objectives, while fighting against opportunists and reactionary forces opposing popular class interests.

We would like to end also by repeating that no solution can be achieved if the democratic and social issues are not dealt with together. Social demands

cannot be separated from democratic demands : nor can they be subordinated ; they go in hand in hand.

The demise of independent politics in Syria

As Pierre Frank, French Trotskyist, once wrote : "Let us note that the greatest theoreticians of Marxism did not at all define the political nature of a bourgeois regime by the positions which the latter held in the field of foreign policy but solely and simply by the position it occupied in relation to the classes composing the nation".

The roots of the revolutionary process are the absence of democracy and increasing social injustice as a result of neoliberal policies, especially as implemented to a high degree with the arrival to power of Bashar Al Assad in 2010.

The advent of Hafez Al Assad to power had marked a new era in Syria whereby independent popular organizations from trade unions to professional associations and civic associations came under the regime's authority after harsh repression. Professional unions of doctors, lawyers, engineers and pharmacists were dissolved in 1980. They were the main organizations previously leading the struggle for the return of democratic freedoms and the lifting of the emergency rule. They were re-established but their leaders were replaced by state appointees.

In the school system, the regime targeted principally leftist teachers from different tendencies in the 1970s onwards, simultaneously allowing religious fundamentalist currents to develop. Independent intellectuals, such as Michel Kilo and Wadi Iskandar, and university teachers, including Rif'at Sioufi and Asef Shahine, critical of the régime, were also the targets of the regime.

No immunity was granted to university campuses, neither to teachers nor students. Security agencies could actually arrest students inside lecture halls and/or on campus and they did.

In a similar manner the regime imposed its domination on the bureaucracy of the trade union workers, and this is what hindered the labour struggle against neo-liberal policies pursued by the authoritarian regime since 2000, which has allowed the decline in the standard of living of the majority of the people, as well as political répression.

These were the main causes which launched the wave of protests, causes that in these years revolved around the economy. For example, in May, 2006, hundreds of workers protested outside the public construction company in Damascus and clashed with security forces, and at the same time that taxi drivers were going on strike in Aleppo.

More recently, the trade unions as an institution have been completely silent in the face of the repression of the Syrian people, and more specifically against the workers, even when the latter were the target of repression. Successful campaigns for general strikes and civil disobedience in Syria during December 2011 nevertheless paralysed large parts of the country, indicating a level of activism on the part of the working class and the exploited, who are indeed the heart of the Syrian revolution.

Repression also included all political parties that refused to submit to the diktat of Hafez Al Assad and the obligation to enter the umbrella of the National Progressive Front, where they had no right to any political activity except under the approval of the régime. These parties suffered from harsh repression ever since his advent to power, and not only at the hands of the Muslim Brotherhood. In the beginning of the seventies, various secular political parties, especially any with leftist tendencies were the targets of the regime, including the movement of February 23 (the radical tendency of the Baath close to Salah Jadid), the League of Communist Action (Rabita al amal al shuyu'i) whose members came mostly from the Alawi sect, and to a lesser extent the Communist Party Political Bureau (CPPB) of Ryad Turk. The National Assembly, so-called for including various leftist parties, was also severely repressed at the beginning of the 80s.

This trend has continued into the 2000s with the coming to power of Bashar Al Assad. An opposition movement gathering of intellectuals, artists, writers, scholars and even politicians who demanded reforms and democratization of the state between 2000 to 2006 was brutally repressed by the various wings of the security apparatus. This was accompanied also by the opening up of debate forums, and, between 2004 and 2006, by a multiplicity of sit-ins, a new political phenomenon in Syria. Calls for sit-ins came from political parties and civil organizations at one and the same time. The government of Bashar Al Assad cracked down on this movement, forums were actually closed, sit-ins were severely repressed and many intellectuals who launched this call for civil society and democratization were imprisoned. At the same time, the Kurdish Intifada of 2004 was severely crushed.

Syrian society came increasingly under the control of the regime in all its various components. The Baath Party was the only political organization which had the right to organize events, lectures and public demonstrations on the campus of a university or military barracks, or the right to publish and distribute a newspaper. Even the political parties allied to the regime in the National Progressive Front, did not have the right to organize, to issue statements or to have the slightest official presence. The Baath also controlled an array of corporatist associations through which various societal sectors were brought under regime tutelage. They were called popular organizations and set their sights on incorporating peasants, youth and women.

The fight for social justice

Social justice has also been a key demand from Syria's popular masses. It is not a surprise that the biggest section of the Syrian revolutionary movement includes the economically disenfranchised rural and urban working and middle classes who are experiencing the accelerated imposition of neoliberal policies by Bashar Al Assad since his arrival to power.

These policies especially benefited a small oligarchy and a few of its clients. Rami Makhlouf, the cousin of Bashar al-Assad, embodied this mafia-style process of privatization led by the regime.

A process of privatization created new monopolies in the hands of the relatives of Bashar al-Assad, while the quality of goods and services declined. These neoliberal economic reforms allowed the appropriation of economic power for the benefit of the rich and powerful. The process of privatization of public companies has been made for the benefit of a few individuals close to the regime. At the same time the financial sector has developed inside the establishment of private banks, insurance firms, the Damascus stock exchange and money exchange bureaus.

Neoliberal policies undertaken by the regime have satisfied the upper class and foreign investors, especially from the Arab Gulf, by liberalizing the Syrian economy for their benefit and at the expense of the vast majority of Syrians hit by inflation and the rising cost of living.

In addition to that, Syria's agricultural and public sector were also declining and no effective strategy to strengthen them have been suggested yet, which could jeopardize the country's alimentary autonomy and harm the population through the constant rise in prices of food and non-food basic needs.

The process of economic liberalization has created greater inequality in Syria. The poorest were struggling to help themselves in the new economy due to a lack of employment opportunities, while the middle class is plummeting towards the poverty line because their incomes have not kept up with inflation, which rose to 17% in 2008.

There is now 20-25% unemployment, reaching 55% for under-25s (in a country where 65% of the total population are under 30). The percentage of Syrians living under the poverty line rose from eleven percent in 2000 to thirty-three percent in 2010. That is, around seven million Syrians living around or below the poverty line.

In agriculture, the dispossession of several hundred thousand farmers in the northeast as a result of the drought should not be thought of as merely a natural disaster. The increasingly intensive use of land by agro-businessmen — including land previously kept for grazing — as well as the illegal drilling of water wells facilitated by paying off local administrators has contributed to the crisis in agriculture.

Indeed, the expansion and intensification of land exploitation by large commercial farmers (agrobusiness), including land previously held for grazing, as well as the illegal drilling of wells and the establishment of selective water pipes meeting the requirements of the new landowners — all facilitated by the corruption of the local governments — have accelerated the agricultural crisis. According to the United Nations, in 2010, more than a million people have been forced to migrate from the north-eastern region of Syria to urban centres.

The geography of the uprisings in Idlib and Deraa as well as other rural areas including the suburbs of Damascus and Aleppo, historic bastions of the Baath Party that had not taken part on a massive scale in the insurrection of the 1980s, shows the involvement of the victims of neoliberalism in this revolution. Many from these groups joined the armed groups of the Free Syrian Army (FSA).

Part 2

In Part 2, the author dispels the myths used by the Syrian regime to legitimise itself. Is anything left of the regime's rhetoric of socialism, secularism and anti-imperialism?

The Syrian regime's rhetoric : socialist, secular, and anti-imperialist?

Syria has been able to portray itself as an anti-imperialist state through its support for the resistance in Lebanon and in Palestine for many years now, and has taken strong rhetorical positions in opposition to Israel.

But this stance is not based on anti-imperialist principles, but on putative 'national interests'.

These are guided by the necessity of ensuring the security and continuity of the regime as well as a balance of power in diplomatic negotiations with Israel to recover the Golan Heights area seized in 1967.

The regime has actually collaborated with western imperialist governments on many occasions. It is the same regime that refused to assist the Palestinians and progressive Jordanian groups in overthrowing the conservative Hashemite regime in Jordan during the popular uprising in 1970, known as the Black September.

This is the same regime that crushed the Palestinians and the progressive movements in Lebanon in 1976 with the tacit agreement of the west, putting an end to their revolution, while participating in the imperialist war against Iraq in 1991 with the coalition led by the US.

They also participated in the 'war on terror' launched by President George W. Bush by collaborating on security issues. Israel has actually several times called on the US to ease the pressure on the Syrian régime, which has not shot a single bullet for the occupied Golan Heights since 1973.

Syria has not responded to direct attacks on its soil widely attributed to Israel, including a 2007 air strike on a suspected nuclear reactor or the assassination of a top Lebanese leader, Imad Moghniye, in the following year. It also has engaged in multiple rounds of peace talks, most recently in 2008. Although these talks have not yielded an agreement, their repeated failure has led to nothing worse than a continued chill.

Syrian officials have repeatedly declared their readiness to sign a peace agreement with Israel as soon as the occupation of the Golan Heights ended, while nothing was said on the Palestinian issue.

Rami Makhlouf, the cousin of Bashar Al Assad, went so far as to declare in May 2011 that if there is no stability in Syria, there will be no stability in Israel, adding that no one can guarantee what will occur if something happens to the Syrian regime.

As a result, it is not hard to understand Israel's satisfaction with the status quo under the current Syrian regime.

The Palestinian refugees in Syria are fully aware of all this, and have increasingly been participating in the revolution alongside their Syrian brothers and sisters. They too have suffered from the regime's repression.

Secular

The regime under the rule of Bashar Al Assad has continued the policies of his father and has increased the collaboration with religious associations and conservative segments of the society in conjunction with the new social market economy and the implementation of accelerated neoliberal policies. This has meant the withdrawal of the state in social subventions and many essential public areas.

It should be known that prior to the commencement of the révolution, 30.1% of the population lived below the poverty line and almost two million people – or 11.4% of the population – had insufficient means to meet their basic needs. Real GDP growth and real per capita income has been decreasing since the beginning of the 90s. This has pushed the regime to continue its neoliberal policies and search for more private capital.

In the area of health, notably, the regime has significantly retreated, leaving the initiative increasingly to charitable associations, and especially religious ones. In 2004, around 300 associations were providing a total of 842 million Syrian Pounds (SP) to more than 72,000 families. The most successful and notorious of these was the Jama'at Zayd, which has deeprooted relations with the Damascus Sunni bourgeoisie, conducted by the Rifa'i brothers, despite their well known opposition to the regime in the past.

Despite having a rather opposing tone to the regime nowadays, the association did not hesitate to collaborate with them in the past, notably by obtaining the control of some new mosques at the ex-

pense of others, so that some of their members were able to procure important offices in various official religious institutions. Neoliberal policies have reinforced these religious associations, both Islamic and Christian, in Syria and in their hinterland of networks, increasing their role in society at the expense of the state.

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

Bashar Al Assad did not hesitate to meet with the famous Youssef Al Qaradawi, currently "supporting" the revolution against the regime, who visited Damascus in 2009 at the head of the World Union of Oulemas.

The regime continued this policy of détente towards opposition Islamists that had commenced at the beginning of the nineties through the release of thousands of political prisoners in 1992, the tolerance of Islamists publications and of some movements as long as they refrained from political involvement. In 2001 for example, Shaykh Abu Al fath Al Bayanuni, the brother of the former head of the Muslim Brotherhood, was authorized to come back after 30 years of exile with his son, a rich businessman, who participated in the creation in 2010 of the first sexually segregated mall in Syria. These policies were also part of a strategy to create and deepen the rapprochement with the economic elites of Aleppo.

These governmental measures were accompanied by the censorship of literary and artistic works, while promoting a religious literature filling more and more the shelves of libraries and Islamizing the field of higher education.

This is true particularly in the humanities and expressed itself in the rather systematic referral to re-

ligious references of any scientific, social and cultural questions. The government also, in 2007, withdrew authorizations from two feminist organizations (the Social Initiative and one organization affiliated to the Communist Party linked to the regime) following pressure from various religious groups and personalities.

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

Part 3

Dominant narratives on Syria simplify it to a struggle between a dictatorship vs Islamic extremists, with Syrians included only as passive, voiceless, victims. In Part 3, Syrians are re-introduced as a people revolting against authoritarianism in both its secular and religious embodiments.

Only masses of people developing their own mobilization potential can realize change through collective action. This is the abc of revolutionary politics. But this abc, today, faces profound skepticism from numerous leftist milieus in the west. We are told that we are taking our desires for realities, that there may have been a revolutionary impulse in Syria two and a half years ago, but that things have changed since then. We are told that jihadism has taken over the fight against the regime, that it is no longer a revolution but a war, and that there is a need to choose a camp to find a concrete solution.

So much debate on the left is trapped in this 'campist' logic, often accompanied by conspiracy theories that blur the fundamental differences between left and right – especially the far-right.

Popular committees, elections, and civil administrations

From the outset of the revolution, the main forms of organization have been the popular committees at village, city and regional levels. The popular committees were the true spearheads of the movement that mobilized people for protest. Then, the regions liberated from the regime developed forms of self-gestation based on mass organization. Elected popular councils emerged to manage those liberated regions, proving that it was the regime that provoked anarchy, and not the people.

In some regions liberated from the regime's armed forces, civil administrations were also set up to make up for the absence of the state in taking charge of its basic duties in various fields, like schools, hospitals, roads, water systems, electricity, communications. Those civil administrations were implemented through elections and (or by) popular consensus and have to provide civil services, security and civil peace among their main tasks.

Free local elections in the 'liberated zones' occurred for the first time in 40 years in certain regions, neighbourhoods and villages. This was the case for instance in the city of Deir Ezzor, in late February 2013.

Those local councils reflected the sense of responsibility and the capacity of citizens to take on initiatives to manage their own affairs relying on their managerial staff, their own experience and clean energy. Such initiatives took various forms, both in regions still under regime control and those that have freed themselves from it.

This does not mean that there are no limits to those popular councils, such as the lack of representation of women, or of certain minorities. One is not trying to embellish reality, but to establish the truth.

Another equally important element in the popular dynamic of the revolution was the proliferation of independent newspapers produced by people's organizations. The number of newspapers went from three before the revolution –all in the hands of the regime – to more than sixty written by these civic groups.

In the city of Deir Ezzor, in June, a campaign was launched by local activists to encourage citizens to take part to the process of monitoring and documentation of the practices of people's local councils. Among other things, the campaign encouraged the promotion of rights and the culture of human rights in society. There was a particular emphasis on the idea of rights and justice for all.

It is also important to remind everyone of the meeting in Rihania, a city on the Syrian-Turkish border, where the Free Syrian Union was formed on October 13, 2013, gathering about 106 military, media, and civil formations under its umbrella. These were all calling for a Free and Democratic Syria in which all sects and ethnicities would be treated equally. Although limited in some regards (e.g. the name Syrian Arab Republic was maintained as well as a call to return to the 'liberal' Constitution of 1950). But this initiative must clearly be included in any account of the democratic stakeholders in the revolution.

The example of Raqqa

A prominent example of self-management by the masses took place in the city of Raqqa, the only provincial capital that has been liberated from the regime (since March 2013), but is today occupied by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

In the first few months following the liberation of the city and despite still enduring regular regime shelling, Raqqa was completely autonomous and it is the local population that managed all the local services for the collectivity.

These popular organizations, often led by young people, came on in leaps and bounds. They multiplied, to the extent that more than 42 social movements were officially registered by the end of May 2013. The people's committees organized various campaigns. The "revolutionary flag represents me" campaign consisted in painting the revolutionary flag in neighbourhoods and streets of the city, to oppose the Islamist attempt to impose the black Islamist flag throughout. On the cultural front, a

play mocking the Assad regime was performed in the city centre and at the beginning of June, these organizations held an exhibition for art and local crafts. Centres were established to give the youth an occupation and to treat the psychological disorders resulting from the war. By the end of the year, Syrian baccalaureate exams in June and July were entirely organized by volunteers.

These types of experiences of self-management are found in many liberated regions. It is worth noting that women play a great role in these movements and in the protests in general.

For instance, on June 18, 2013, in the city of Raqqa, a mass protest led by women was held in front of Jabhat al-Nusra's Islamist headquarters, where the protesters called for the liberation of incarcerated prisoners. Protesters shouted slogans against Jabhat al-Nusra that denounced their actions. The protesters did not hesitate to deploy the first slogan ever used in Damascus in February 2011: "the Syrian people refuse to be humiliated."

The group "Haquna" (meaning 'our right'), to which many women belong, have also organized many gatherings against the Islamist groups in Raqqa, chorusing among other messages, "Raqqa is free, down with Jabhat al-Nusra."

During summer 2013, solidarity gatherings called for the liberation of kidnapped activists held in Islamist-held prisons. The protests enabled the liberation of some activists, but numerous others remain in jail to this day, like the famous Father Paolo, and others including Firas, the son of the intellectual Yassin Hajj Saleh.

In September 2013, following an attack ISIS against the Church of Our Lady of the Annunciation in Raqqa, youth groups and activists organized a demonstration to condemn ISIS actions, in which they brandished a big cross in solidarity with the Syrian Christian community of the city. They also issued a statement saying that, "they demand the respect for all religions: Christian and Muslim are one: We have lived and will live as brothers. The people who practiced these actions

only represent themselves and the Islamic religion is innocent of such acts"

In the people's organised resistance to the islamist groups in the city of Raqqa, like elsewhere, women have played a leading role. Suad Nofal, a school teacher, for example, has been protesting nearly daily for months against the authoritarian practices of ISIS, demanding the release of political prisoners.

Opposing authoritarianism, religious or secular

Similar protests contesting the authoritarian and reactionary practices of the islamists took place in Aleppo, in Mayadin, al-Qusayr and other cities like Kafranbel.

In the neighbourhood of Bustan Qasr, in Aleppo, the local population has protested numerous times to denounce the actions of the Sharia Council of Aleppo, which contains many Islamist groups. On August 23, 2013, for instance, the protesters of Bustan Qasr, while condemning the massacre through chemical weapons committed by the regime against people in Eastern Ghouta, were also calling for the liberation of the famous activist Abu Maryam, once more jailed by the Sharia Council of Aleppo.

They continue until today to demand his release. At the end of June 2013, in the same neighbourhood, the activists shouted, "go f*c* yourself Islamic council," protesting at the repressive and authoritarian politics of the latter. Popular outrage was also expressed following the assassination by foreign jihadists belonging to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria group (ISIS) of a 14-year old boy, who allegedly made a blasphemous comment in a joke referring to Prophet Mohammad.

A protest was organized by the popular committee of Bustan Qasr against the Islamic council and the Islamist groups. Activists cried, "what a shame, what a shame, the revolutionaries have become shabiha," comparing the Islamic council to the Syrian regime's secret police, a clear allusion to their authoritarian practices.

There are weekly protests on Fridays. During the one on Friday 2 August 2013, the Local Coordinating Committees (LCCs), who play an important informative role for the revolution, but also a role of support by supplying foods, good and services to the populations and the refugees, declared this in a release: "in a unified message from the revolution to the entire world, we are confirming that the kidnapping of activists and essential actors of the revolution, unless they serve tyranny, hinder the freedom and the dignity of the revolution." This message was addressed directly to those reactionary islamist groups. In the same vein, on 28 July 2013, the LCCs wrote a release with the title "the tyranny is one, whether in the name of religion or of secularism," rejecting both the islamists and the regime.

The Council of Salah Eldeen Quarter, in Aleppo, signed a placard on September 27 2013, saying in opposition to ISIS: "Take Your Islam and Leave Us Our Islam – Islam conquered hearts before lands".

Coordination committees such as the Kurdish Fraternity Committee have accused ISIS of "occupying cities and terrorizing citizens", equating them with the pro-regime group Hezbollah, which has been ruthlessly targeting civilians. They demonstrated in Ashrafiya, Aleppo, on September 20, 2013 against ISIS and we could see banners notably saying, "Syria will be free, free; ISIS, get out" and "We Syrians Reject Masked Fighters in Our Country," "ISIS is the Regime's State of Iraq and Syria", and "Our Syria is colourful. No to ISIS and its black flag."

In earlier September, eleven civilian groups representing the organized structures of the revolution in a broad area outside Damascus, rallied strongly around Razan Zaitouneh, a key grassroots revolutionary figure. The 36-year-old lawyer was threatened and harassed by members of armed jihadist factions in eastern Ghouta of Damascus, for no other reason than, "being an independent and unveiled woman who is among the grassroots leadership cadres of our revolution," as one activist put it.

More recent examples can be also be cited, such as the Statement of the Civilian Movement in Syria Regarding the Remarks of Mr. Zahran Alloush, Commander of the Army of Islam on October 14, 2013 in which groups and members of the Syrian revolutionary process stated their rejection « of any attempt by any party to impose authoritarianism upon decision-making and upon the work of citizens. We also reject any attempt to make compliance with any institution not elected by the people, no matter how powerful or wealthy the institution, a benchmark for the public good or a gauge of patriotism or an indicator of the ability to perform civic duty today ».

This statement was issued after Mr. Zahran Alloush (Commander of the Army of Islam) pronounced the establishment of the expanded Douma Civilian Council « divisive » because it ought to have taken the Consultative Council that is associated with him as its sole reference point.

In the eyes of the people, ISIS is yet another face of the Assad regime because of its authoritarianism, as expressed on a banner in a demonstration on December 27 2013 in Maraath al-Numan in Idlib that said, "The majority of us have become wanted by two states (the Assad regime and ISIS)".

On January 3, 2014, demonstrations occurred in different locations where ISIS was present to demand its departure and overthrow. Chants such as, "Assad and ISIS are one" or "ISIS get out", widely used for a while now in liberated areas of Syria, were heard everywhere.

The Syrian revolutionary masses have proven for a while that their revolution is not dead and never has been. But the world does not want to see this symbol. They ignore the fact that, in a neighbourhood of Aleppo as late as Saturday, January 4, 2014, slogans are still being used against the Assad regime and against the jihadists – slogans such as, "our revolution is against all oppressors" or "the Syrian people will never submit".

The fronts of the revolution are many and overlapping, from patriarchy to Arab chauvinism. Despite harsh conditions, mass participation in the revolutionary process is still ongoing.

***'Enemies are many. The revolution is one and continues
Arabs and Kurds are united***

In the northeastern part of Syria, populated by a majority of Kurds, recent battles between Islamists and Kurdish militias from the PYD (linked to the PKK) has led to the emergence of many popular initiatives from the activists and the local population.

Those popular initiatives aimed to show the brotherhood of Kurds and Arabs in this region, and to reaffirm that the popular Syrian revolution is for all, and that it condemns racism and sectarianism.

During those battles in the Raqqqa province, the city of Tell Abyad has seen the creation of the "Chirko Ayoubi" brigade, which joined the Kurdish Front brigade on July 22, 2013. This brigade now combines Arabs and Kurds together. They have published a common declaration denouncing the violations committed by Islamist groups and the attempts at dividing the Syrian people in its ethnic and sectarian basis. Unfortunately some other FSA forces have fought on the side of the Islamists.

In the city of Aleppo, in the Achrafieh neighbourhood – mostly populated by Kurds – a protest was organized on August 1, 2013, gathering many hundreds of people who support brotherhood between Arabs and Kurds, and condemn the acts committed by Islamist extremist groups against the Kurdish population, chanting together for the unity of the Syrian people.

In the city of Tell Abyad, which has suffered from heavy fighting, activists have tried to organize many initiatives aimed at ending armed fighting between the two groups, and stopping the forced expulsion of civilians. They want to put in place a people's committee to govern and manage the city and to promote collaborative initiatives and actions between Arab and Kurdish populations, to reach a

consensus through pacific means. The efforts are ongoing despite the continuous battle between Islamist and Kurdish militias.

In the city of Amouda, around thirty activists met on August 5, 2013 with Kurdish and Syrian revolutionary flags behind a poster saying "I love you Homs," to show their solidarity with this city, besieged by the Syrian regime's army.

Recently again, in the city of Quamishli – where Arab populations (Muslim and Christian), Kurds and Assyrians live – local activists have organized numerous projects to ensure coexistence and the administration of certain neighbourhoods by joint committees. In the same city, the branch of the Free Kurdish Student Union has started a small internet campaign calling for freedom, peace and brotherhood, tolerance and equality for the future of Syria.

Women and patriarchal values

One of the active women in the group in Salamiah said: "We participated in the funeral processions of our martyrs, although generally the entrance of women in cemeteries is not a customary practice in our city. But we wanted to break archaic customs, including this one. Each of us considered the martyr as a son, brother or father. Any martyr is the son of the city and not just of his family".

She added: « What distinguishes this group of rebel women is the team spirit with which they work to achieve their objective, which is also the objective of the revolution throughout Syria ; that is to overthrow the dictatorial regime based on cliques and clans and the establishment of a civilian democratic state for all the Syrian people, with all its components. "

While Ahlam, another female revolutionary, says: "We categorically reject all phenomena foreign to our society and want to see removed both foreign agendas and agendas far distant from the aspirations of the Syrian people, acting under different names and in an extremist form that only serves the regime, giving the latter arguments to hit out at

the revolution and to terrorize the population." She continues: "As a group of women, we believe that the establishment of a free and modern state cannot be achieved without the existence of citizenship. It is our responsibility today to prepare a new phase in the life of Syrian women, so that a woman can expect to enjoy the full rights of citizenship in a new society. Our revolution is not only a revolution against a corrupt regime and archaic and obsolete laws that do not guarantee justice to women. It is also a revolution against all the customs and the lores that have held women back, preventing them from full and effective participation in the construction of the state and society.

Popular resistance from below

Thus, the popular committees and the organizations play a crucial role in the pursuit of the revolutionary process, because these people are essential actors who enable the people's movement to resist. It is not about diminishing the role played by the armed resistance; but the latter depend on the popular movements to continue its fight. Without this, we would not stand a chance.

A banner crafted by the revolutionary city of Kafranbel sums up very well the spirit of the Syrian revolution, "enemies are many ... the revolution is one... and continues". Yes the revolution continues, despite the difficulties and multiple dangers. The Syrian people continues its path towards freedom and dignity, sweeping away all its oppressors.

We have for example seen the youth in the city of Deir Attyah self-organizing to clean their streets in a campaign called "cleaning Deir Attyah to bring it back more beautiful", and the youth of Daraya launching a campaign a few weeks ago to ask for the end of the siege in their area.

Popular activism in the Syrian revolutionary process is still, as we have shown here, very much alive.

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