

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV473 June 2014

CHINA:

From bureaucratic counter-revolution to bourgeois counter-revolution

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA:

Plenums, power, politics

DOSSIER

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USA:

President Obama's Backhanded Maneuver Targets Anti-Deportation Movement

SOLIDARITY STEERING COMMITTEE ·

The Democratic Party strategy on immigration has always been to focus the debate on Congressional legislation and paint the Republicans as the real obstacle, thereby winning a political battle without taking any meaningful action. But we know and Obama knows that the President has always had the power to prevent deportations and end programs like Secure Communities without Congressional action, and the administration has already proven their ability to act under pressure by granting the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and putting an end to new 287(g) agreements. Earlier this year, mounting pressure from the militant and growing anti-deportation movement forced President Obama to agree to a review of deportation practices and to promise changes by early summer. Even after the announcement, pressure has continued to grow with many Congressional Democrats publicly stating that the administration needs to take executive action to significantly change deportation policies.

This recent development is clearly an attempt to reverse some of that pressure, buying time for the administration and putting the focus back on Congress and the Republicans. Not long after the story broke, an anonymous staffer for a DC immigration advocacy group told activists that their organization had been approached by a white house adviser and asked to sign this letter in order to give the administration cover. The President, who has deported a record two million people during his

time in office, is making a desperate last attempt to avoid action and to shift blame back onto the Republicans just in time for the mid term elections.

It is also an attempt to divide a movement. The militant youth who have built and led the contemporary movement against deportations have only recently been finding support from more mainstream and well-resourced organizations, including labor unions. A united movement poses a serious threat to the administration and to ruling class interests. This backhanded maneuver can be read as an attempt to drive a wedge between undocumented youth activists and the broader forces that might support them, thereby weakening a powerful movement and keeping much of that movement under the influence of the Democratic Party.

It remains to be seen how well the strategy will work. There is certainly a fight back: organizers have loudly called out SEIU and the other groups who decided to sell out the 90,000 or more people who will be deported during the window granted to the administration. Some mainstream immigrant rights groups that have long supported reform have released statements denouncing the administration's decision. Even the New York Times published a strongly worded statement from its editorial board that identified the real political dynamics and called the President's bluff.

At the same time, Reform Immigration for America, one of the largest and most influential immigration, NGOs has released a strongly worded statement pushing for a renewed fight for legislative reform: "starting today, this country will see activism around immigration reform on a massive scale," their latest E-mail states. Other large and powerful groups are sure to follow. These groups

will attempt to reorient grassroots forces toward reform, while saying nothing about the decision to delay administrative action. SEIU and other groups whose reputation in the movement matters little can take the heat for selling out tens of thousands of people, and RIFA and their like can complete the job.

We must resist and fight back against this two-faced strategy. We need a united working class movement demanding an end to deportations, an end to programs like Secure Communities, and legalization for all. SEIU and their allies have willing-

ly acted as the administration's lapdogs in an attempt to divide this movement and grant cover to politicians who want to avoid action yet again. And so we call on everyone who believes in justice to see this move for what it is. We support the activists who are tirelessly fighting against the deportation regime and fight to ensure that nobody takes the bait by backing down from the demands for executive action and returning to yet another round of futile lobbying for reform.

May 29, 2014

PORTUGAL

Portugal, Europe and the Left Bloc after the European elections

LEFT BLOC ·

Following the [September 29, 2013] local elections, the Left Bloc developed its European program via a thorough programmatic debate involving many independent activists. That culminated at our February 2014 national conference.

The Left Bloc entered the campaign with a strong orientation, a clear, alternative program to the one proposed by the government, a candidate elected by consensus and an openness reflected in the quality of the list of candidates presented and the public support they received. The Left Bloc carried out a dynamic election campaign, throughout which it remained united and completely focused.

The Left Bloc received a bad election result [149,628 votes, 4.56%, down by 6.15% from 2009]. We were able to elect Marisa Matias, but were a long way away from electing a second deputy. We not only failed to turn around the losses suffered at the last legislative and municipal elections, but received an even lower vote this time around. The party must carry out a profound reflection on the political situation, the path we have taken to date and future options for the Left Bloc.

Crisis of the political system and the centre

The May 25, 2014, European parliamentary elections were a sign of the deep crisis facing the European political system. This was reflected in the generalised loss of votes suffered by traditional and governing parties (whether social democratic or conservative) and the growth of extreme right and xenophobic and reactionary populist forces, such as occurred in England, France, Denmark, Sweden, Austria and the Czech Republic.

Nevertheless, anti-austerity forces received significant results in Greece (victory for Syriza), Ireland (20% for Sinn Féin) and the Spanish state (United Left, IU, and the new party, Podemos, together won 18% of the votes).

A second factor in the crisis of the political system is the persistently high rate of abstention that has worsened with the social desperation arising as a result of the economic crisis. The very low participation rate in these elections deepens the crisis of representative democracy in the European Union.

In Portugal, the abstention rate at the European elections reached a record 66% (3% higher than in 2009, with 280,000 less voters). In Braganza, Faro, Vila Real and Las Azores, the abstention rate was higher than 70%. The previous highest abstention rate for European elections was registered two decades ago (64.6%).

The fact that migration has increased at a rate not seen since the 1960s and 1970s no doubt played an important role in the increased abstention rate. Nevertheless, the main explication for this phenomenon is the accumulated discontent with politics in general that is felt among broad sections of the popular classes. This disconnect among citizens tends to find its main expression in European elections, but it has also increased in legislative and municipal elections and could become a structural tendency. The current level of abstention is an expression of protest against austerity and anti-social policies.

In Portugal, the governing parties suffered a humiliating defeat that represented a condemnation of austerity policies. [Socialist Party (PS) president and prime minister Pedro] Passos [Coelho] and [Peoples' Party president and deputy minister

Paulo] Portas have not been deposed simply because the inaction of the president keeps them in power.

The votes lost by the centre right did not go to the left in a significant manner. While it is true that the governing parties lost 400,000 vote compared to 2009, the PS stood still, winning only one more European deputy that the right-wing alliance.

The Portuguese Communist Party won 416,000 votes (35,000 more than in 2009), but it was not the only force that was able to channel some of the discontent. Polarisation also occurred around personalities such as Antonio Marinho e Pinto (Earth Party, 200,000 votes more than 2009). Despite not winning a seat for Rui Tavares, the Partido Libre (Free Party) received an important vote (70,000 votes) on the basis of an undifferentiated criticism of "party apparatuses" and the promise of a new way of doing politics that involves citizens, together with a predisposition towards an agreement with PS.

Left Bloc's results

The National Coordination salutes those activists who converted the Left Bloc into a force that had a presence across the country in a political battle that allowed us to preserve the representation that our political current has in the European parliament.

The National Coordination also salutes all the candidates that stood for the Left Bloc, whether they are members or independents, particularly Marisa Matias and Joao Laviña for their outstanding performance as lead list candidates.

The Left Bloc suffered as a consequence of two consecutive electoral defeats (2011 and 2013), which lent credence to the ongoing story regarding the Left Bloc's inevitable decline. Public disagreements and internal criticism also contributed to this, as did the exaggerated blame laid on the Left Bloc for the lack of a genuine convergence of the left around which expectations were created by failed to be met. This issue had particular repercussion within the Left Bloc.

On the other hand, the Left Bloc can no longer play the novel card to its advantage and its image has been tarred by the institutions within which we carry out part of our struggle, such as parliaments and municipal councils, and which today are viewed with a lack of confidence by many of the victims of the policies they decide upon. Without a sufficiently rooted electoral and activist social base, the Left Bloc faces greater difficulties due to the division of the left and the types of populism that characterise this context.

The debates at our organisational conference last February focused on this reality and attempted to start a response. The Left Bloc will continue to debate both the causes and consequences of the recent election results and debate its project and the political space it fills. Branches, and municipal and district groups will be bringing together members to carry out this discussion before the end of June.

The Left Bloc believes it is essential for the debate that our sympathisers and voters be included in these discussions. The objective is to recapture the original spirit of the Left Bloc, of unity and intransigence, which goes beyond party limits and involves activists and social movements in an indispensable dialogue for the construction of a broad alternative.

The European Union after May

The European election results demonstrated the how broadly held the perception is that the response to the EU crisis of the last few years has exacerbated the exclusion of citizens, promoted inequality, reinforced the control of a single power over the directorate, consolidated the decisive weight of the financial system and economies subordinated to the pursuit of profits, all of which has provided incentives for seeking national solutions to the aggression carried out by the European commission and the European Central Bank.

The categorical rejection of any process of pooling sovereign debt, as set out in the agreement between the right wing parties and the Social Democratic

Party in the German government, as well as the failure to modify the Budget Treaty – an election promise raised by [French president François] Hollande, and then quickly forgotten – shows that EU policy will continue to worsen the destruction of the economies of the periphery countries and has imposed, in the name of the euro, a social crisis whose depth is without precedent.

Moreover, Europe does not have the means to resist a new financial crisis with its current institutions. Austerity leads to deflation and the risk of a prolonged depression, impedes an economic response that involves the creation of employment and growth, and condemns essential public services to disappear.

As such, the 20 years of austerity that the EU, the president and the government announced for Portugal are only compatible with authoritarian political forms and the concentration of power within the central bloc of governments pursuing this path of destruction. Collaborationism is the manner in which they hope to run Portugal.

Mobilise in order to wear down the government

The next few weeks will be marked by the return of protests, with trade union actions called in Oporto and Lisbon (June 14 and 21, respectively). Political discontent of the majority needs to be accentuated through the deepening of mobilisations, but above all taking into consideration the recent attacks against collective bargaining and the new austerity

measures that the government is preparing as a response to the rulings of the Constitutional Tribunal regarding certain measures in the 2014 state budget. The government has indicated that it willing to ignore the real content of the court's sentences by not immediately complying with the reposition of salaries for the public administration or restoring subsidies they cut.

Reduction in the number of deputies weakens democracy

At a time when dissatisfaction is growing with the political system, the Socialist Party has proposed reducing proportionality and plural representation that are a part of democracy, and re-raising a proposal to reduce the number of parliamentarians and introduce uninominal [single-candidate] electorates. Responding to the political system's crisis of representation with regressive and pro-two-party proposals is an indication of PS politics, shared by both [party general secretary Antonio José] Seguro and [PS mayor of Lisbon Antonio] Costas.

National convention in November

The National Coordination has decided to hold the next national convention in Lisbon, on November 22-23, 2014. The IX Convention will evaluate the Left Bloc's work over the past two years, set out a political orientation and elect representatives to the party's national leadership bodies for the following period.

INDIA:

Say No to Nuclear Power. Defend the anti-nuclear activists who are falsely accused

RADICAL SOCIALIST ·

India:

Yet, for two linked reasons, Indian capitalism is determined to press forward with nuclear weapons and nuclear power alike. It brings massive contracts. And this kind of centralized power production benefits the top layers of the capitalists. And such power production, like electricity from big dams, goes for a skewed "development" policy that subsidizes luxurious living for the wealthy while exploiting the toiling people.

And nuclear weaponization has been the goal of the Jan Sangh, forerunner of the BJP, ever since 1951, as they see it as essential to securing a higher status for the Indian state in the global pecking order.

As a result, the latest offensive against anti-nuclear activists, while utterly false, malicious, and contemptible, is also understandable. India's anti-nuclear activists, and organisations like the CNDP, many of whose leaders have been named in the leaked Intelligence document, are democratically minded Indian citizens. They are being reviled as "foreign agents", in a stance that is typical of reactionary nationalism. Radical Socialist has been committed to a non-nuclear future for India, and stands by these activists and their campaigns. We call upon all socialists, environmentally concerned citizens, and democratic forces, to unite to defend the anti-nuclear activists from such false attacks.

13 June 2014

BRITAIN:

June 21 - a brilliant day

FRED LEPLAT ·

The biggest contingent was that of the teachers union the NUT which is preparing for industrial action on the 10 July. UNITE, Britain's largest union and the civil service union, PCS had also mobilised their activists in large numbers, while the fire brigades union, the FBU had brought along its decommissioned fire-engine, flanked by its members currently on strike over proposed changes to their pensions.

There was also a wide array of local and national campaign groups, such as Keep Our NHS Public and Disabled People Against Cuts. A new mood of optimism and solidarity was present throughout the day, and not just because of the brilliant weather and festival in Parliament Square!

The size of the demonstration establishes the People's Assembly as the national coalition against austerity. It also prepares the ground for mobilising popular support for the day of co-ordinated strike on 10 July by public sector unions. The NUT and the FBU are likely to be joined by public service union UNISON, UNITE and the PCS in their fight over pay and pensions. These unions will be announcing the result of their ballots in the coming days. Even the Royal College of Midwives is talking about industrial action as the Health Minister, Jeremy Hunt, refused to accept the 1% pay rise recommended by their pay review body.

The People's Assembly demonstration kicks off a summer of protest which will continue after the 10 July public sector strikes with the People's March for the NHS which leaves Jarrow for London on the 16 August, the anti-NATO protest in Newport on the 30 August and the TUC march and rally on the 18 October calling for a pay rise in Britain. The pos-

sibility of further days strikes looms in the autumn if there is no settlement for the disputes involving the public sector unions.

The campaign has begun for an alternative to austerity to be heard in the run-up to the general election. However, in order for the government to retreat from its attacks, the size of the demonstrations and the scale of the industrial action will have to be considerably greater than they are now. There is a way to go yet before we are in a period of "mass strike". The TUC demonstration in March 2011 was 500,000 strong, the largest since the anti-war march of 2003. Last year, 60,000 marched in Manchester outside the Tory party conference. All the forces of the trade-unions and campaigns should now be mobilised to make the TUC demonstration on 18 October at least as big as the one three years ago.

Large demonstrations and industrial action are absolutely necessary to make the government and employers back-off. But we also need a political alternative. The disquiet in the Labour Party about Miliband's personal appeal is totally misplaced. The disquiet should be about the policies of the party, and not the personality of its leader. Minor gestures about the minimum wage, modest controls on private rents or not renewing the contracts of the private rail companies, however welcome, are not sufficient. The Labour Party has totally embraced austerity and neo-liberalism. If elected, a Labour government under Miliband would be no different to that of the Hollande Socialist Party government, or that of the Samaras coalition government in Greece in which PASOK participates.

The democratic channels of the Labour Party, which might have given the hope that the course of the party could be changed, have been totally destroyed. To argue that it is possible to reclaim the

Labour Party from the austerity-lite New Labour lacks credibility and leads the movement down a dead-end. We need to lay down today the basis for a socialist political alternative, which is as loyal to the working class as New Labour is to the bankers and big business. That means taking the steps today to create a new mass broad political organisation, which takes its inspiration from Syriza in

Greece or Podemos in Spain. Leaving the political field on the left open, hoping that Labour can be reclaimed or that something will turn up in better times, is not an option. It is leaving people to be driven through fear into the arms of UKIP.

Instead, Left Unity has the ambition to become the anti-austerity party that gives hope.

Fred Leplat, 23 June 2014

CHINA:

From bureaucratic counter-revolution to bourgeois counter-revolution

PIERRE ROUSSET ·

Surprisingly, these documents also concerned nearly 22,000 residents in continental China or in Hong Kong. It took a team of journalists (some of them Chinese) to identify the latter. Thirty newspapers are linked internationally in the ICIJ. In January 2014, these investigations were made public. *Le Monde*, in its issues of January 23-25, 2014, thus published a dossier of 12 pages in France. The editors noted that the results of the investigation "took the breath away" both in terms of the wealth amassed and the involvement of the economy, surpassing predictions: "There is not one Chinese sector, from oil to renewable energy, from mining operations to the arms trade, which does not appear in the documents possessed by the ICIJ and its partner."

Via TrustNet, a consultancy now known as PricewaterhouseCoopers has contributed to the constitution of more than 400 offshore companies for clients in continental China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The Swiss bank UBS helped create more than a thousand "offshore entities". It isn't just private wealth which, legally or otherwise, uses tax havens like the Virgin Isles, Caymans or Bermudas: state enterprises do so also, in particular the national giants of the oil industry. Shadow wars are waged on this terrain in which the CCP can brutally intervene by incarcerating business lawyers or disgraced company directors. The highly capitalist offshore world now forms part of the economic and political life of the post-Maoist regime.

At the heart of the ICIJ investigation were the "red princes" – "linked by blood or marriage" to the top

leaders of party and state – who have benefited from banking secrecy to create offshore companies or invest their ill gotten goods: cronies of the current president Xi Jinping, his predecessor Hu Jintao, ex-Prime ministers Wen Jiabao or Li Peng, but also at least fifteen of the wealthiest people in the country, members of the National Assembly, generals and so on. Tax havens allow the creation of enterprises which escape the control of the authorities, operate outside of the control of the authorities, hide true ownership of a company, operate in the greatest opacity and launder capital, are quoted on foreign stock exchanges so as to avoid legal obstacles to stock market flotation, falsify the prices of commodities exported or imported, dissolve an "entity" quasi-instantaneously to escape legal proceedings, and so on. These so called havens thus shelter the fruits of corruption, bribes and massive diversion of money, sheltering "fabulous fortunes" (for now) from justice or settlements of accounts inside the party.

The sums involved are gigantic. The ICIJ investigation sheds light on the role of Western financial institutions in the functioning of the system, with a very prominent place for UBS – the biggest European bank for wealth management – and Cr dit suisse. They favour the secret or illicit movement of capital, in return for which the "red princes" open to them the doors of the political regime. In short, the current Chinese  lite behaves like any other bourgeois  lite!

Everybody recognises that capitalism is flourishing in China, but some still believe (on the right and left) that the state and party remain "Communist", inasmuch as the CCP keeps control of economic policy. The ICIJ investigation confirms however to

what point the regime and capitalism now maintain incestuous relations.

Before the economic reforms initiated from the 1980s onwards by Deng Xiaoping, the boost given to capitalist opening in 1992, then the return in 1997 of the former British colony Hong Kong to Continental China, this accession of the "son of" or "daughter of" (like Li Xiaolin, daughter of Li Peng) to the world of business would not have been possible. Between a bureaucrat and a bourgeois, there is then no Chinese wall. How to understand this great Chinese transformation?

From whence did the new Chinese capitalism emerge, what has allowed its blossoming and what are its specificities? What basic questions does this contemporary experience raise? The present contribution will try to address these questions.

Revolution and counter-revolutions

There was a social revolution in China under the Maoist regime; then a social counter-revolution initiated under the post-Maoist regime by the reforms of Deng Xiaoping. This does not amount to an opinion and a debatable reading of texts or official proclamations, but of historic data: the transformation of the Chinese class structure has twice been so radical that it is impossible to ignore. It is all the more visible since it has been accompanied by spectacular renewals of the composition of the basic classes, the proletariat or the bourgeoisie, of an upheaval of the situation of women or the peasantry, as well as cultural, legal and ideological reversals.

To sum up, in the time of Maoism, the dominant classes of the old regime (the rural gentry and the urban bourgeoisie) disintegrated. A new proletariat developed, politically subordinated, but benefiting in the state sector from a privileged social status. Agrarian reform overthrew the village order. Whatever its limits, a profound movement of equalisation of rights benefited ordinary women. The Confucian ideology was assaulted and egalitarian aspirations were officially promoted. A state bu-

reaucracy which was privileged, but different from that of before [1], progressively crystallized, occupying a nodal place within society [2].

In the 1980s and 90s, a new bourgeoisie was constituted; it was above all the product of an evolution internal to the society and not to the return of the exiled rich, its composition reflecting the specific history of the country. The bureaucracy transformed itself, becoming the pillar of a specific "bureaucratic capitalism". A new proletariat appeared, fed by a massive rural exodus and made up of "internal migrants" without papers or rights, replacing the working class of the Maoist era. The peasantry is now threatened by a legal and general privatisation of plots on which it has usufruct. The super-exploited worker of the industrial free trade zones has become the symbol of the condition of ordinary women.

Certainly, any analysis of contemporary Chinese history should integrate these caesuras, these discontinuities. It should also offer an interpretation of what the "Cultural Revolution" of the late 1960s was; which relates to the formation and role of the state bureaucracy in a transitional society, to the manner in which it appropriates the monopoly of power.

The difficult restoration of control by the party and the administration after the chaos of 1966-69 marks in this perspective the completion of a bureaucratic counter-revolution and raises a significant question: the relationship between the latter and the bourgeois counter-revolution which began decisively 15-20 years later.

In contrast to Russia, the CCP steered the process of capitalist restoration from beginning to end: while this institutional continuity explains on the one hand the fairly remarkable success of the enterprise, it does not in the least hide the profound ruptures, political and social crises, and wide ranging social conflicts which have accompanied this counter-revolution.

This discontinuity is not expressed only in the repeated upheavals of the overall structure and social

hierarchy, in the repeated transformation of the condition of the peasantry or ordinary women, but also in the meteoric trajectory of a new actor (a bureaucracy of a very specific type) and in what could be called the recreation of the basic classes (bourgeoisie, proletariat).

A "bureaucratic capitalism"

The term capitalist restoration should not imply a return to the old bourgeoisie and the capitalism of the past, even if, under the dictatorship of the Kuomintang, a party-state already framed economic activity. The revolution has taken place, reshuffling the cards. Neoliberal globalisation has significantly changed the mode of imperialist domination. China has imposed itself in the international arena as an "emergent power" – in fact already largely emerged – a status which shows to what point the current situation differs from the 1920s in the "golden age" of Chinese capitalism, or 1930 and 1940 under Chiang Kai-shek.

From one bourgeoisie to the other

The rural gentry and the urban, industrial and trading bourgeoisie massively took the road of exile both before and at the time of the CCP victory in 1949, fleeing to Hong Kong (a movement which in fact began from 1945 onwards), invading Taiwan with the armies of the Kuomintang, strengthening its bridgeheads in south east Asia or in the Western countries. Agrarian reform, the movement of repression of "counter-revolutionaries" during the Korean War (1950-53) then the economic nationalisations disintegrated the dominant classes of the old regime in the People's Republic.

Members of the old rural and bourgeois elite remained, collaborating with the CCP but on an individual basis and contributing in some way to the social erasure of their own classes.

The history of the Chinese bourgeoisie continued, but overseas. One of the unexpected results of the victory of the Maoist revolution is to have, in reaction, accelerated the development of a transnational Chinese capital which – today – plays an impor-

tant role in the links between the capitalism of continental China and the world market – to the point where the South Koreans have created the acronym "Chiwan" (China-Taiwan) to refer to this alliance between the best of enemies.

Yesterday, capitalist restoration in continental China would have taken the form of a military or economic reconquest under the flag of the Kuomintang and under the aegis of Washington. Today an uncontrolled capitalist development would have loosened the grip of the party over society and led to an open crisis of the regime. The rapidity with which Western-Japanese and Chinese transnational capital established themselves in the People's Republic after the political bureau had appealed for foreign investment indicates that this possibility was not only theoretical. The conditions of admission of China to the World Trade Organisation were very much more favourable to foreign capital than in the case of India. At the beginning of the 2000s, its weight became predominant in a growing number of sectors. But the CCP recovered its grip in 2003, with the 17th party congress and the election of a new leadership, reaffirming that there was no question of it losing control of the economy: capitalist restoration should above all benefit the regime and the new bourgeoisie born inside the People's Republic. Thanks notably to the breadth of the internal market, the development of domestic capital allowed it to keep its position in relation to foreign investors.

An alliance was built with Chinese overseas capital, but under the hegemony of the CCP and the state bureaucracy. A new class of private entrepreneurs was constituted in China itself; the place of multinationals in the economy became very significant; but the regime kept control of the sectors considered strategic and still dictates the rules of the game.

Bureaucratic capitalism

China fits in with the model of "state capitalisms" which, from India to South Korea, have played a major role in the development of various Asian

economies between the Second World War and the neoliberal wave. It is also often classified in the vast category of "authoritarian capitalisms" where a despotic state guarantees capital its liberty. But this authoritarian state capitalism is of a very specific type, the product of too original a history to be easily labelled. To define it more precisely, Au Loong Yu, taking up an analysis by Maurice Meisner [3], calls it "bureaucratic capitalism". This term indicates both the central place occupied by the party-state bureaucracy inside the new dominant class, and the interpenetration of the various components of the current Chinese bourgeoisie.

Much more than in the "classic" bourgeois regimes, bureaucratic capitalism goes very far in the fusion between power and money. The politicians are not merely the clerks of big capital. The highest sphere of the bureaucracy, at the head of the party-state, includes billionaires and business people. This fusion is found at all levels of the institutions and administration. Bureaucrats of a certain rank use their position to accumulate capital. Nepotism reigns at all levels, the best placed leaders placing their children in posts of responsibility.

Thus, the capitalist bureaucrats benefit both from their wages and a share of capitalist surplus value. Bureaucratic capitalism keeps control of the most profitable sectors of the economy [4]. They constitute the central kernel of the new bourgeoisie. A notable number of entrepreneurs and business people have family links with the bureaucracy; others occupy a more marginal position.

The term bureaucratic capital specifically concerns the capital possessed or controlled by bureaucrats thanks to their exercise of power.

– *Possessed*: in the first case, members of the bureaucracy have, by abuse of power, created for themselves or their families private enterprises; or have profited from the privatisation of numerous small or medium enterprises in the mid 90s; or again have individually joined the ranks of the bourgeoisie through corruption, receiving shares from private capitalists.

* *Controlled*: in the second case, the enterprises officially belong to the state, but their "use" is under the effective control of party cadres. Or they have been transformed into public limited companies which seek to make a profit rather than produce public goods. Their branches can obtain the status of mixed enterprises. Political cadres have the means to impose their cronies at the head of these entities. Without legally owning these enterprises, they can massively privatise profits and build fortunes. This process is obviously not specific to China, but it takes on a special dimension here.

Administration and enterprises

Also, each administrative department can, in its area of competence, create enterprises which have the sole objective of making a profit. The Department of Labour will create an enterprise providing labour; the fire service a fire safety equipment factory; the police a security agency and so on. The privatisation of urban land allows municipalities to carry out profitable operations – they are also offered shares in building enterprises. The army finally constitutes a powerful military-industrial complex which can today operate in a market economy.

Again, these practices are not specific to China. From Pakistan to Egypt, for example, the army also owns enterprises and land. Individually and collectively, the higher officers form a major component part of the national bourgeoisie. But in China, the phenomenon is of a rare scope, involving the whole of the party-state bureaucracy of a certain rank.

Above all, all this shows how concretely a bureaucracy monopolising power in a society where the bourgeoisie has been eradicated can transform itself into a new dominant class – by what means it "bourgeoisifies" itself.

The development of capitalism in China has not reduced the weight of the state apparatus, very much the contrary. Under the Kuomintang, before the revolution, there were already two million civil servants. After the revolution, there were 8 million in

1958, 21 million in 1978. The number is currently reckoned at between 50 and 70 million – much more than the regime officially acknowledges! This again witnesses to the power and centrality of the bureaucracy in capitalist China today.

The "necessary conditions" of the new Chinese capitalism

What has made possible the formation in China of a *new* bourgeoisie, a *new* capitalism, and the affirmation of a *new* power in the international arena?

Can China already be characterised as imperialist, in the Marxist sense of the term? The question is debated; for me, the process remains as yet unfinished, without any certain outcome, but it is certainly very much underway – it is the objective pursued by the leadership of the party-state. We have already seen the constitution of a new imperialism in Japan following the Meiji Revolution a century and a half ago. The Japanese precedent has shown that an imperialism can emerge elsewhere than the West, inasmuch as the class structure of the country allows it, but it had benefitted from a final breach in the domination of the world by the European and US powers. This chapter closed with the end of the 19th century.

China's "emergence" is thus in no way banal. What has changed the situation to the point that a national bourgeoisie can now hope to compete with the greatest powers? The long term impact of the revolutions of the 20th century on the one hand, but also the victory of the bureaucratic counter-revolutions – then the areas opened to capital by neo-liberal globalisation.

Revolution and independence

The revolutions of the 20th century have modified the traditional framework of inter-imperialist competition. Thus, after 1945, the USA in particular, although a superpower, had to accept the rehabilitation of its competitors in Europe (the Marshall plan) and in Asia (the reconstruction of Japan). To establish a cordon sanitaire around the People's Republic of China, they used their military power:

wars in Korea and Indochina; construction of bases in South Korea, Japan and Okinawa, the Philippines, Thailand and so on. They also had to accept an unexpected strengthening of national capital in South Korea and Taiwan; and allow India to lean towards Moscow to ensure a less dependent capitalist development.

The Chinese revolution ensured the independence of a country threatened with becoming a (neo)colony of Japan or, more likely, the USA. It ensured an independent base for development: cultural modernisation, industrialisation, technological system, mass education, formation of a large and qualified working class and so on.

Alliance

The power of capitalist China obviously owes a lot to the geographical and demographic dimensions of the country and its internal market, but also to the quality of its access to the world market. An alliance yesterday deemed inconceivable has been created between the new élite born out of the bourgeoisification of the bureaucracy and transnational Chinese capital [5]. Independence and opening to the world have a posteriori been revealed as two elements essential to national capitalist renewal.

In 1997, Hong Kong was returned to the People's Republic. As a British colony, it became a Special Administrative Region (a status shared by Macao), preserving, under the principle of "one country, two systems", its role as financial centre and its opening to investment. Retaking possession of this territory without changing its international position was a deliberate choice of the CCP, which shows to what point capitalist reconstitution was thought through by the party leadership. A bridge between continental China and the world market, Hong Kong gave a kind of "organic" character to the alliance between the bureaucratic bourgeoisie and Chinese transnational capital.

On the one hand, the CCP has steered the bourgeois counter-revolution, on the other transnational Chinese capital has refrained from attacking the

regime. It knows that only the party-state can ensure an ordered transition and avoid socio-geographical fractures which could threaten the unity of the country. China, a country-continent, is subject to an internal "combined and unequal development" liable to provoke violent tensions between regions.

Bureaucratic counter-revolution

For the new Chinese capitalism to take off, it was necessary that the dynamic of the revolution became exhausted and the working class and the people as a whole should suffer a historic defeat. This is the role played by the bureaucratic counter-revolution. It was not a bourgeois counter-revolution, but it was its essential precondition.

In essence, the new state bureaucracy was not the heir of the old regime. It emerged from inside the revolution. At the time of the conquest of power, it did not yet exist, properly speaking, even in an embryonic form. It represents very much more than a simple party apparatus. The pressure of revolutionary combat reduced, the cadres increased the privileges from which they benefited and thought of themselves as a "leading faction" of the new society. They became conscious that they had collective interests to defend and finally constituted – thanks to the monopoly of power they enjoyed – an autonomous, crystallised, dominant social layer.

The formation of this type of bureaucracy is a real social process with profound implications. It appropriates the party, the state. In China, as we have seen, this process was accompanied by successive crises (the Hundred Flowers, the Great Leap Forward and so on) which have increasingly dislocated or broken the links made during the revolutionary struggle between the CCP and sectors of society. At the price of a factional schism at the very summit of the party, it led to the crisis of crises: the so-called "Cultural Revolution" during which the party and the administration shattered into splinters, with the army alone ensuring the continuity of power.

At the political and ideological level (one might say psycho-sociological), the murderous chaos resulting from the Cultural Revolution, followed by the reign of the "Gang of Four" – a particularly intolerant bureaucratic dictatorship – created in reaction conditions favourable to the discourse of reform adopted by Deng Xiaoping following his reconquest of undisputed power. It was seen as a return to reason: cultural relaxation, an avowed pragmatism, partial de-collectivisation in the countryside, workers' cooperatives and so on. The orientation advocated by Deng was all the more easily accepted inasmuch as the socio-economic reforms did not appear pro-capitalist.

At the social level, the actors in the egalitarian mobilisations of 1968-1969, abandoned by Mao, were massively repressed. The CCP was progressively rebuilt from above. Thus the completion of the bureaucratic counter-revolution sanctioned the abortion of the Cultural Revolution. Under Deng, the regime inflicted a succession of major defeats on the popular, democratic and student movements, centrally in 1989 with the crushing of the demonstrations at Tien An Men Square in Beijing – the repression extending also to the provinces. It was the depth of this defeat which allowed the regime to accelerate capitalist restoration from 1992 onwards.

Bureaucracy and bourgeois counter-revolution

By defeating social resistance, the bureaucracy created a relationship of forces favourable to the renaissance of a capitalist economy. In the past small private entrepreneurs were tolerated. They were now encouraged – and ceased to be small. But the essence was elsewhere: the state bureaucracy led its own bourgeois reconversion. Its privileges were no longer enough. They were closely dependent on the post occupied. They could not be privatised and did not allow a private accumulation of capital transmissible to the family.

The bureaucracy had become a dominant social layer, but it aspired to become a *possessing* class – a class of *proprietors*. The bureaucracy thus became a major actor in capitalist renewal. It substi-

tuted itself for a renascent but embryonic class of private entrepreneurs to impel the accumulation of capital.

Today, the party-state bureaucracy is not alongside the bourgeoisie, in support or in conflict with it: it is the bourgeoisie, or at least its core. It has transformed the state, yesterday radically hostile to capitalism, to make it an instrument at the service of capitalist development. A state in the service of the collective and specific interests of the capitalist bureaucracy. A state, one could say, privatised by this bureaucracy [6].

The party-state has ensured the construction of infrastructures appropriate to the requirements of capital (notably in the coastal regions); it has created free trade zones very favourable to foreign investors; it has piloted a new phase of industrialisation which has allowed China to become the "workshop of the world"; it has guaranteed profits by imposing on the working class a regime of permanent repression; it has intervened effectively to save "markets" and profits during the financial crisis of 2008.

Thus this state has created conditions favourable to capitalism in general, not only bureaucratic capital. The "Chinese model" implies moreover a close intertwining between the state, private enterprise, foreign investment, the world market and offshore capital.

Collectively, the bourgeoisified bureaucracy organised in the CCP still controls the core of the process of capital accumulation through its monopoly of power, its family networks, the links of dependency forged with entrepreneurs, joint-ventures with foreign capital and the place of the state sector in the economy. However many bureaucrats are also personally interested in private profit.

Although the big state enterprises still command a number of strategic sectors, their overall weight is considerably reduced. In 1979, they produced 80% of industrial goods as against only a third currently (albeit in an expanding market). In around twenty years, starting from virtually nothing, the private

sector (Chinese or foreign) has experienced a phenomenal expansion.

There exist however interdependency and tensions between the state and private sectors, as well as with foreign capital. The synergy which has characterised recent decades can seize up during a recession or a financial, social or international crisis. The "Chinese model" may not survive a rise in conflict between the various components of the new capitalism.

The fragility of the Chinese model also stems from generalised corruption which has become uncontrollable. It has grown incessantly since the 1980s: individual then "organisational" corruption (the leaders of the administrative sectors exchanging "money for power"), which has become specifically "institutional": banalised, endemic inside the party-state, it is now a component of the system itself. Recurrent "anti-corruption campaigns" provide an opportunity for the settling of political or personal accounts, but they do not challenge its "systemic" character. How can rational policies be implemented in these conditions?

The scope of the assets invested by the "red princes" in tax havens reveals to what point the members of the bourgeoisified bureaucracy are involved in the private accumulation of capital [7]. The bureaucratic bourgeoisies can lose coherence and fissure from the inside – giving private capital the opportunity to gain a more central place in the economy.

Finally with the arrival on the labour market of the rural exodus, social resistance grows faced with the super-exploitation characteristic of a private accumulation of capital or a predatory transnational capitalism.

After 1949, the CCP benefitted from a formidable historic legitimacy given the role it had played in the liberation struggle and the foundation of the new regime. It no longer benefits from any such legitimacy whether historic, social, moral or democratic. It only has power.

To endure, the regime must reform. The élite is however unprepared for this. The transformation of the "Chinese model" is not completed. We are probably dealing with a transitional regime subject to internal contradictions whose future remains open.

The international conditions: new geopolitical situation and capitalist globalisation

National factors are not enough to explain the ease with which the new capitalist China has imposed itself as a power in the international arena. Certainly, in Asia most especially, the traditional imperialisms have had to accommodate the national bourgeoisies to contain the revolutionary wave following the Second World War. But this period is over: they could have benefited from this to reassert control and stifle the emergence of new imperialist candidates.

They have not in fact done so. The explanation can probably be found in the implications – not all anticipated! – of capitalist globalisation initiated in the 1990s and the consequences of the disintegration of the "Soviet bloc".

The dismantling of the Soviet Union and globalisation are closely linked. The end of the geopolitics of blocs was an indispensable condition for the transformation of the world market in capital and commodities. Neoliberal policies were certainly imposed in certain countries (the USA, Britain and so on) before the demise of the USSR, but they could only globalise when the geopolitical field opened. Symptomatically, the WTO was created (1994) in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989).

The end of the "Eastern bloc" allowed a considerable expansion of the world capitalist market with the reintegration inside it of the former so-called "socialist" countries and the strengthening of economic interdependency: thus, the USA depends on capital inflows from China and China depends on the US market. By liberalising capital movements, the traditional financial powers have opened breaches through which newcomers have been able

to pour. Convinced that they no longer faced adversaries of their own size, they emancipated themselves from politics, as if the "market" sufficed to regulate societies and ensure – with the aid of the repressive state and neoliberal ideology – their domination. At the national level, governments were forbidden to maintain the previous modes of domination, forged by history: state dirigisme in Asia, populism in Latin America, historic compromises in Europe and so on. At the geopolitical level, all alliances – previously frozen by the confrontation of blocs – became fluid and unstable. In Asia, the case of Pakistan illustrates the scope of the upheaval : the dominant classes could previously count on the assured support of the USA and China against India, itself backed by the USSR, while the India-Pakistan conflict strengthened the state's control over society. Today, they are assured of nothing and the Afghan conflict fractures the state, destabilizing society.

We are no longer in a situation where, in many countries of the "South", the national bourgeoisie or more generally the élites are organically subordinated to a given imperialism, as in the time of colonialism or again to a great extent after formal decolonisation. Inter-imperialist competition has again opened, for a new division of the market. The USA is certainly in a dominant position, but they are not capable of controlling the world alone. They seek to utilise for their benefit the "secondary" traditional imperialisms, but they cannot prevent the entry of new powers. Thus, in Africa, great manoeuvres are underway between the USA, Canada, France, UK, China, India, and South Africa. Of the "emergent powers", China is the best placed to profit from the reigning geopolitical instability, the relaxing of the control exercised by the traditional imperialisms over the bourgeois elites of the South and the competition underway on the world market.

From one working class to another

It remained necessary that the new Chinese bourgeoisie had, at the internal level, the possibility of

ensuring an extremely rapid primitive accumulation of capital – and thus break the social resistance of the working class inherited from the Maoist era. As has been said, it did so in an extremely radical manner – by replacing the latter by a new proletariat available at back and call – the undocumented workers originating from the rural exodus. Between the Maoist era and today, the structure of the Chinese proletariat (composition, social status, standard of living, type of consciousness and so on) has been profoundly modified. We are in the presence of a radically different working class.

It is the second time in less than a century that a new working class has emerged in China. The process is certainly different: the first time, in the 1950s, the old proletariat was not massively withdrawn from production to make room for another. But Chinese social history witnesses in spectacular fashion to the reality of the revolution of 1949 and the bourgeois counter-revolution initiated three decades later, as well as the specificity of the Maoist regime.

A century ago, China experienced its first waves of industrialisation. The industrial working class nonetheless remained very much in the minority, estimated at 1.5 million in the early 1920s as against at least 250 million peasants. It was concentrated in very large factories in certain regions only: coastal metropolises in the south, the Moyen-Yangzi river basin, Manchuria in the north, and so on. A good part of textile production still originated from the artisanal sector and the bulk of the urban semi-proletariat was made up of precarious workers, the "coolies" (unskilled labourers, journeymen, porters).

The young workers' movement played an important role in the revolution of 1925, but was crushed by the counter-revolution of 1927, then subject to Japanese occupation. Decimated in the towns, the Communist Party lost the essence of its initial implantation. After the Japanese defeat in 1945, the working class waged some big defensive strikes in reaction to hyper-inflation, but it no longer had its own specific organisations and political traditions.

After 1949: an envied status, but....

In essence it was a new working class which was formed in the People's Republic of China. From 3 to 8 million before 1949, thirty years later it was close to 100 million. The statutory employees of state firms constituted its big industrial battalions, the others working in collective enterprises in the town or countryside.

Recruited in the context of a massive policy of job creation ("low wages, many jobs"), the urban workers of the new state sector alone benefited from the high status of "worker and employee" with its social advantages: housing, tickets giving access to cereals, financing of education for children, health services, special stores, guarantees of lifetime employment, retirement pensions and so on. Each worker was allocated to an enterprise and a work unit as, in France, civil servants are assigned to a post. A worker reaching retirement age could frequently transmit their status to a family member.

Work rhythms were not intensive; in this area, compromises between directorate and workers were the rule. However, the political surveillance exerted by the party was nonetheless close, encroaching on personal life, the danger being avoiding using words deemed "counter-revolutionary". Urban workers were protected from the pressure that a rural exodus would have had on their employment, since peasants did not have the right to move to the towns. For some researchers, the condition of personnel employed in state firms could be characterised as "semi middle class". In any event, the situation of this working class, in the Maoist era, was very far from the super-exploitation characteristic of a period of primitive accumulation of capital!

Benefitting from significant privileges in relation to the rest of the population (not counting the cadres of the party-state), the working class for a long time supplied a solid social base for the Maoist regime, being sometimes mobilized against oppositionist intellectuals and students. It had a high social self-consciousness, but no political autonomy: it re-

mained subordinate to the CCP in the absence of independent trade unions or political pluralism.

The working class of the state sector was the last to be impacted by the crisis of the Maoist regime, but it did not escape the tumult of the "Cultural Revolution" (1966-1968). During this major crisis deep democratic and social demands were expressed, but few radical movements were able to establish independence in relation to the power struggles inside the party-state. In the absence of perspectives, the social uprising fell into factional hyper-violence. With the support of the army, chaos gave way to a particularly intolerant bureaucratic dictatorship.

The renaissance of Chinese capitalism condemned the working class formed under the Maoist regime to disappearance. Ideologically, the enrichment (of some) and no longer labour was valued. A number of state enterprises were prepared for privatisation, the rhythms of production were accelerated, protections dismantled.

The working class in the state sector opposed a massive resistance (punctuated by violent explosions) to this programme of reforms. Many enterprise directors preferred to negotiate a compromise rather than confront their employees. The Chinese proletariat was incapable of offering a political alternative to the regime, but the regime was incapable of imposing its policy on wage earners. It thus decided to withdraw this restive working class from production en bloc, though early retirement, permanent halting of work or unemployment.

To camouflage the explosion of unemployment, the regime invented new terms supposed to express a "Chinese characteristic": "not in post", "awaiting a post" and so on. Some 40 million workers were thus withdrawn from production.

In 1995, employees of state enterprises were 112 million – with an additional 35.5 million in the co-operative sector. In 2003, it had fallen respectively to 69 and 9.5 million. The first to be affected, women represented 70% of those laid off.

China's undocumented workers

In a country like France, civil servants are also replaced by employees with a "private" status – but more progressively and the so-called private sector already exists. In China, a layer of qualified workers, technicians and engineers originating from the state sector has been maintained in activity; for the bulk of employees, it has however been necessary to create a new working class for which the peasantry, once again, provided the battalions. This work force was available thanks to the unleashing of the rural exodus: some 250 million peasants (half of them women) moving illegally from the countryside in search of employment.

The peasants could not move at will in their own country; they needed a permit to move from their village of origin [8]. This has proved highly effective in the context of capitalist transition. Illegal, rural migrants were in the situation of "internal undocumented workers". The regime has thus been able to abuse a workforce available at its beck and call.

A heritage of the Maoist period, this peasant workforce was much better educated than in many Third World countries and had benefited from a better access to health. These uprooted rurals had moreover no collective tradition of struggle, they were ignorant of all social rights and planned to return one day to the village. Good news for wildcat capitalism and the free trade zones and export industry which today employ more than 20 million workers – 70% of them women. Here is a working class corresponding to a period of primitive accumulation of Chinese capital – as well as the demands of the transnationals.

In the state enterprises in association with European and US capital, or in the factories of certain Western firms, the situation of workers is generally better, but they only represent a very narrow segment of the Chinese labour market. The Western "order givers" also often go through Asian intermediaries without monitoring the conditions

of exploitation imposed by their subcontractors and suppliers.

Overall – and in particular in the Taiwanese or South Korean factories, working conditions are characterised by very long daily hours, exhausting rhythms, non-respect for rest times and days off, close surveillance (timing of toilet use and so on), very low wages, repressive discipline, non-existent safety standards (in relation to fire for example), frequent accidents, damage to health (toxic products) and so on. Or a situation typical to periods of intensive and primitive accumulation of capital; all with the active complicity of the local authorities.

The second generation of migrants is now arriving on the labour market. Unlike their parents, they do not expect to return to the village and are familiar with the social environment in which they were born. They are more able to defend their rights, but they have no organisation to help them and too often suicide continues to be a response to intolerable working conditions.

The upending of the social order

The dominant ideology does not necessarily express the reality of a regime. The invocation of democracy, for example, very often seeks to hide its absence. Great ideological or legal upheavals nevertheless reflect great social changes.

During the Maoist epoch, the working class was constitutionally elevated to the rank of "ruling class" and the peasantry the "semi-ruling" class. They are today symbolically marginalised and it is private ownership (in the capitalist sense, including of the means of production) that the Constitution must protect. Private wealth, including very large fortunes, and private enterprise are henceforth considered eminently legitimate and honourable. It is a radical legal and ideological reversal in relation to the Maoist regime.

The conditions of WTO entry in 2001 give capital (and foreign capital in particular) considerable rights. When the modification of laws is delayed in relation to the capitalist appetites of the bureaucra-

cy, the regulations are ignored (in principle, for example, administrative departments do not have the right to create their own enterprises – which they nonetheless do).

In the cities, the workers under Maoism were paid according to a wage scale fixed at the level of the government ministries. Peasants often received work points in the context of the popular communes. Today, paid labour is again a commodity.

Because of the privatisation of urban and suburban land, property speculation, and the regrouping of the new wealthy into separate and protected neighbourhoods where they ostentatiously enjoy "nouveaux riches" lifestyles, town planning is remodelled according to profoundly inegalitarian standards.

The peasantry were initially favourable to the reforms introduced by Deng Xiaoping partially decollectivising agriculture. Families won the right to use a plot of land, in return for which they had to pay a tax and sell a part of the harvest to the state at prices lower than the market rates. But with time, the tax became increasingly heavy so as to finance the bureaucracy. Zones are arbitrarily declared ripe for urban development so as to facilitate speculative operations. Large scale construction works and pollution have increasingly serious consequences. Gangs impose the law of local potentates.

New differentiations appear inside the peasantry. A minority profits from the proximity of the urban markets. But pauperisation and precarity threaten a significant part of the rural population. Unemployment becomes structural and a vast "floating population" now lives in the margins of society.

The government supports a legal change in the status of agricultural land authorizing its privatisation – a modification of the law which would facilitate capitalist land grabbing.

Access to education became very inegalitarian with – from the end of the 1970s to the 1990s – the rein-

roduction of university entrance examinations, then the very selective possibility of studying abroad and the creation of a "trade in degrees" in higher education, not to mention increased registration fees.

In the Maoist era, intellectuals were officially allocated a very low ranking (ninth) in the social hierarchy. They supported Deng Xiaoping's reforms and the promotion of science against the primacy of politics; however, as a whole they were not the beneficiaries of them on any lasting basis. A small minority joined the new *élite* bourgeoisie, providing its ideologues. "Experts" (engineers, lawyers, economists, journalists, researchers at the service of pro-capitalist think tanks and so on) acceded to significant posts of responsibility.

For Mao, society could only evolve under the pressure of its internal contradictions and through class struggle. While social contradictions explode, China, if one believes the current leadership of the CCP, lives in "harmony": the ideological reversal is once again radical.

For a long time, the regime has tried to camouflage the scale of the ruptures by resorting to a succession of formulas reflecting the deepening of the reforms: this began with the "economy directed by planning with the support of the market", then the "planned commodity economy" and later still the "market socialist economic system": the decline of the public sector is apparent! In the early 1960s, debates inside the CCP leadership had opposed "radicals" to "moderates" in terms of economic orientation. Clearly, however, the stakes have changed between past and present. It is no longer about rendering the system "flexible" by liberalising the economy a little or seeking better equilibriums between town and country, or industry and agriculture – society has genuinely changed bases.

The role of the state is obviously not neutral in great transformations of the social order. After the conquest of power in 1949, it decisively served to break the power of the old dominant classes and to constitute a new working class in the state sector.

From the 1980s and 1990s onward, it served equally decisively to ensure the reconstitution of new bourgeois *élites*, withdrawing from production the working class inherited from Maoism and forming another by drawing massively on undocumented rural migrants.

The current Chinese state is indubitably bourgeois, and is no longer then the same state as that of the Maoist era; it is difficult to "date" the bourgeois counter-revolution in the same way that one can date the victory of the Maoist revolution. What does such a dissymmetry imply?

An undateable counter-revolution?

Any social revolution is a process: there is a before and after to the "conquest" of power. Socio-economic transformations are never instantaneous. We can however date the (temporary) victory of the great revolutions of the 20th century: October 1917 in Russia and October 1949 in China, 1945 in Yugoslavia, 1959 in Cuba, 1954 and 1975 in Vietnam. These dates are not only symbolic – the proclamation of new regimes – they mark a substantial rupture: a state apparatus disintegrates at the national scale, another emerges; one army replaces another; the party (ies) incarnating the old order are defeated to the profit of a party emerging from the revolutionary struggle; an alternative political power takes form.

Everything can be complicated in the detail. According to the forms taken previously by the revolutionary combat (existence or not of significant liberated zones), social transformations can be begun or merely envisaged. The old order can still control a more or less significant part of social relations and bequeath an administration inherited from the past. The new order remains to be consolidated. But the "moment" of the "conquest of power" nonetheless remains a decisive turning point in relation to this.

It is much less obvious in relation to the counter-revolution which defeats what has been socially accomplished by the revolution, as shown in the

Chinese case. One can certainly detect points of change in the process of capitalist restoration: it becomes conceivable at the end of the 1970s, starts during the 1980s, is openly affirmed in the 1990s, giving birth to a new power called "emergent". But the whole seems the product of a gradual evolution in the context of the same state, under the leadership of the same party, framed by the same army. There are some major points of change, as with the new policy of reforms adopted in 1992, but there was no October 1949 of the bourgeois counter-revolution: a conquest of power – in 1992 indeed, power was already conquered.

For some, the fact that one cannot "date" the victory of the bourgeois counter-revolution shows simply that there was no social revolution and that October 1949 was only a myth. For others it proves that the so called counter-revolution has not yet taken place. For the first, the CCP was already bourgeois at the time of its conquest of power; for the second, it remains guarantor of a non-capitalist road, of a market socialism "with Chinese characteristics". A problem: there was certainly on two occasions a radical transformation of the class structure in China, in 1949 first, then following the "reforms" initiated by Deng Xiaoping.

The difficulty in "dating" the conquest of power by the Chinese bourgeoisie is nonetheless significant. It indicates that the process of counter-revolution is not the reverse image, as in a mirror, of the revolutionary process. It takes different paths, notably in a transitional society, and should be understood in its specificity – it is one of the basic questions that the history of contemporary China poses for us.

Transitional society

First element of response: the specificities of a transitional society where no mode of production imposes its law. Capitalism can no longer do it, but neither can socialism: it remains to be built and it is not won in advance!

When capitalism realises the conditions of its reproduction, the "agreements" [9] dominate. The

dominant class, "hegemonic" social relations, the dominant ideology are bourgeois [10]. In a transitional society, the "disagreements" ["discordance" in French] dominate. The change of political power takes place well before a socialist economy is created. The state can serve to develop new relations of production, but these relations are not yet "hegemonic" and a mode de production does not dominate the state by the intermediary of a class endowed with social power. That is why the characterization of a state in a transitional society poses so many problems [11]

Even under a functioning socialist democracy (which was not the case in Maoist China), the proletariat would not be a consolidated dominant class in the same way the bourgeoisie is under capitalism. The relations between employees and peasantry are unstable whereas without this latter, the revolution would not have majority support. The "construction of socialism" is in no way automatic, in particular when the international environment is hostile. The "relative autonomy" of the state takes on a qualitatively more significant dimension than in a society where the domination of a mode of production is well established.

Bureaucracy and state

It is easy to understand, in these conditions, the incestuous relationship between state and bureaucracy. A sum of bureaucrats does not make a bureaucracy in the sense understood here, the outcome of a process underway from which it crystallizes and becomes conscious of its being, its collective interests.

The party-state is the context inside of which this social layer constitutes itself, by which it imposes its domination over society, with which it identifies itself, which it makes its own: "l'État, c'est nous". Losing in the course of this process its popular roots, the party-state changes without for all that becoming bourgeois. But because it is already the state of the bureaucratic counter-revolution, it can become the instrument of the bourgeois counter-revolution.

Bourgeoisification at the summit

Capitalist transition does not, in the case studied here, require the overthrow of a dominant layer and its replacement by another. The proletariat and popular layers are excluded from a power which is monopolised by the bureaucracy. The new bourgeoisie is born from a transformation of the latter into a possessing class, in a world context eminently favorable to such a development.

The components of the Chinese bourgeoisie external to the state were not in a position to bid for power for themselves, to confront the bureaucracy on the road to bourgeoisification. The game is essentially decided at the summit. So far as China is concerned, this process had been nonetheless punctuated by crises (including the major one of 1989): this has not been a tranquil affair. But in principle, capitalist development has taken place in a still more insidious fashion: we can note one day that capitalism now dominates society without being able to "date" the qualitative point of change.

Once more on the theory of permanent revolution

The emergence of the Chinese capitalist power would imply according to some that the theory of "permanent revolution" (as well as similar conceptions of "uninterrupted revolution") was unfounded – or at least has now been shown to be invalid.

The theme of "revolution in permanence" [12] goes back to the 19th century and is found among various Marxist authors, starting with Marx himself. It concerns the dynamic initiated by a revolutionary uprising in a country where capitalism has not yet consolidated its law: once in struggle, the popular layers tend to defend their own class objectives and to go beyond the limits assigned to the revolution by the initial bourgeois leaderships. Thus, the dynamic of social struggles could put on the agenda a socialist perspective even before the "capitalist stage" has been completed, or indeed seriously started.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Leon Trotsky in particular developed this approach, concluding that in the imperialist epoch the national bourgeoisies of the dominated countries had shown themselves incapable of fully realising the democratic tasks historically identified with the bourgeois revolutions of the previous century – a task which thus henceforth fell to the proletariat allied with the peasantry. These bourgeoisies could notably no longer free society from the grip of the great capitalist powers and resolve positively the national question.

In the 19th as in the 20th century the possibility of a "socialist growing over", of a "democratic revolution" with a popular base, remained conditional. To consolidate itself, a revolutionary power should benefit from an international extension of the revolution, notably in the developed capitalist countries.

In essence, this analysis was historically confirmed. After Japan in the 19th century and before the early 21st century, no bourgeoisie of a dominated country has been able to free itself from imperialist domination. None of the great social revolutions of the 20th century, which broke this link of subordination, was led by the bourgeoisie ensuring the development of an independent capitalism.

It is particularly notable that no national bourgeoisie (in Latin America for example) profited from the world wars of the 20th century to make its international take off, whereas the belligerent powers could no longer exert their control with the same force. It was the revolutionary movements which poured through the breach: the Russian revolution in 1917, the Yugoslav, Chinese or Vietnamese revolutions in 1945.

Elsewhere there was certainly the international extension of the revolution, but not in the imperialist countries, which finally contributed to the exhaustion of the popular dynamic in the new transitional societies and to the bureaucratisation of their states.

A theory which was valid form more than a century was not erroneous! Is it however obsolete? Yes, but above all no. No because it remains indispensable for understanding how the world has changed in the past and changes in the present. If Japan was able to achieve its bourgeois revolution, it is because it had not yet passed under imperialist domination and the class structure of the country could incubate a capitalist development. If China can do the same today, it is, as we have seen, for similar reasons. The theory of permanent revolution (and more generally of "combined and unequal development"), helps us analyse why what was possible before yesterday (Japan) was no longer possible yesterday and becomes possible again today. A theory which allows assimilation of the new, of thinking through the transcendence of its previous conclusions, is not invalid!

Yes, the theory of permanent revolution as formulated a century ago is outdated, but in the sense that it should be rethought in the current world context as the theme of "revolution in permanence" of the 19th century had to be rethought according to the rise in power of the traditional imperialisms and the completion of the world market, as well as the upheavals induced in the social formations of the dominated countries.

And no, the theory of permanent revolution has not remained ossified for a century. The social formations of the dominated countries have always undergone differentiated development and for several decades there has been a discussion on this subject, for example on the notion of "semi-industrialised" countries or "sub-imperialisms". The revolutions of the 20th century in the Third World considerably enriched our understanding of the social convergences which underlie a "permanent" or "uninterrupted" revolutionary process (see the peasant or indigenous question, or again the second wave of feminism). The experience of the bureaucratisation of these revolutions has given a new "density" to the key elements of socialist programme which are self-emancipation and a democracy conceived from the viewpoint of the people.

The updating continues (centring attention on the ecological issues, for example), but it is certainly necessary to work more systematically on all the consequences of the new mode of domination imposed through capitalist globalisation: sterilisation of bourgeois democracy, accelerated commodification of all spheres of social life and of living itself, reorganisation of work and new technologies, increased precariousness of entire layers of society even in the "North", activation of multiple identity based conflicts with non-progressive dynamics, renewal of "inter-power" competition, global ecological crisis, incidence of extreme climatic phenomena and global warming and so on. What are then today the "appropriate" forms of internationalism?

Finally, the strategic conclusions of the theory of permanent revolution are not obsolete. There is no return backwards to the "glorious" times of the bourgeois revolutions of old. The time when, faced with the old order, they showed a democratic potential is long gone. In truth, bourgeois democracy is emptied of any content including in the Western countries where it was born: inside the European Union for example, treaties have withdrawn from elected assemblies the right to decide the socio-economic orientation of the country – no more choice, no more democracy! The advances of capitalism are at a very high price and plunge us into a catastrophic ecological crisis which can only be limited by breaking the commodity dictatorship. To speak of "bourgeois democratic revolution" has become much more than yesterday a contradiction in terms.

Only revolutions both anti-capitalist in their content and anti-bureaucratic in their dynamic can restore meaning to the word "democracy". The question is important, because at the international level, left currents of Maoist origin (but not only them) judge as positive the emergence of the Chinese power, even when they recognise that it has become capitalist – if only because it contributes to "balancing" the world relationship of forces. We will consider Beijing's geopolitical role, in particular in East Asia, in a future article. We

will simply say to conclude that this role contributes to making the peoples of the region	hostages to powerful conflicts.
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DENMARK

A good anticapitalist policy agenda

SAP (DENMARK) ·

The policy agenda the Red-Green Alliance adopted at its annual national meeting contains a Marxist critique of capitalist society and clarifies the eco-socialist goals of the party. It does not have a clear grasp of the strategy for the actual transition to socialism – neither reformist or revolutionary – but on the other hand it clearly maps out guidelines for a line of class struggle right now that does not limit itself to the framework of the capitalist system.

Perhaps, the most important difference of opinion was whether or not the Red-Green Alliance should "be a rallying point" for all who are opposed to the attacks of neo-liberalism or simply operate as a "driving force" and "prime influence" in popular movements based on this kind of broad-based platform. In other words – by and large: whether or not the Red-Green Alliance is to move away from being an anticapitalist party with a clear profile of political dissension and towards being a broader anti-neoliberal party, which limits its socialist politics to ease the task of attracting discontented social-democrats and members of the Socialist Peoples Party to become members of the Red-Green Alliance.

This vision was expressed in an alternative policy agenda of its own and in a proposed amendment to the original national executive that was backed by Johanne Schmidt-Nielsen, Pelle Dragsted, Mikkel Warming and several other people. But it was turned down by a considerable majority in both instances, and the Red-Green Alliance fortunately continued to be a party for socialists who consider a fundamental change of society their guideline and goal.

Removing capitalism

A group of proposed amendments aimed at introducing wordings such as "removing private ownership of the means of production" – but none of those wordings were balanced enough to save small businesses from instant nationalization so they were obviously turned down. However, we may still find comfort in the fact that fundamental "changes in the ownership to the means of production" is still demanded and that "capitalist exploitation must be removed", that "collective ownership [will] be dominating", that "sectors fundamental to society [must] be owned and controlled by the community" and so on!

Similarly it has been underlined that in a socialist democracy "regions, workplaces and public institutions [will be] controlled and organised far more directly by the people". And due to a group of proposed amendments from the environmentalist committee we dissociated ourselves with the blind growth of the capitalist system - also when goes by the name "green" capitalism!

The state, the system and the class struggle

The topic that created most debate up to and at the annual national meeting was the public sector and two different proposals for this paragraph. A majority of the national committee had chosen Mikkel Warming's and Stine Brix's version, which, with expressions such as "sowing the seeds of socialism" in the public sector could be interpreted as a vision of socialism gradually growing out of an ever larger state sector (see also <http://sap-fi.dk/side.php?id=1246>)

A vast majority (approximately 2/3) at the annual national meeting, however, decided to insert a proposed amendment from Per Clausen, Pia Boisen and Micahel Voss. It is obviously difficult to say if this can be taken as a mark of a strategic position

on the subject of the bourgeois state or simply a rejection of an embarrassing option, which is looking at parts of the capitalist reality through rose-tinted spectacles. However, both reactions would be good signs for the Red-Green Alliance.

Strategically it was also a success that the excellent formulations about being prepared to break with capitalist limitations in the daily struggle – in the paragraph "the daily struggles are part of our struggle for socialism" – were allowed to stay in the text in their full meaning (even though this was due to a tied vote).

When it came to parliamentary tactics – and the risk of becoming part of messy trade-offs rather than a consistent line – we witnessed a clear defeat of the groups in our party that might have been prone to let themselves be seduced by trade-offs in order to reach "results" in parliament: the principle of always voting against – even minor – backlashes became part of the programme.

Some feminist proposals were turned down, but others had already been incorporated, so it was not disastrous. The fact that sentences about self-organization by women (and other oppressed groups) did not make it, does however reflect that the place of women's issues is still too small in the Red-Green Alliance.

Finally, there is good reason to be pleased with the long row of proposals that were also carried: about resistance to the EU and NATO, abolition of the military as we know it, abolition of the monarchy, etc.

Less revolution, better rooted among the members

A proposal from Michael Voss, which among other things hinted at the strategy for a revolutionary situation, was solidly turned down. And even though we obviously cannot extract any conclusions from the fact that the word revolution now is on the page once as opposed to the former 20 occurrences, there is no doubt when it comes to the transition to socialism, the question of revolutionary strategy, several babies (that we hold dear) have been

thrown out with the bath water, when we compare it with the former policy agenda.

In this policy agenda the Red-Green Alliance has chosen not to pin down a precise revolutionary strategy for the transition to socialism. Only a proposed amendment about the constitution called this into question.

To propose that a new socialist society must have a new constitution that safeguards "a democratic takeover of sectors and natural resources fundamental to our society" is important and an improvement on the original draft.

Does the lack of a strategy for the transition to socialism then reflect that the "Red-Green Alliance has moved to the right?" that we used to be a revolutionary socialist party and now have a broader anticapitalist party?

No it doesn't. Any sober evaluation must conclude that a clear perception of a mass movement and extra-parliamentary struggles, the need for workers councils and dual power in connection with a revolutionary break is not and probably never has been part of the Red-Green Alliance's collective mindset. The new programme is – despite a debate flawed by mistakes verging on nothing less than democratic disasters – far better rooted in the membership base.

After the annual national meeting we have a relatively clear, Marxist and anticapitalist programme, which we believe that the members and the leadership of the party will actually use and defend – in the party as well as publicly when it comes to training and debates. It means that the Red-Green Alliance has taken a step forward – towards something good that we did not have before.

In SAP we believe that we have some historically and theoretically well-founded ideas about revolutionary strategy that cannot be found in the new policy agenda of the Red-Green Alliance. It is now – even more – important that we take responsibility for a further development of those ideas. And we will obviously share them with other members of

the Red-Green Alliance in our discussions about our continued common cause to change society. At some stage in time the Red-Green Alliance will have to develop its strategy regarding this – and

hopefully that will happen before we stand unprepared in the situation...

SAP national executive committee, 23 May 2014

Support the Struggles of Brazilian Workers

RADICAL SOCIALIST ·

As the "World Cup fever" grips the world, or more accurately, as it is rammed down us through the media, Brazil has erupted in struggles. For a year, popular mobilizations of immense dimensions have been shaking the country.

At its peak, a million people or more have been out protesting. This is not some abstract protest. When in 2007 the Brazilian government of Luis Inacio da Silva (Lula), of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers Party) put forward its bid for the 2014 World Cup and was given it by FIFA, Brazil, like India, was seeing itself as part of a new acronym, BRICS, and imagining that the crisis of capitalism was finished and the country, notably its elite, were on the way to international stardom and the world cup would be the icing on the cake. \$11 billion has been spent for the world cup by now. This at a time when the masses of working people are angry at the lack of development of educational and health facilities. As a result, the most visible governmental role over the World Cup has been to augment security repeatedly. 57000 troops, over 1,00,000 law enforcement personnel, even 34 anti-aircraft guns have been reportedly pressed into service.

Meanwhile, every opinion poll shows this growing cost of the World Cup has been viewed as detrimental by ordinary people. Workers, students, have come out, demanding a reorientation of government priorities. Students and teachers have struck, demanding more funding for education. But most

worrying for the government in recent times has been the transport workers' struggles. From 5 June, Metro workers in Sao Paulo have been on strike. In order to achieve its goal of getting political prestige out of the World Cup, the government has taken strong action. The transport workers carry 4,000,000 passengers every day in the city. On 8 June, the courts declared the strike illegal. They demanded that workers must immediately return to work, and declared a fine of US \$ 222,000 per day on their union for defying this order.

While Brazil has a Social Democratic regime, whereas in India a party rooted in fascist politics has gained parliamentary majority, what is common to both countries is the determination of the ruling class to use neo-liberalism for its own expansion at the cost of the toiling people. Radical Socialist expresses solidarity with all the fighting militants, especially with the workers of Sao Paulo out on strike and the militants attacked and beaten up by police on the eve of the World Cup. We call on working class, socialist and democratic organisations in India to protest, to express solidarity with the toiling people of Brazil.

Long live working class struggles for emancipation

Full support for the Sao Paulo Metro Workers

Long live proletarian internationalism

12 June 2014

Radical Socialist

ON THE LEFT:

America's Left Forum – Reform or Revolution:

DAN LA BOTZ ·

America's radical gathering on the left began in 1981 as the Socialist Scholars Conference, changing its name in 2004 to the Left Forum. It brings together every year more than 3,000 people from around the country—and some from around the world—to participate in several plenary sessions and hundreds of workshops on every subject of interest to the left, from discussions of the environment to LGBT rights, from labor union strategies to the way forward for the women's movement, from debates about the future direction for the Palestine solidarity movement to discussions of the economic crisis in Europe. Featured this year in the plenaries and among the panels was the national shame of mass incarceration. In addition to a plenary dealing with the theme, there was a criminal justice track at the conference with 12 workshops.

Left Forum's featured speakers this year were Marxist economist David Harvey, singer and civil rights activist Harry Belafonte, and former Black Panther and Communist Party presidential candidate (1980 and 1984), professor Angela Davis. Davis has for many years campaigned against America's horrendous prison system and this year took that campaign this year to the Left Forum which was held at the John Jay School of Criminal Justice in New York City. Davis and others called for a radical rethinking of our society's criminal justice system, for ceasing mass incarceration, and for an end to the death penalty.

The movements against mass incarceration and against the death penalty have been growing and have an impact. In part this has been driven by the

blatant racism of the system. Of the 2.3 million in prison, 1 million are black. One of every six black men in the United States has been incarcerated. While African Americans make up just 13% of the U.S. population, they comprise 40% of the prison population; similarly 16% of the U.S. population is Latino, but they make up 21% of the prison population. At the same time, in 2009, African Americans made up about 41% of those on death row, Hispanics 11 percent, others 2 percent; that is 54% of those awaiting the death penalty were people of color. Some 32 of country's 50 states have the death penalty, and there are at any one time about 3,000 prisoners on death row, and as many as 30 prisoners are executed each year.

Professor Michele Alexander, an African American scholar, took up these issues in her highly acclaimed and influential book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness* published in 2010. In it she argued that the war on drugs and current law enforcement policies had had an impact similar to the racist Jim Crow system of the 19th century. That same year, Piper Kerman, a white woman who served 13 months in prison for her role in a drug deal, wrote *Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison*, which subsequently became a hit Netflix show. She has been a prominent speaker against incarceration, pointing out that women have been the fastest growing segment of the prison population, leaving behind devastated families.

Another source of opposition to the "injustice system," as many call it, has been The Innocence Project, founded by Barry Scheck and Peter Neufeld in New York. It works to committed to exonerate wrongly convicted people through the use of DNA testing and succeeded in winning freedom for 316 wrongly convicted people, including 18 who

had been on death row. The Innocence Project's work suggests that eye-witness evidence is often wrong, that police and prosecuting attorneys often treat the accused unfairly, and that plea bargaining leads the innocent to accept some prison time, fearing they will do worse if they plead innocent.

All of this has been accompanied by active movements in many states against both mass incarceration and against the death penalty. This work frequently brings together religious activists, Roman Catholics in particular, with secular humanitarians, and leftists. The National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty is the largest coalition against capital punishment, anchored by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Groups such as the International Socialist Organization (ISO) have for years also worked in coalitions against the death penalty. U.S. support for the death penalty—60 percent still support capital punishment for murder—is at its lowest level in more than 40 years.

Habitual offender laws, such as California's "3 strikes" law (after the baseball phrase "three strikes and you're out") first passed in 1993, have been adopted by 23 states. These laws require judges and juries to send convicted individuals to prison for long terms, sometimes for minor offenses. Many

and perhaps most of those convicted had been involved selling or buying drugs. Given the obviously failure of the American criminal justice system to actually reduce crime as well as pressures from the reform movements, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder has in the last year called for a reduction in these sorts of harsh sentences that raised the American prison population from 500,000 in 1980 to 2.3 million today.

For many years discussions of criminal justice in the United States revolved around punishing the individual who committed a crime and only secondarily around attempts at rehabilitation. Progressives have raised the alternative of "restorative justice," that is, the notion that justice should come about through the action of all of those involved in a crime—perpetrator, victim, and society—in attempt not to punish but to heal. Those on the left, such as the scholars and activists at Left Forum, call for a society that ends racism, sexism, and homophobia, provides all citizens with not only their basic social needs—employment at a living wage, health care, education, housing, and transportation—but also opportunities for self-fulfillment.

18 June 2014

WAR IN IRAQ:

Reap the Whirlwind

DAVID FINKEL ·

Of course, the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 with Britain's support "caused this" – by creating the al-Qaeda outfit now called ISIS, by setting in motion intercommunal warfare that wiped out most mixed Sunni-Shia neighborhoods, by ultimately replacing the horrific Saddam Hussein dictatorship with the sectarian, corrupt and bumbling regime of Nouri al-Maliki.

What next ? Despite frantic media headlines, ISIS will not capture Baghdad or Shia strongholds, and Kurdish forces will halt its expansion in the north. How long ISIS rules the Sunni heartlands depends mainly on how long the population tolerates its terrorist cruelty. Its savage massacres of captured sol-

diers, as well as Shia civilians, are clearly intended to provoke reprisal killings and force a Sunni-Shia civil war that the vast majority of Iraqis don't want.

Whether Iraq survives as a country is harder to predict, and in any case effectively out of U.S. hands now. If there's one thing that can make the crisis even worse, and increase the chances of Iraq's disintegration, it's a new U.S. military intervention. Bombing Iraq would show that Washington has learned nothing from its war that "caused this." We've already reaped the whirlwind – don't let it happen again.

June 18, 2014

Against the Current

WAR IN IRAQ:

On Recent Events in Mosul and Other Cities

FALAH ALWAN ·

The media, especially that which is allied with the Iraqi government and western states, has been focusing on the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Syria (ISIS) and its control over several Iraqi cities, provoking its audiences against the militant group. Indeed, ISIS terrorist groupings do exist among armed groups there and its influence in the recent events is clear. However, it is also true that Iraqis generally reject ISIS, whether in the central or southern regions of Iraq or in parts of the country that are no longer under government control: the so-called "Sunni" areas or the "Sunni Triangle," a term that intelligence services, particularly the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), devised as part of a plan to engineer sectarianism in Iraq. At the same time, Iraqis generally reject Maliki's regime and its policies, built as they are on an ethno-sectarian basis. This is especially the case in urban areas where sectarian discrimination is most concentrated, wherein the government treats ordinary people as political enemies.

The fall of several Iraqi cities in the hands of armed groups does not represent the dreams of the people who live there. Their demands to be rid of sectarianism are clear and direct. They expressed them through nonviolent sit-ins, but armed terrorist groups took advantage of this environment to take power. The people's demands against discrimination and sectarianism are just and fair, whereas Maliki's policies are reactionary and discriminatory, and are therefore rejected. In the meantime, ISIS' control of cities and people poses a serious threat to everyday life and to society.

Popular demands have morphed into a tool for reactionary forces to divide up the political pie, from the terrorists of al-Qa'ida, the Baath Party, and tribal leaders to the Shi'a religious leadership that has called for open warfare and the Kurdish nationalist forces that have achieved military and political gains. This all comes at a moment when Iraq has clearly become divided according to the wills of dominant political forces, whereas the will of the Iraqi people remains ignored.

Regional forces that benefit from Iraq's disintegration—especially Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey—operate in their own way to achieve political gains. All the while the US government—the prime cause of these problems to begin with—prepares to intervene however it chooses. President Obama has so far expressed his concern over Iraqi oil twice when talking about recent events. He has not shown any regard or concern for the fate of two million people now under the control of ISIS, or for the women who have started committing suicide in Mosul as a result of ISIS gangs. The working class in Iraq is the common force that exists across the country, from the north of Kurdistan to the furthest points south. It is this force whose very existence and survival depends on the eradication of discrimination and the unification of the Iraqi people. This is the only force that can end fragmentation and division.

We reject US intervention and protest President Obama's inappropriate speech in which he expressed concern over oil and not over people. We also stand firmly against the brazen meddling of Iran.

We stand against the intervention of Gulf regimes and their funding of armed groups, especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

We reject Nouri al-Maliki's sectarian and reactionary policies.

We also reject armed terrorist gangs and militias' control of Mosul and other cities. We agree with and support the demands of people in these cities against discrimination and sectarianism.

Finally, we reject the interference of the religious institution and its call for indiscriminate warfare.

We aim to stand with those who represent the interests of the people and to empower them in the face of this dangerous and reactionary attack. We call for a clear international position to curb the deteriorating situation as well as regional interference, and to support the people of Iraq.

13 June 2014

<http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/18143/on-recent-events-in-mosul-and-other-cities-in-iraq>

WAR IN IRAQ:

A Voice From Inside Mosul

What is the situation now in the city of Mosul?

QC: In terms of the security situation, there is no fighting or bombing. The roads are open, but there is a shortage of basic goods and services. For example there is no electricity or Internet, and water, as well as gas cylinders and fuel are in short supply. Food prices are high, too. While the hospitals are still functioning, other government institutions have shut down.

Is it possible for non-governmental organizations [NGOs] and human rights defenders [HRDs] to work in Mosul?

QC: No, it is not possible for NGOs and HRDs to work freely. Insurgents, especially extremists, do not accept civil society, and if I said I wanted to work in Mosul they would punish me. They call it "Had"; it is punishment according to Sharia law. Organizations must operate secretly in order to send reports about the situation. I also prefer to keep my name unknown for this interview. Civil society in our cities must work in alignment with the government, otherwise you will be accused of supporting the militants. But at the same time, the insurgents also reject any independent role for civil society.

What about the displaced — are there people displaced from Mosul? How large are the numbers?

QC: There are many families — as many as one hundred thousand — who fled to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq [KRG]. We are talking about perhaps five hundred thousand people, the majority of whom are children and the elderly. The KRG authorities did not allow most of them to enter because they require that those who enter have a guarantor from the Kurdish region. Many of these now internally displaced persons [IDPs] are being

kept in very basic camps. The crisis of the IDPs is immense and urgently requires the assistance of humanitarian organizations. The crisis is growing worse, especially after the battles in the city of Tal Afar, which created thousands of newly displaced civilians.

Who controls Mosul? Are there now sanctions or reprisals against civilians?

QC: The situation in Mosul has been very bad since militants seized control of the entire city. The city's immediate future is not clear. People do not know whether there will be a military strike, or if we will remain under the rule of the gunmen who seized power (who are not themselves ruled by law), or if they will form a government in these areas. Until now there have been no acts of revenge or collective punishment of civilians. We heard that a new governor has been appointed, a former army officer named Hashim Aljmas.

Who are the gunmen who entered Mosul?

QC: There was a mixture of armed groups who entered Mosul: some Islamic extremists (from ISIS) and other rebels (or nationalists) some of whom are former members of the army and some Ba'athists. In Mosul there are now different groups that are in control of each neighborhood. Generally, these groups do not discuss their future plans for the city, and they do not allow the media to operate in the city.

What do the people of Mosul feel about what has happened? Why do they think that the city fell?

QC: The main reason for the fall of the city of Mosul — the second largest city in Iraq — is that the Maliki government did not respond to the demands of the citizen protestors who demonstrated in Mosul, Anbar, Salahuddin, Diyala and Hawija over

a year ago and so the citizens did not support the Iraqi army.

The policy of the Iraqi government headed by Nouri al-Maliki has been totally sectarian in the way it has operated in the Iraqi provinces. The government has almost totally excluded representatives of the Sunni population from the sovereign ministries, or left them with no real authority. Even the new Iraqi army was formed on this basis.

How is the Iraqi army viewed by the sons of the city of Mosul?

QC: The Iraqi army unfortunately does not support a doctrine of loyalty to the homeland (or an Iraq that is inclusive of all people); instead it is loyal to the Madhhab or Shia doctrine. It deals with citizens according to their religious sect. The armed forces have attacked people in the cities of Mosul, Anbar, Salahuddin, Diyala and Hawija. They have carried out arrests, torture and extortion. There have also been many cases of rape by members of the army, both outside and inside prisons.

But Mosul contributed to the recent elections, wasn't that a sign of hope for change through peaceful means?

QC: The last election was frustrating. Most of the political blocs accused the Prime Minister of rigging the election for the purpose of securing a large number of seats (93) in the Iraqi parliament. This has raised a fear among many politicians and citizens that Nouri al-Maliki would return for a third term as prime minister of Iraq, which would essentially amount to the creation of a new dictatorship. Everyone is aware how he has attempted during his two terms in power to increase his control over all aspects of political life, especially the "independent" commissions including the Electoral Commission and the Human Rights Commission. He accused his opponents in Parliament of crimes and had many arrested and imprisoned. Now the state security institutions are largely dominated by one sect (Shia) and are constantly fed sectarian ideology.

I think the insurgents planned this current invasion of the provinces to coincide with the announcement of final election results, which was an excellent time for them to suggest to the citizens that their revolution would rid the Sunnis of the sectarian Maliki government, which is now trying to control the state for a third term. Maybe this is why rebels received a warm welcome from some citizens in the provinces where the insurgents took over. When the gunmen entered the city of Mosul, the military was very weak due to fear of reprisals from the community (since most of the community hates the army). This explains why military commanders fled, and why the army was unable to defeat what was only a small number of insurgents.

Do you want the army to "free" the city of Mosul?

QC: I think the solution must be a political one first. The Iraqi army, if it acts professionally and patriotically, and works in collaboration with the people of the city, is capable of freeing Mosul from the insurgents. But there must be a military plan that takes into account the population of the city and ensures the safety of Mosul's civilians. There are a million civilians who may now be at risk. Aerial bombardment would be especially catastrophic for them.

What will help the civilians in Mosul? What is the role for the U.S. in the future of Mosul?

QC: I think we need to guarantee and strengthen the capacity and the activity of civil society, so that it becomes a link between the government and society, so that citizens are empowered to play a greater role in identifying and implementing solutions to problems in the future.

I think that recent events are the beginning of the division of Iraq into three regions (Sunni, Kurdish and Shiite). This is increasingly considered by many politicians to be the solution to political and armed conflict among the different groups in Iraq. The Kurdish authorities and the leaders of the insurgents seem to have agreed that this is what will

happen. Iraqis were once unified, but the experience of the past eight years and the likely continuation of the current political situation makes it almost impossible for our cities to go on like this.

I think that America understands what is happening and that it will push for the division of Iraq. The US will not necessarily send its military to Mosul or

Iraq, but it will clearly play a role in what will be agreed upon. People here want civilians to rule the city so we can solve our problems ourselves. We want the extremists to leave and we want the end of military activities and the presence of weapons. But at the same time we don't want to return to sectarian rule in any way.

UKRAINE

Popular movement and imperialisms

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL ·

The very deep political crisis experienced by the Ukraine since November 2013 is far from being over. In this country, following a very long national oppression (basically Polish and Russian), the process of national formation is incomplete, the nation-state is still fragile. This is all the more the case that the country is taken in hostage between Russian imperialist pressure and that of the Euro-Atlantic powers, and subject to the socially fragmenting impact of neo-liberalism.

1. From Maidan to the provisional government: a powerful popular mobilization

For three months (November 21, 2013 – February 22, 2014) tens of thousands (and on some days hundreds of thousands) of people gathered in the centre of Kiev, on the Place ("Maidan") of Independence. It was the suppression of the first protesters ("pro-European" and defending national independence) which gave the movement its massive size by late 2013, combined with a hope - ideally associated with "Europe" - of well-being, rejection of corruption, democracy and national sovereignty.

We stressed in February (IC resolution) the characteristics of this movement which has *"presented a combination of revolutionary (democratic, anti-elitist, self-organized) and reactionary elements - the overall outcome was and remains a question of political and social struggle. Those features are also deeply rooted in the current character of the present post-soviet Ukrainian society (atomized, without any class identity, with degradation of education and hegemony of reactionary nationalist ideas in society, combined with a legitimate com-*

mitment to national independence and the dramatic legacy of Stalinism)."

We can specify the weaknesses and limitations of Maidan:

- Despite its length, the main forms of self-organization which emerged remained limited: above all the construction, the maintenance, the defence of this rebel city of tents and barricades in the middle of winter, the organization of supplies and of health services ... teams occupied administrative buildings, a student assembly imposed notably transparency of the budget for education. "Sotnia" (companies) for self-defence were formed, of which a minority were controlled by political organizations present in the Maidan.

- The movement never had any "representation" or elected spokespersons. This has facilitated its exploitation by the political parties of the opposition, including the far right party Svoboda, ranked among the "pro-Europeans" - speaking in the name of "Euromaidan", particularly abroad.

- The small groups of the extreme nationalist right (Pravyi Sektor and so on) vying with Svoboda played a role in the self-defence of the movement. Their evident "visibility" and their attacks against left-wing activists have been used to discredit the whole of Maidan, notably by the Russian government and media, or later by anti-Maidan components identifying with the left.

- Finally, although very diverse and sensitive to social issues (against the confiscation of public goods, corruption, inequality), the movement has not expressed social demands; it has done very little to mobilize the industrial working class, and therefore also the regions in the east and the south-east (despite a few exceptions). If strike calls (launched by the independent trade unions) have not been sup-

ported, the same is true of attempts at workers' mobilizations against Maidan.

– Taking into account the initial themes ("pro-EU"), of the predominant organized forces of the right and fascist aggression, the very weak Ukrainian left has been very divided faced with Maidan and in Maidan: in addition to the various anarchist groups, the Socialist Movement - Left Opposition has chosen to intervene there opposing right and extreme right ideas as a result of the social and mass democratic aspirations of the movement. By way of contrast, the organization "Borotba" (Struggle) remained outside the movement, denouncing it globally as reactionary. Located on the "left" by its label, and its social discourse, the Ukrainian CP, very much involved in the oligarchic privatizations, has sought to distinguish itself from the Party of Regions by proposing a referendum regarding the agreement with the EU; but it was discredited by its vote for the February laws criminalizing all protesters. It has propagated, like Borotba, the thesis of the "Nazi putsch".

– In total, while taking more distance from the parties than was the case in the "Orange Revolution" of 2004, Maidan especially mobilized in the regions of the west and the centre of the country, more oriented to the EU; if it was expressing social and democratic aspirations shared across the entire country, its only "program" was the fall of Yanukovych.

2. The fall of Yanukovych: a popular victory confiscated and a right wing government, not a "fascist putsch".

The fall of Yanukovych has dismembered the Party of the Regions, which had become under his presidency the main instrument of the power of the oligarchy, and whose base was located in eastern Ukraine - where the Ukrainian oligarchy emerged and developed in the great industrial corporations privatized fraudulently during the capitalist restoration in the early 1990s. This party had a strong electoral support because of social relations of domination. The implosion of the Party of the Regions, which became in the course of the presidency of Yanukovych the structural instrument of

his regime, as well as the dissolution of the special forces of repression, "Berkout", weakened the Ukrainian state, depriving it of an important part of its structures of domination.

Although all the ministers of the new government had been accepted by the crowd of Maidan, the movement was largely demobilized after the establishment of the provisional government.

The fall of Yanukovych was the victory of a quasi-insurrectionary movement, and not the deed of a "fascist anti-Russian putsch supported by the west". Even if Yanukovych came to power in 2010 through elections recognized as legitimate, he was himself responsible for his own downfall: he is deeply discredited, including in his region of origin, the Donbas, by years of oligarchic personal and familial enrichment while the country is impoverished; and even his unexpected refusal in November to sign the agreement with the EU has been the illustration of the presidentialist drift of a regime less and less controlled even by his own party and parliament. His fall was catalyzed by the repression and the dead of Maidan. In view of the disputes on the responsibility for these deaths, the government in Kiev has appealed to the International Criminal Court (ICC), on April 25; it is investigating events ranging from November 21, 2013 to February 22, 2014.

It was the parliament itself which voted for the dismissal of the president after his escape, with a very strong majority, and which designated the provisional government. The latter largely reflects the compromise, supported by Western diplomats, which had been negotiated with Yanukovych, before he fled. After having explicitly supported all "pro-European" parties, including Svoboda, the European governments have been embarrassed by the extreme right. The latter has sought to make itself more "respectable" (Svoboda has toned down its anti-Semitic matrix and its celebration of the SS Galizien Division). In parallel, the minister of the interior (who has been asked by the European Parliament to disarm the private militias) is in a tense relationship with Pravyi Sektor.

If the government is not "neo-Nazi" it is true - and non-trivial - that the party of the extreme right "Svoboda" has multiple positions of power within it: 4 ministries (3 since, March 25, its Minister of Defence, Admiral Ihor Tenyukh, regarded as "inactive" in the face of the events in the Crimea, was "dismissed") as well as the post of attorney general. Andriy Parubiy, secretary of the National Security Council and of defence, is sometimes also catalogued as a member of Svoboda. It is true that he was one of the founders, in 1991, of the "Social Nationalist Party of Ukraine" which took the name of Svoboda in 2004. But he left this organization 10 years ago and has since 2012 been a member of "Batkivshchyna" ("Homeland") led by Yulia Tymoshenko.

It is this formation that dominates this neo-liberal government which has appointed oligarchs to posts as governors of regions and has put in place the measures required by the IMF: including an increase in the price of gas (50%), a freeze on wages and hiring in the public sector, reduction of pensions, reduction of social expenditure, VAT increases and so on. The first measure taken by the new parliamentary majority, repealing the act of 2012 on languages, has not been ratified by the acting president. But in the context of a denunciation of the new regime as "anti -Russian" including by Moscow, the effect has been disastrous in the Russian-speaking regions. The Russian aggression in the Crimea is presented as a response to such a policy.

The 25 May election carried the oligarch Petro Poroshenkoto the presidency of the Republic – by 54.7 % of the voters, with a participation of 60.3 % (this latter figure is undoubtedly over-estimated). [1] This election, taking place against a background of tensions that diverted the social questions, nevertheless expresses a popular desire to give Ukraine a sovereign representation. It buries at the same time the fundamental political demands expressed by Maidan – a radical cleansing of the police and State apparatus, the fight against corruption, the separation of big capital from direct political pow-

er. Never in the modern history of Ukraine has big business been so directly involved in the management of the country: almost all those who figure in the Forbes list of the richest Ukrainians are today in high-ranking posts in the executive.

3. Annexation of the Crimea

The Crimea (12% of whose population includes Tatars formerly deported by Stalin and having returned since 1991), the gift of Khrushchev to Ukraine in 1954, had acquired a special status as an autonomous republic within the independent Ukraine, since 1993. Its main city, Sevastopol, had a separate status, as a naval base which houses the former Russian Black Sea fleet, according to a treaty of "peace and friendship" in 1997.

Moscow had obtained from Viktor Yanukovych an extension of the lease, under which it leased the basis to the Ukraine, in return for the agreement on energy tariffs and the debt specified in December 2014. Putin exploited the fall of Yanukovych to unilaterally challenge all these agreements, by annexing the Crimea. But it was the argument of the "Russian minorities" threatened by a "fascist putsch" which was put forward in the vote by the Duma in favour of the employment of Russian armed forces in Ukraine. That is why this thesis plays an essential role in the propaganda. In the posters for the plebiscite that was held under military deployment and without access to Ukrainian media, Ukraine was marked with a swastika.

Moscow has stated that 97% of voters voted yes, with a participation of 86% - figures very far from those provided by the Russian Presidential Council on Civil Society and Human Rights: "According to various sources, in Crimea 50-60% voted for joining Russia, with the total turnout of 30-50 per cent"). The exodus of Tatars out of Crimea has resumed - their fate is in no way assured. But on 20 March the treaty incorporating the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol in the Federal Republic of Russia was ratified by the Russian Duma.

Behaving like a great power, Putin has stifled domestic critics by encouraging a nostalgic Great Russian chauvinism for all of "little Russia" - at the risk of a conflagration in the Ukraine. As was long the practice in Stalinist propaganda, to be Ukrainian (or Tatar) now means being (pro) Nazi and "anti-Russian". This finds its counterpart in the ultra-nationalist propaganda where to be "Russian" means being "anti-Ukrainian" or "Bolshevik". The real political, social and geo-strategic conflicts are thus hidden.

4. The "Anti-Maidan" faced with an unpopular government

In any event, the eastern and south-eastern regions of Ukraine are not the Crimea. Unlike the latter, they had voted massively for the independence of Ukraine in 1991; and the public opinion polls showed (until recently) that they remained predominantly attached to this, in spite of their political mistrust of Kiev. Favouring linguistic pluralism, and even a form of decentralization, or again wanting to keep the links with Russia (hoping notably for better energy prices), or being nostalgic for the USSR does not involve a secessionist logic: the Putinian political regime is not attractive (even if it is presented as a protector) and the policies applied in Russia near Donbas have removed much of the state aid which still remain massive in Ukrainian industry. But the policies conducted by Kiev cause concern, even if jobs are as much threatened by insertion into Russia than into the EU or submission to the IMF. The popular choices are therefore uncertain and concerns are quickly exploited.

The "popular republics" of Donetsk and Lugansk, self-proclaimed, exploit mistrust of Kiev. But they have broadly been reduced to para-military apparatuses or bring together former members of the Ukrainian state apparatus, criminals of all sorts, military personnel from Chechnya, members of the Russian security forces, or ordinary Ukrainians. Nothing that promotes a real popular mobilization, in a situation which is increasingly chaotic after clashes of which it is difficult to make an assessment.

The tragedy in Odessa on May 2 - the fire at the trade union centre which cost the lives of 40 so-called "pro-Russian" activists who were barricaded within, including a Borotba activist, as a result of the armed aggression against a demonstration in favour of "unity of Ukraine" leaving 4 dead - marked a radicalization of the "anti-Maidan" propaganda: according to the latter it would be a "new Orator" protected by a "Nazi state" in Kiev - which is accompanied by an indictment of "callous indifference" if one challenges these interpretations.

The anti-Maidan has not known any mass mobilisations beyond a few thousand protesters, in a highly populated area. It is difficult to clearly include there the thousands of voters in the plebiscites of May 11 in favour of the "popular republics" which have been without doubt at the same time in part a protest demonstration against Kiev and a vote forced by the militias - the same ones who on May 25 banned participation in the presidential election. Massive strikes have taken place, especially in Krasnodon, but they were on wage claims and the workers have rejected the political manipulation of the "pro" or "anti" Maidan candidates. Other more recent strikes among the miners, are against the "anti-terrorist" actions taken by Kiev (denouncing the risks of the bombing for the mines).

Even if we can denounce the hypocrisy of Putin calling for dialogs that he rarely practices at home, or denying any external intervention, the latter does not take the form of a military invasion. The violence of the armed "anti-Kiev" militias, blocking any dialog, certainly requires an adequate response. But the latter could rely on the democratic and peaceful aspirations of the peoples. And the defence of the unity of the country implies answers other than military ones. Even if it is difficult to accept all the false propaganda, it is certainly true that the operations launched by Kiev were ineffective in ending the chaos and unable to earn the trust of the people. Which Putin intends to exploit.

5. Russia's imperial policy

Since 2008 and playing on imperialist contradictions, Russia has sought to reaffirm itself as a great power, after its marginalization since 1989.

The dismantling of the USSR and the restoration of capitalism in Russia was reflected in the Yeltsinian phase of 1990 by a plundering of wealth dominated by oligarchic quasi-feudal fiefdoms controlling the state. The Community of Independent States (CIS) had little of substance in this phase. Yeltsin's Russian state lost its internal (including the capacity to have taxes paid) and external power, in spite of its dirty war in Chechnya. The integration of Russia in the "G8" did not kid anyone with regard to its actual weight.

The Putin era initially resulted, in 2000, in the restoration of a strong internal state, incorporating the control of oligarchs and exports - after the payments crisis of 1998 - especially in the oil and gas sector. This was accompanied by a "managed democracy", framing the elections and the major media and suppressing protests at the same time the old social protections were dismantled. The resumption of strong growth has been accompanied by the internationalization of the economic and financial presence of the Russian oligarchs, and several attempts by Moscow to create around Russia a more integrated economic "space" than the CIS.

The Russian regime has tried, especially since 2011, to transform the Customs Union already put in place with Belarus and Kazakhstan (which Armenia has joined), in a project of "Eurasia" for 2015 directed also at Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and even Georgia and Moldova: it concerns, by playing notably on the weapon of the gas tariffs, offering them an alternative to the "Eastern Partnership" with the EU: the challenge is for Russia to compete with China and Western capital but also to counter attempts at incorporation of its "close neighbours" in the Euro-Atlantic institutions (EU and NATO).

Russia also exploits the dependencies and "partnerships" that the big imperialist powers have established with it, such as in the "fight against terrorism" or the management of the Syrian crisis. It

takes advantage of the crisis of these powers, but it suffers also because of its own dependencies, which it is endeavouring to mitigate by the deployment of its relations with China.

Its coup in Crimea rests on the apparatus of Yanukovych and on the extreme "Eurasian" right to mark a new relationship of forces in international negotiations. But it is not certain that Putin controls the separatist forces of Ukraine and the dynamic carries dangers, beyond the short-term gains: Azerbaijan has joined the criticism against the annexation of the Crimea which is not reassuring for the neighbours with which Moscow would like to associate.

6. Western imperialisms

The fall of the Berlin Wall, was accepted by Gorbachev in the context of "Soviet disengagement": lowering the cost of the arms race and winning Western credits were his priority. In the negotiations undertaken in Germany, he had advocated the dissolution of the two military blocs; and then he had to accept the entry of the reunited Germany into NATO, in return for the commitment by the United States that no foreign troops or weapons would be stationed in the East and that NATO would not extend further.

But U.S. imperialism made the choice to expand NATO to Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic in 1999, Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia in 2004, as well as Albania and Croatia in 2009.

And the "pro-Western" forces of "coloured revolutions" in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004), heavily supported by the United States, had called for their integration into NATO and the EU. The latter was however divided with regard to relations with Russia. As can be seen by the direct links that Germany (or Italy) had preferred to build with Moscow for oil supply.

In 2009, the Polish leaders, supported by Sweden, advocated an "Eastern Partnership" of the EU - in the absence of new enlargements, this amounted to

a "thorough and comprehensive free-trade" agreement with all the former countries of the ex-USSR bordering the EU - including Ukraine. Russia reacted by the Eurasia project offered to the same countries with the objective of a redefinition of continental relations, where Russia would be a dominant pole, but also a counter-weight to the demands of the EU.

Yanukovich, facing the risk of cessation of payments, negotiated the agreements with the EU until 2013, under pressure from Russia and the IMF. He asked for tripartite meetings (Ukraine, Russia and the EU) then refused by the latter. Today, the Western imperialist states seek an agreement with Russia - in spite of all the big speeches. None of them, no more than the government in Kiev, can control the clashes on the ground which can degenerate into a real civil war.

7. Sovereignty of Ukraine

The unity of Ukraine requires military neutrality, the withdrawal of Russian troops, and the rejection of anti-social policies.

Only an anti-war and anti-fascist front (Ukrainian and international) against the reactionary forces of every kind, rooted in the peoples, can impose it, against the Russian and Western imperialist dictats, in defence of social and national rights, against violence.

These are the objectives that the progressive forces of Russia and the EU will defend against the IMF and the "free trade" agreements - by recognizing the right of the Ukrainian people to decide on its international links.

The national question is at the centre of political activity in Ukraine. As the Left Opposition put it: *"the national and cultural renaissance of the Ukrainian nation and other nations of our country is not possible without the social problems being resolved"*. In Ukraine, a left that left the national dimension to the nationalists would condemn itself in advance to failure. In the nationalist camp there are already emerging currents that, taking advantage of the marginality of the socialist left, wish to appear in the eyes of workers as an alternative to capitalism.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA:

Plenums, power, politics

JAN MALEWSKI ·

The first plenum appeared in Tuzla on February, 2014, on the initiative of a group of workers, activists of the non-institutional socialist organization Lijevi [3] and intellectuals who wanted to go beyond confrontations in the streets and enable the spontaneous popular movement, which had just forced the cantonal government to resign and fraternized with the police, to organize in order to be able to take control of their future. The first proclamation of the plenum of Tuzla (see below) reflected these concerns.

Tuzla's Declaration of Citizens and Workers (Tuzla #1)

February 7, 2014

DECLARATION 7 February 2014. Today in Tuzla a new future is being created! The [local] government has submitted its resignation, which means that the first demand of the protestors has been met and that the conditions for solving existing problems have been attained. Accumulated anger and rage are the causes of aggressive behaviour. The attitude of the authorities has created the conditions for anger and rage to escalate.

Now, in this new situation, we wish to direct the anger and rage into the building of a productive and useful system of government. We call on all citizens to support the realization of the following goals:

(1) Maintaining public order and peace in cooperation with citizens, the police and civil protection, in order to avoid any criminalization, politicization, and any manipulation of the protests.

(2) The establishment of a technical government, composed of expert, non-political, uncompromised members. [They should be people] who have held no position at any level of government and would lead the Canton of Tuzla until the 2014 elections. This government should be required to submit weekly plans and reports about its work and to fulfill its proclaimed goals. The work of the government will be followed by all interested citizens.

(3) Resolving, through an expedited procedure, all questions relating to the privatization of the following firms: Dita, Polihem, Poliolhem, Gumara, and Konjuh. The [government] should:

§ Recognize the seniority and secure health insurance of the workers.

§ Process instances of economic crimes and all those involved in it.

§ Confiscate illegally obtained property.

§ Annul the privatization agreements [for these firms].

§ Prepare a revision of the privatization.

§ Return the factories to the workers and put everything under the control of the public government in order to protect the public interest, and to start production in those factories where it is possible.

(4) Equalizing the pay of government representatives with the pay of workers in the public and private sector.

(5) Eliminating additional payments to government representatives, in addition to their income, as a result of their participation in commissions, committees and other bodies, as well as other irrational and unjustified forms of compensation beyond those that all employees have a right to.

(6) Eliminating salaries for ministers and eventually other state employees following the termination of their mandates.

This declaration is put forward by the workers and citizens of the Tuzla Canton, for the good of all of us.

source Bosnia-Herzegovina Protest Files

In the days that followed, similar plenums appeared in all the cantons of the Federation, while popular demonstrations in Republika Srpska, smaller and less angry, have not led to the emergence of such self-organization.

The heading of the blog of the plenum of Sarajevo summarizes what unifies the citizens who participate: "If you are against the ruling class, bribery, corruption, theft, nepotism, hypocrisy ... join us!" The banners proudly raised by the plenum of Mostar - a town that is separated between a Croatian part and a Bosniak (Muslim) part, a separation that the authorities manipulate so as to promote an ethnic interpretation of the popular struggle - highlight the other dominant aspect of the present social movement, its anti-nationalism: "Freedom is my nation" and "Our unification is your destruction!". As a member of the inter-plenums working group in Sarajevo on March 3 commented, "this town, which for twenty years has symbolized the division of our society (...) can for the first time show that we are a political and not an ethnic nation" [4].

What is a plenum?

On March 28, the Sarajevo plenum adopted its principles and rules of functioning, for which the project was developed by the working group for questions of functioning. The principles are three in number:

1. Equality and fairness. - All persons in the plenum, including those who have taken part in its organization, represent only themselves, and all participants have the same rights. Everyone has the

right to participate in the organization of the plenum and in its working groups.

2. Solidarity. - The plenum formulates common demands. When one person intervenes, the others listen, respecting the principles of the plenum.

3. No violence - The plenum is a space without violence, a space of mutual respect and constructive exchanges."

The rules of functioning that were adopted are an application of these principles. "The plenum has no leader, only moderators who organize the discussion. Moderators are volunteers and change at each session (...). It is only possible to speak on the subject under discussion, the time is two minutes and all participants must introduce themselves. (...) Two people take notes which will be published at the end of the debate. (...) The voting will take place after 30 minutes of discussion. All decisions shall be taken by a simple majority (50 per cent plus one vote)."

The session of 17 February of the Sarajevo plenum – with between 600 and 1000 participants – gives an idea of the atmosphere of these popular assemblies. The plenum was to elect seven persons to present complaints to the authorities, whereas there were thirteen volunteers. After recalling that nobody has the right to represent the plenum and it is only a question of "presenting demands", all the volunteers had to present themselves and then the moderator took a vote on each name, leaving the meeting time to ask questions and the candidates time to reply. Two candidates were booed and the seven who had the most votes were elected. Then one of those elected took the microphone: "Listen, I was chosen, and so it's not to change the decision concerning myself that I am intervening, but why don't we all go together?" Cheers. The moderator therefore submitted this proposal to a vote and it was decided that all those who could would go and present the demands!

From the first session of the plenum in Tuzla, it was clear that the plenums did not want to substitute themselves for the authorities, without however

trusting them, and wanting to keep a watchful eye on them. The plenum called for the establishment of a government of "professional technicians" who were not to be members of a political party, who had not been compromised and had not previously exercised a leadership function. That was when the government of the canton of Tuzla had just resigned.

These formulas bear witness to the total loss of legitimacy of the state structures and parties that had carried out, over the last twenty years, the "transition to a market economy", that is to say the restoration of capitalism. This is a serious crisis of the dominant ideology, which was based both on popular hopes that the "transition" would guarantee "a better life" and on the exacerbation of ethnic nationalisms which, while dividing the popular classes, enabled those in government to attribute to "the others" the responsibility for the non-fulfillment of these hopes. The mass mobilizations that were begun in February 2014 by the workers of bankrupt privatized factories in Tuzla immediately placed the responsibility on those who had illegally enriched themselves by stealing, during and after the war (1992-1995), property that belonged to the population, on this "oligarchy of ethnicists and par-tocrats" [5].

The perception of the Mafia-like character of the politicians and the new capitalists who today dominate the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (and which can also be seen in other regions of the former Yugoslavia) does not (yet?) go so far as to formulate another project of society. The dominant discourse of the movement of contestation is marked by the demand for a state that is understood as a "good organization of society," an ideal state which is doing its job correctly under the control of its population. That is the source of the hopes for a government of honest technicians, but also of the determination not leave it a free hand or, more importantly, to give it a blank cheque.

To this end the plenums, like the one in Tuzla, have established working groups (12 in Tuzla, each of them corresponding to a cantonal ministry; in

Sarajevo there are no working groups that correspond to each ministry, since the plenum of Sarajevo has decided to focus its work on questions of social justice). There are also technical commissions (in Tuzla, there are three commissions: logistics, legal and media, and a commission for "contact with the workers "). These committees and working groups prepare the plenary debates on the subjects that they are concerned with and do not have delegated authority from the plenum.

Thus, Bahrija Umihanovic, who had just been appointed Prime Minister, not by the plenum, but by the Assembly of the Canton of Tuzla, addressed on March 12 the legal commission of the plenum – since he saw there an active and influential team within the plenum – to invite them to discuss the future government. The response sums up the dominant conception of the role of the plenums and their desire not to delegate its representation: "Neither the legal commission, nor any other working group, team or individual is authorized to speak on behalf of the plenum of the citizens of the Canton of Tuzla; we hereby inform you that the session of the plenum will take place on Saturday, March 15 at 6 p.m. (...). Therefore, we invite you, as the future Prime Minister of the government, to attend this scheduled meeting in order to present your project to the citizens. We remind you that the Assembly of the Canton of Tuzla completely ignored at its meeting on 10 March the demands of the plenum that were adopted at its last meeting on March 6, when it organized a debate on the candidates for the post of Prime Minister, transmitted by radio and television. There is at present no delegation of the plenum that you can meet and your governmental programme can only be presented to the citizens at the opening of the scheduled meeting of the plenum. (...) We would like to remind you of the priority demands for the future cantonal government, adopted at the session of the plenum on 22 February:

- Adoption of emergency measures to relaunch productive and commercial activities in the canton;

– Establishment of an independent group of experts which will examine the privatizations that have been effected or which are underway in the Canton of Tuzla, and to inform the competent authorities of the results of its audit.

In addition, please note that all the working groups of the plenum will submit to the ministers concerned, after their appointment, the demands adopted by the plenum." [6]

The new Prime Minister of the Canton of Tuzla had therefore to appear before the plenum and to listen to the questions and interventions of the citizens for more than five hours. We should note that the plenum did not wish to comment on the new government, but merely to point out that it must carry out its demands. On March 28, the Tuzla plenum made public an explicit press release: "It is not up to the plenum to choose or to nominate candidates for the posts of Prime Minister and of members of the government of the canton."

Selma Tobulic, one of the participants in the Tuzla plenum, commented on this decision in the following way: "The new Prime Minister has repeatedly said that he was not under pressure from any party, but it is important that the citizens understand that you not need to be a member of a political party to be pressurized by it" (11).

Demands addressed to the authorities

The plenums thus began to formulate concrete demands with the aim of changing society.

For example, at its meeting on April 2, the Tuzla plenum began a discussion on the proposals formulated by its working groups on employment and social affairs, as well as on enterprise development. These demands, once adopted, will be forwarded to the cantonal government.

In the field of employment and social affairs, the plenum demands that the government present a plan of action. In this framework, the first points show a distrust of the offices dealing with employment and social assistance (demand for an audit,

the publication of the justifications for the allocation of jobs, a change in the law so that all candidates have equal rights according to clear rules - age, duration of unemployment, social status, etc., verification of social assistance benefits paid in 2012 and 2013 ...). There follow the egalitarian demands. First of all, those directed at the privileges of the elites: abolition of "white bread", that is to say, the right of leaders (ministers and their assistants) to receive their salary after their duties have ceased; abolition of bonuses and other advantages enjoyed by leaders (housing that goes with the job, payment of transport costs, etc.); abolition of material benefits for participation on the boards of directors or supervisory boards of companies in the framework of the institutional functions that they exercise; abolition of the right of public servants to enjoy priority in competitive examinations for the civil service. There follow the demands concerning the provision of jobs for the unemployed: hiring to fill job vacancies; priority for the hiring of unemployed graduates aged between 30 and 35; a review of all administrative jobs. Finally, there are the demands aimed at guaranteeing the rights of all those who have been deprived of them: to ensure the rights of those who have been deprived of them: the right to health care for workers whose employers have stopped paying social security contributions and for the unemployed; reinforcement in terms of finance and staffing of the centres for social protection; benefits to be paid in priority to unemployed mothers.

In the domain of enterprise development, the demands put forward in the debate reflected the weight of small entrepreneurs and of neoliberal ideology: strengthening of the institutions providing support to businesses; changes to the laws restricting businesses (for example, easier and cheaper registration); a radical change in the system of public procurement; the construction of a motorway between Croatia, Tuzla and Sarajevo (to provide easier access to the canton); but also creation of free trade zones...

For its part, the plenum of Sarajevo adopted at its 12th session, held in the open air since the cantonal government had refused it access to the Youth Centre, demands concerning health. First of all, it demanded access to health care for all residents of the canton, and therefore the necessary changes in legislation, within 40 days at the latest (this concerns above all workers who are deprived of social security). Secondly, it demanded that the government and the health insurance department verify within 30 days the supply contracts for goods and services, cancel those that were unfavorable and initiate proceedings against those responsible, and verify how useful were the non-medical jobs in the department, as well as those in the ministry. Thirdly, it demanded the revocation of those administrators employed in managerial positions and in health institutions, who were on the list of "the hundred highest salaries of the Federation" which had been published in the media. Fourthly, it demanded the publication on the websites of the ministry and of medical institutions "of all information concerning the organization, the powers, the responsibilities, the financial transactions and all transactions involving more than 200 convertible marks (KM) as well as that concerning the rights of patients." Fifthly, the plenum demanded the adoption of a system of financial support for those whose state of health required treatment abroad; equal access for everyone with regard to services, medicine and health apparatuses; and the establishment of a transparent system for procurement of goods and services.

It is worth noting the emphasis placed on helping the most socially vulnerable and in this context, the taking into account of the unpaid work of women. Thus the 9th plenum of Sarajevo demanded "the raising of benefits for the most socially vulnerable to the level of the real cost of living in the Canton of Sarajevo; for the minimum financial assistance to the unemployed to be equivalent to one third of the [average] monthly wage in the canton; for payment in cash of at least 50 per cent of the average monthly wage to all women, regardless of their employ-

ment status; for a special status for single parents (including fees, assistance and incentives in finding employment, etc.)."

Citizens' control over the administration

Lastly, the demand for austerity, that is to say for real control and severe limitation of administrative expenditure, comes up regularly in the demands that are formulated. This demand takes into account on the one hand the effective bankruptcy of state governments and the fact that this bankruptcy is the result of the theft, legal and illegal, of society's resources by the oligarchs and "partycrats" who exercise power. On March 13, the plenum of Sarajevo thus demanded a stop to "borrowing from commercial banks" and "radical austerity measures." There follows an explanation: "The austerity measures should in no way worsen the social situation of the citizens of the canton or threaten those social groups who are already vulnerable".

As the invitation to the meeting of the Tuzla plenum on 2 April states, resuming its previous decisions, "the ethnicist and partycratic oligarchy protects those who, during and after the war, took advantage of the confusion to get their hands on enterprises that had been destroyed and put up for sale, as well as on public property, reducing what belongs to everyone by 9 billion dollars, a sum which appears in the accounts. We want a fair redistribution of wealth, the restoration of public property and the arrest, trial and conviction of those who speculated during the war and looted after the war". The text emphasizes that "the plenum of Tuzla estimates that over the last decade the [institutional] political parties received around 200 million KM from the budgets of the municipalities, the cantons and the Federation."

Popular control can also impose citizens' choices on the administration. Thus, after the closure of the Zivinica market by the administration – in order to comply with the regulations - which involved the laying off of the workers of this market, the legal commission of the Tuzla plenum imposed on April 7 a meeting with the representatives of the workers,

the municipal administration, the Prime Minister, Bahjira Umihanovic, and the minister for planning and environmental protection, S. Karadzin. Following on this meeting, the administration had to commit itself to opening a temporary market nearby and to allocate the stands in priority to those who had previously worked in the market that had been closed, and to taking the necessary steps to ensure the reopening as early as possible of the traditional market. The next day, the government adopted a decree simplifying the regulations. It was also decided that the plenum would monitor the implementation of these decisions.

The reactions of the government

The political structure imposed on Bosnia at the time of the Dayton agreements, [7] in particular that of the entity "Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina" limited the political power of the new bourgeoisie. That did not stop it from looting the country and dividing the population along ethnic cleavages, which were largely imaginary. But the weakness of the central state and the ethnocentric ideology of the recently enriched elites did not permit the use of the various armed forces beyond the limits of the ethnic entities. After trying to quell demonstrations by using local police, and in view of the rapid fraternization of the Tuzla police with the demonstrators, four cantonal governments resigned. In the aftermath, the cantonal institutions chose to temporize, giving way to certain demands. Thus the government of the Canton of Zenica - Dobož reduced the salaries and other benefits of members of the executive [8]. The Cantonal Assembly of Sarajevo (the official institution) approved on February 24 the demands of the plenum of the citizens of the capital: establishment of a government of experts, "non-partisan and uncorrupted", an audit of the salaries of politicians; a revision of privatizations; the establishment of an independent commission to establish the responsibility of the police during the violent crackdown on demonstrators on February 7. In Tuzla, the new Prime Minister appeared before the plenum.

But after these first concessions, largely verbal, the cantonal governments did nothing. And the repression, sometimes subtle and silent, was not interrupted.

In Mostar, the elites and the media continued their attempts to divide the population along ethnic lines and one of the active supporters of the plenum, Muharem Hindic, was arrested and beaten up by the police. The police also regularly intervened to prevent contingents of demonstrators from leaving Spain Square (in East Mostar, the "Muslim" part of the town) and crossing over to the Western ("Croatian") part, so as to be able to describe the demonstrations as "Bosniak".

In Zenica, Benjamin Kaknjo, who is active in the plenum, was beaten up by three people, including the son of the mayor, Hussein Smajlovic.

In Tuzla, one of the activists, whose family was repeatedly threatened by unknown individuals, decided to leave the city.

In Sarajevo, to start with, on March 7 the authorities banned the protesters from "blocking the traffic." Then the canton decided not to provide the plenum with the Dom Mladich (Youth Centre), a meeting place and "a public space, built by generations of Sarajevans", on the pretext that the plenum was not paying the rent!

The plenums were thus obliged to spend their time in the fight against repression and to organize events – leaving that much less time to discuss the transformation of society.

After the ban on meetings in the Youth Centre, a petition launched by 77 personalities - "human rights lawyers, cultural workers, journalists, citizens of Sarajevo" - and subsequently widely signed, "expressed the deepest condemnation of the intention of the government of the Canton of Sarajevo to prevent the ongoing work of the plenum, which is the most authentic and legitimate form of citizens' democracy." Commenting on the attitude of the authorities, the petition says: "They want by all means to suppress the free expression of the thought and

the demands of citizens. They want to impose on citizens the discipline of collective nationalist fear. They want to buy rubber bullets and proclaim that dissatisfied citizens are vandals and terrorists. The six leaders want to be alone again on the front pages of the newspapers and thus for everything to return to normal. That will no longer happen." [9]

The demands concerning respect for the law on the part of the police were formulated by all the plenums. For example, the working group on internal affairs of the Tuzla plenum submitted for discussion, on March 31, the dismissal of the police chief, Samir Aljukic, the revocation of the committee responsible for appointing top police officers and the transfer of these appointments to the plenum, and also the possibility for the plenum to appoint to leading positions in the police people not having the rank of superintendent. On the level of the Federation, it proposed the dismissal of the director of the Federal Police, Dragan Lukac, and a law concerning police officers, putting wages of cantonal and federal officials on the same level.

Towards a federal plenum?

Once the plenums began operating regularly, some of their participants began to visit other plenums and reported back on their impressions. At the beginning of March members of the plenum of Sarajevo went to Tuzla, Mostar, Konjic ... People from Tuzla and Bugojno spoke in the plenum in Sarajevo. Inter-plenum working groups were established and a meeting of the working groups of Zenica, Orasje, Tuzla and Sarajevo took place in March, during a weekend in Tuzla, in order to build a network of plenums. The goal was to develop a list of common federal demands.

The plenum of Tuzla had rapidly formulated three priority demands, which could only be resolved at the federal level:

"1. Modification of the Law on Public Revenue of the Federation;

"2. Adoption of a law on confiscation of wealth acquired illegally in the Federation;

"3. Abolition of the funding of political parties and organizations from the budget of the Federation."

The minutes of the meeting summarized the discussions: "In order to harmonize demands, which must be done jointly at the federal level of government, inter-plenum activity has begun and inter-plenum work has been established within the plenum of the Canton of Tuzla. The opinion shared by all the plenums is that no canton can or should have a monopoly in the field of the demands of all the citizens of the Federation. In the plenums of the other cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, many demands concern the level of the federal government, and many of those coincide with the demands that have already been adopted by the citizens' plenum of the Canton of Tuzla (abolition of "white bread", suspension of criminal proceedings against demonstrators, differentiation of VAT rates, determining the level of income of civil servants, etc.) and some have already been implemented at cantonal level. But many of these demands must be adopted by the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the legislative and constitutional levels. It is therefore necessary to adopt a common position in these domains, so that all citizens of the Federation speak with one voice and can tell our governing oligarchy that they are tired of political and economic violence."

It was a difficult discussion, because tax revenues are transferred to the cantons unevenly, with the intention of dividing the interests of the different populations. Although the allocation of federal revenues to cantonal budgets is based on four parameters (population, the number of students in primary and secondary education and the surface of the canton), the Canton of Sarajevo has been attributed a special status with a coefficient of 2, thus receiving for the year 463 million KM, whereas the Canton of Zenica-Doboj, which has a comparable population, received only 208 million and the Canton of Tuzla, whose population is greater than the Canton of Sarajevo, received 280 million. "The analysis of the budgets for the year 2009 thus shows that the tax refunds to the budgets of the

cantons were 909 KM per capita in Sarajevo, 463 KM per capita for Zenica-Doboj and 506 KM per capita for Tuzla. Based on the foregoing, the plenum of the Canton of Tuzla decided to adopt unanimously the demand to amend the law on the public revenues of the Federation to allow for a more equitable distribution between the federal, cantonal and communal levels, respecting the principles of economic equality, solidarity and local autonomy, by leveling the coefficients of equalization between the cantons and abolishing the special status of the capital and the coefficient 2." However, this demand will not appear on the list of common demands of the cantons, because the plenum of Sarajevo did not adopt it...

It was on March 15 that a list of ten common demands, already adopted by the plenums of Zenica, Mostar and Bugojno and published on the website of the plenum of Sarajevo, was presented to the session of the Tuzla plenum. It was decided that the discussion on these demands would continue in subsequent sessions and that all working groups were to discuss the points that concerned them.

A long discussion of these claims finally took place at the meeting of the plenum of Tuzla on April 2. Demands 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 (see below) were adopted unanimously. Demands 1 and 9 were controversial, but were eventually adopted by a majority vote. One demand - "Fixing of the amount of the salaries of elected officials, of those who exercise executive functions and their advisers at the level of twice the average salary of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina" - was rejected by a majority vote. As a result the number of demands common to all the plenums has been reduced to nine.

Common demands adopted by the plenums

On 9 April 2014, hundreds of protesters from across the Federation presented the common demands of the plenums.

The plenums concerned were those of the cantons of Mostar, Konjic, Tuzla, Srebrenik, Gracanica, Zavidovici, Maglaj, Zenica, Fojnica, Donji Vakuf,

Jajce, Sarajevo and others and their demands were presented to the Federal Government and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

1. Resignation of the Federal Government.
2. Suspension of criminal proceedings against all demonstrators from February 5 onwards.
3. Immediate suspension of privatizations and the sale of public assets. Revision of privatizations and prosecution of those responsible.
4. Abolition of privileges for public institutions and administrations at all levels, including the payment of wages after the end of the exercise of public functions ("white bread") and expenses for their families and for housing attached to the workplace.
5. Abolition of fees paid to members of boards, commissions and other bodies in the public enterprises founded by the authorities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina on the basis of the budget.
6. Introduction of a progressive income tax for all taxpayers, so that they pay more depending on the increase in the level of their income and their profits.
7. The Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina must amend the VAT law in order to introduce differentiated VAT rates, with a rate of 0% for basic commodities.
8. Urgent harmonization of pensions in line with the increase in the average wage in the Federation, so that pensions are not reduced, and payment of pensions to those who have acquired the rights [when employers have not paid the contributions of their employees].
9. An immediate stop to loans used to finance the public expenditure of the Federation from domestic and foreign banks or funds.

Translated by International Viewpoint

The minutes of the discussion at the plenum of Tuzla illuminate these choices:

" With regard to the first demand, that is to say the

resignation of the government of the Federation, the participants in the discussion at the plenum have clearly demonstrated their opposition to the government, especially because of its role in the repression of protests in Tuzla on February 5, 2014 and throughout the country in the following days. It was therefore clear that we should not overlook the responsibility of the political oligarchy within this government. But it is not realistic to expect the formation of a new government before the elections [which are scheduled for autumn] and the political oligarchy is not waiting for the elections to present itself as an opposition force. It is for these reasons that the demand was adopted by majority vote.

"Concerning the demand for the immediate abolition of loans from banks and from national and international funds to finance public spending in the Federation, it was pointed out in the discussion that it is not realistic to stop borrowing immediately because of the obligations of the state, especially towards the less well-off socio-economic groups. Such a measure, optimal and highly desirable, would be possible only after the adoption of measures of economic development and of employment of the population, which would lead to an increase in public revenues. That is why this demand was not adopted unanimously.

"The discussion on the fixing of salaries of elected officials and their advisers concluded that this demand was poorly conceived and badly formulated. The participants in the plenum stressed support for the principle that lay behind this demand, but noted that, according to the law on the rights of elected officials, it was possible that in some cases this would lead to increasing the salaries of some of them. They also highlighted the major differences between the categories concerned by this demand and therefore the necessity of treating them separately. Consequently, the general conclusion was that the working group must reformulate the demand and be more specific before the debate resumed on this subject. This demand was therefore rejected by the majority of those voting and it was

decided to resume the debate after a reformulation of the demand."

These discussions within the cantonal plenums led to the formulation of nine common demands and on April 9, the delegations of the cantonal plenums gathered in front of the seat of government in Sarajevo to hand them in together. However, the government avoided being confronted with this "plenum of the plenums," deciding to meet on the same day in Mostar, and none of its members dared to appear before the demonstrators.

Trade union renewal

At the same time as the "plenum of plenums" was demonstrating in front of the seat of government in Sarajevo, workers in the liquidated enterprises in Tuzla – Dita, Guming, Polihem, Poliolchem, Integra, Inzenjering, Hotel Tuzla, Borac, Tuzla Kvarc, Rudar Invest, Banovic and TTU – were demonstrating, as they did every Wednesday, in front of the Tribunal and the Prosecutor's Office. They developed statutes for the future union, which will be called "Trade-union Solidarity" and these statutes have already been signed by more than 700 workers in fifteen enterprises in the canton. The president of the union at Polihema, Enes Tanovic, said that they were waiting until they had regrouped the workers of all the enterprises, and that to do that they were visiting all the municipalities, and then they would deposit their statutes in order to legalize the new union.

This trade-union renewal is important. The national and cantonal directions of the institutionalized unions were in reality passive during the mobilizations that began in February, and sometimes even condemned them. Throughout the country, workers emphasized that these union leaders had given up the struggle for their rights. "Anti-party" feelings went along with the rejection of the union organizations. Building a new union from below, from each enterprise, is therefore a step forward in the self-organization of workers in Bosnia.

The need for politics

Several years ago, Daniel Bensaïd wrote: "The moroseness and the melancholy of the epoch betray a need for politics, for politics in spite of everything, a need for secular freedom, to no longer suffer a fate but to choose one's own history, without the least certainty of achieving it. To assert the primacy of politics over history and economics is on the contrary to reopen the questions of justice and equality, which are what is really at stake." [10]

The plenums in Bosnia are a practical application of this need for politics, for non-politicking politics, opening up the question of justice and equality, aspiring to transform this society, which is morose and melancholy for the vast majority of its citizens.

The invocation of direct and participatory democracy is permanent. It goes hand in hand with the rejection of parties, which have become instruments for the enrichment of elites, with the rejection of privatization and the affirmation of collective public good. For two months, the plenums in Bosnia have made progress, including by coordinating on the level of the Federation. They continue to present demands, which they are refining, to the authorities. These demands are gradually outlining the contours of a new society. They pose the question of the ownership of enterprises and social services: private property has gone bankrupt, mired in theft, looting and corruption; there are beginning to be demands for collective property, even though the experience of the failure of the Yugoslav revolu-

tion makes such a solution complicated in the popular imagination.

Although they do not aspire to take power, the plenums have become a counter-power. The four cantonal governments made up of "experts", who are "not compromised" and are "non-political party", are already beginning to appear in the eyes of the masses as not being their governments. In this country, which is in fact a protectorate of the European Union, the new ruling class is illegitimate and does not have at its disposition a military force capable of intervening against the population - except in the Republika Srpska (and it is also for this reason that dual power has not developed there) - such a situation can continue. Although at the beginning of February the High Representative of the UN had threatened to employ EUFOR (the military force of the European Union) to restore order, the European Union finally decided to temporize. Because "restoring order" - and thus integrating or suppressing the plenums - is all the more difficult because the "protectors" cannot legitimate either the elites of the Federation, whose corruption is now clear for all to see, nor those of the Republika Srpska, which partially escapes their control.

Nevertheless, the days of this duality of power are numbered: either the elites manage to put an end to it, or the vast majority of the impoverished population will impose its choices and will therefore have to create its own governments in order to implement them.

April 15, 2014

BRAZIL

"For the moment, a process of building new mass organizations and clear references to a new political project have not developed"

FERNANDO SILVA ·

JM - What is the situation today concerning the mobilizations in Brazil against the cost of the World Cup?

FS - In actual fact the mobilizations taking place at present in Brazil are much broader than the protests against the World Cup. Since the days of June 2013, when hundreds of thousands took to the streets in demonstrations in over 500 cities, a new situation has opened up, with the relaunching of major social struggles. For example: there are many more strikes for wage increases, many of them against the will of the bureaucratic union leaders; there are occupations of urban land and road blockades by movements fighting for housing; there are student strikes, struggles in the periphery against police repression, struggles of indigenous peoples affected by the expansion of agro- industry. And, of course, demonstrations in different cities against the money being spent and the crimes around the football World Cup.

At the present moment, on the eve of the World Cup, the most important struggles are the strikes in transport and education and the popular struggle for housing. These are very massive struggles, radicalized battles, paralyzing big cities, where the problem of urban mobility is very serious, and where a strike on the underground or the buses can be enough to cause problems for production in other sectors of the economy.

The World Cup has been organized almost entirely with public money (more than 26 billion reais, between the construction of the stadiums and the work on their surroundings, on airports, etc.). The vast majority of this work has not been completed,

which shows that money has been diverted towards the sinks of corruption. Billions of reais have been spent on the stadiums and have not led to any progress concerning infrastructure and urban mobility.

And if we add the fact that we are in a country where the public health system is existing on the brink of collapse, where fundamental problems of housing for all and basic sanitation have not been resolved, the expenses for the World Cup have been considered as an unnecessary luxury, a waste, a lack of respect for the situation of the majority of the population. It should also be taken into consideration that tickets for the games are expensive and that FIFA has imposed, with "the general law of the Cup," a real state of emergency. The result is that there is a critical attitude towards achieving the organization of the Cup, which is surprising, considering the relationship that Brazil has with football. In the most recent opinion poll, less than half of the population supports the organization of the World Cup in Brazil. That is very impressive in a country where football is part of the national culture.

How is the present PT government responding to this movement?

Basically in three ways: a) it has tried to intensify its policy of small concessions to the poorest sectors of the working class (a small readjustment of the "Family Grant", even lower than the rate of inflation, an increase in the minimum wage, even below what would be necessary), the announcement of partial increases in investment (on education and on urban mobility); b) it has organized an enormous repressive apparatus to contain the

demonstrations during the World Cup and adopted a tough policy of criminalizing protest from the legal point of view. To give you an idea, the federal government has spent 500 million reais in security for the World Cup (weapons, high-tech control and espionage). The army will be in the streets of the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro during the Cup; c) it is conducting broad nationalist propaganda and pro-Cup euphoria to try and convince people that the time has come to "make an effort" for the country, to make it a great World Cup, etc. Some media personalities have said that demonstrations should be left until after the World Cup.

The situation in the country is very contradictory, because although the population will follow the matches, given the huge interest in football in Brazil, especially in a World Cup, there is no euphoria here; there is a very critical state of mind, a great readiness to protest and demand. While I am giving this interview, less than seven days before the opening of the World Cup, a strike by underground workers has largely paralyzed public transport and traffic in São Paulo and about 20,000 homeless people (*sem teto*) have organized a protest at the gates of the stadium where there will be the opening ceremony of the Cup.

- How can the radical left here in France can relay mobilization of people in Brazil?

By spreading information about the social struggles in Brazil, and by denouncing the repression that is preparing to put into effect a real state of emergency in the cities during the World Cup. By taking advantage of this month's World Cup to explain that the social-liberal governments of the PT are not allies of the struggles of the working class, because what they are doing in Brazil is to govern in alliance with financial capital, with the major public works contractors and with industrial agribusiness. It is very important to help us by explaining that there is not a real left in power in Brazil, that the PT government is similar to what the governments of socialist parties are like in Europe, and even worse because the government here is even more dependent on and subordinate to financial

capital, and also very involved in agribusiness, among other tragedies, which is contributing to deforestation, the contamination of water and an increase the greenhouse gas effect.

- Does the social radicalism which has been manifested for several months in Brazil, particularly against the high cost of living, have a political expression?

That is a very sharp contradiction in the process. The June days in 2013 demonstrated an enormous erosion of popular support and a crisis of traditional political representation, including the trade unions, which are among the weakest institutions. But it has not developed, for the moment, a process of building a national leadership, or new mass organizations and clear references to a new political project.

There are sectoral and partial expressions such as the Movement for the "Pass Book" (free transport) (MPL), which became extremely important in June 2013 because it was at the head of the struggle for transport and for the reduction of bus, train and underground fares in São Paulo. Today the MTST (Movement of Homeless Workers) has gained a lot of respect and has established itself as a reference point on a national level, although it is stronger in São Paulo. But these movements are sectoral and they do not pose, or are not intended to be the axis of, the question of the formation of new structures of general leadership. In the political sphere, the PSOL is respected by these movements and among the radical political parties it is the one that can best engage with the demands of the street. But it is still very fragile, and it is torn by an internal conflict between two increasingly incompatible visions of the party. One sector (which has at present the majority of the leadership) is more and more openly reformist, and it has the bureaucratic practices of the old left; facing it, there is a broad left bloc which includes various forces of the Brazilian revolutionary left, which constitute half the party. These forces are usually much more open and tuned in to the demands of the streets. The proof is that it is the youth currents which are led by left sectors of

the PSOL that can fit better into the new processes and even conduct a dialogue with the distrust and the "autonomist" profile of the demonstrations.

The fundamental question is that there is a chasm, which is even a generational gap between the old and the new left. The youth, the younger sections of the population, were the axis of the protests in June 2013, and it is especially they who have been the driving force of the subsequent processes of mobilization. This generation has entered the political arena by the school of the streets and by seeing the PT in power. That is to say that in the eyes of the youth, the left is in power. Therefore, there is a very strong process of negation, there is a lot of mistrust of traditional instruments such as the party, unions, and concerning what exactly is socialism. We are still at the beginning of the remobilization of the movement in Brazil, with a break between the old and the new, but there are many uncertainties, because only the development of the process and good participation (not dogmatic and not "apparatus-centred") of the radical anti-capitalist left can begin to give shape to new instruments and a new political leadership that is able to relaunch a political project of a systemic break which has mass support.

- What are the prospects for the Brazilian left, especially with the elections in October?

It is still difficult to predict. In general, the situation is much better for an anti-capitalist left to be able to achieve greater visibility in the elections. The space to the left of the PT is an open space, but not a broad avenue. For the majority of people, the PT is still perceived as the lesser evil, given the fact that the alternatives to the right or the "centre" are ineffective or disastrous in the eyes of most people. On the other hand, there is mistrust or discredit concerning parties and elections, and this is very strong among young people. Surveys and analyses have shown that the forthcoming elections will be marked by a significant increase in abstention (even though voting is compulsory in Brazil) and in blank votes and spoiled ballot papers.

Furthermore, there will be no single candidate of the parties of the radical left and there is a danger of the PSOL having a profile of a very institutional campaign (if the line of the presidential candidate of the current majority does not change, which constitutes what I called above the representation of the old in the new politics).

Even with these problems, it is the PSOL which has been growing, including on the electoral level, since 2010. It is the party which is best placed to take advantage of this new situation and of the space that is open for a left critique in society, which is greater than four years ago. Maybe not so much at the national level (the presidential election), and more in state elections and for the election of members of parliament.

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS:

Europe adrift and an earthquake in France

FRANÇOIS SABADO ·

1. A massive abstention

This is a major trend in all the electoral consultations, in particular the European elections, and the party of abstention remains the biggest party in Europe (with an abstention rate of 57%). These elections confirm the massive rejection of the EU by the popular classes. Since the beginning, the peoples have been left out of the European construction reserved to the dominant classes, to the governments and the technocratic elites, but today the conjuncture of this type of construction and austerity policies which strangle the peoples leads to a massive rejection. This reveals the formidable crisis of political representation which affects nearly all the countries of Europe and opens a phase of sharp political crisis, not only in the European institutions, but in intra-European relations.

Abstention was particularly strong in the popular neighbourhoods, understandably when the European Union promoted by the governments signifies for millions of human beings more austerity, unemployment and poverty. In many cases this abstention boosts the scores of the populist or neo-fascist parties

2. The rise of far right, populist and neo-fascist parties

The most significant demonstration of this upsurge is the first place achieved by the Front national in the French elections. It is an unprecedented shock. The "French exception" has often been spoken of in European history to evoke popular revolutions and

struggles. Once again, there is a certain exception, but this time against the popular movements.

The Front national is rooting itself in French society. According to the polls the FN list attracted 43% of workers who voted, 38% of employees, 37% of the unemployed. The PS lists have attracted 8% of workers, 16% of employees and 14% of the unemployed. One young person in three voted Front national!

The rise of the far right or the "Europhobe parties" submerges the whole continent, but there is a "French exception", in the size of the FN results, but also because here is a breakthrough of the far right provoked by a very sharp political crisis. First because France is with Germany one of the two key powers of the European Union. Then because the rise of the FN is accompanied in France by a fall of all the other political formations. The traditional right is collapsing under corruption scandals. It is also undergoing an open crisis of leadership. Who can say what will happen to the UMP – the main party of the traditional right – in the coming months? The left, all tendencies combined, is at a low point in scoring barely 34% of votes expressed. We have passed from a bipolar situation to a tri-polar or tripartite one with the right, the PS and the FN.

But the progress of far right or populist formations is not confined to France: the People's Party in Denmark won 27% of the vote, UKIP in Britain came first with 27% of votes cast, the Austrian FPÖ scored more than 20%, without counting the "anti-Europe" parties – as in Germany, Poland or Sweden – which were strengthened. Finally we should note the overtly fascist organisations like Golden Dawn in Greece which won nearly 10%, or Jobbik in Hungary who beat the social democrats

with nearly 15%, who will also mark the political scene in their countries.

It is then a basic political trend, even if there were other scenarios. In Holland, there was a fall in the vote for the Islamophobic party led by Wilders which should be related to the economic upturn in the country, in Finland the "True Finns" fell back in relation to the 2011 parliamentary elections, in Flanders the far right Vlams Belang saw their vote fall, albeit to the benefit of the Neo-Flemish Alliance, pro-independence and conservative.

In Spain and Portugal, neo-fascist formations are non-existent which is explained by the deep popular rejection of the police state dictatorship after decades of Francoism and Salazarism. We note however the presence of an extreme right in Rajoy's Popular Party which, with the pressure of the Catholic hierarchy, explains the proposed law restricting abortion rights.

This general upsurge results from the rise of nationalism in a situation of economic crisis and historic weakening of the workers' movement. Social identity weakens in relation to national identity, class conflict gives way to the "ethnicisation" of social relations, racism infects mass sectors of the popular classes – "it is easier to attack an immigrant than a banker". This isn't the first time in the history of Europe that we have been faced with the rise of the extreme right. In the 1930s, the imperatives of a crisis which demanded the super-exploitation of labour to ensure the profits of the big capitalist groups and the need to contain the revolutionary upheavals linked to the propulsive force of the Russian revolution led the dominant classes to the fascist option.

Another indication of the tensions on the continent: the Ukrainian crisis and the possible national dislocations in central Europe could even bring to mind the nationalist confrontations prior to the war of 1914-18. Of course, the situations are not comparable and when we speak of the 1930s, we can today evoke the "1930s in slow motion", but it should be added that the configuration of the

world, the classes and the relationship of forces are not really the same. Unlike these historic periods marked by the nationalist options of the European bourgeoisies, the dominant classes today choose clearly integration into capitalist globalisation. There are no revolutionary threats imposing fascist solutions on the dominant classes, with violent destruction of the workers' movement and democratic liberties.

The specificity of the current situation over-determines a certain configuration on the forces of the far right depend. There is a whole variety of organisations. Some are completely integrated into the parliamentary game and have broken with their fascist moorings, like the National Alliance in Italy. Others are openly pro-fascist or even neo-Nazi, like Golden Dawn in Greece and Jobbik in Hungary. In northern Europe, these formations specialise in populism and anti-immigrant and Islamophobic hysteria. In France, the Front national combines "leadership" and the "neo-fascist matrix" with objectives of integration into the traditional political game which can create tensions and differentiations. Certainly the FN has evolved, both in terms of some of its themes and its leaders: this is no longer the fascist organisation of the 1980s, but this evolution has not involved a rupture with the neo-fascist origins and matrix, which means that on the one hand the FN is "de-demonised", but on the other includes openly fascist currents inside it or at its margins. The FN's rise provokes a double phenomenon: a pressure on the traditional right and space for extra-parliamentary fascist groups who attack the activists of all left forces.

We should also group in this category of "populists" the so-called "Europhobe" formations like UKIP in Britain, the German AfD, or the "Law and Justice" party in Poland. Across this nationalist and populist spectrum, there are sectors, fascist segments which in certain circumstances of sharpening of social and political conflict can go on the offensive against immigrants and democratic organisations. The situation in Greece, with the development of

Golden Dawn illustrates well the role of these gangs against the left and immigrants.

In another register, because the 5-Star Movement does not originate from the far right, Beppe Grillo obtained, as a formation openly identifying with populism, nearly 25.5%, which expresses the continuation of Italy's political and institutional crisis. He beat the right wing party Forza Italia, but first place was taken by the Italian Democratic Party. The eclecticism of its positions – the rejection of EU austerity policies, but also anti-immigrant positions – like its functioning shows that it cannot constitute the elements of a political alternative, while contributing to the Italian crisis.

The political result is that, whereas the dominant classes need in power parties or coalitions of stable parties seeking integration in the world economy – the parties of the parliamentary traditional right or social democracy – they have to deal with a profound political destabilization marked by the upsurge of nationalist, populist or neo-fascist parties. What would, for example, be the consequences of the rise of the UKIP in Britain if the referendum on European membership led the UK to exit the EU? What would the EU be without the UK? Would this not be the beginning of a dissolution?

The "well understood" interests of the bourgeoisie do not incline to fascism, but the multiple crises with which it is confronted lead it to orient increasingly towards authoritarian solutions. The dominant classes have other possible options than fascism to "regiment" the wage earners, youths and popular classes. The European institutions are anti-democratic; those of parliamentary democracy at the national level are emptied of their substance. The various interventions of the Troika in the south of Europe have shown how the national parliaments have been sidelined. These authoritarian solutions can lead to coalitions of the right and extreme right.

This long phase of economic, social and political decomposition of European societies, the historic crisis of representation and political leadership, the

worrying weakening of the workers' movement, the specific crisis of Europe, can now lead to unforeseen situations, sharp turns, accidents which propel the extreme right to the portals of power.

3. The traditional right

It suffered a reverse, but it has confirmed its majority in the European Parliament with 213 deputies against 190 for the European Socialist Party. In alliance with liberal and centrist forces, it will control the next Parliament.

German Christian Democracy continues to hold the political leadership of the European right. It inspires the policies and governments of national unity with the social liberal left in several countries. In numerous countries there are now coalitions between the right, centre and neoliberal left: Germany, Holland, Austria, Ireland, Greece, Italy, Belgium and Finland. It remains the axis of domination of the dominant classes in many countries.

But beyond these results, the traditional parliamentary right is weakened and fragmented. First on the question of Europe itself, between the forces who wish for optimum integration in the EU and the so-called "Eurosceptic" forces. In a number of countries it is under pressure from the extreme right.

The Christian Democratic, popular right, various centrist parties often top the polls, but the crisis saps the social, political and electoral bases of the traditional parties. These parties are no longer anything more than electoral machines. Faced with the pressure of the extreme right and nationalism, the right radicalizes and fragments: it radicalizes under the influence of the far right parties, notably on questions of immigration, which leads to internal differentiations; it fragments between a "hard right" and sectors which seek to ally with the centre, attracted by social democracy. Finally in France again the UMP leadership is tormented by corruption scandals which could lastingly weaken it, to the benefit once again of the Front national.

4. Social democracy

It has fallen back. It will not have the majority in the European Parliament. It took a walloping in France. Rarely in history has a French president had such narrow electoral support: less than 15%. It suffers defeat after defeat in all electoral consultations. It holds on only thanks to the presidentialist institutions of the Fifth Republic.

But more substantially, these elections illustrate the structural changes of social democracy in Europe. The current crisis has accelerated its adhesion to neo-liberal policies and the electoral campaign of Martin Schultz, supposedly "against austerity", has not camouflaged this reality. In a situation of domination of finance capital, social democracy, still concerned to respect capitalist equilibriums, has had to reject classic Keynesian recipes. The convergence of the policies of governments of the right and neoliberal left is manifest in the eyes of millions of workers.

In France the Bonapartist institutions of the Fifth Republic prevent the constitution of a government of national unity between right and left. But it is by an agreement between the government and the French employers, through a "pact of responsibility", that an ersatz policy of national unity is practiced. Faced with the crisis the essence of the forces of the right and social democracy converge to manage the crisis, in the context of the EU, respecting the interests of the financial markets and multinationals.

But beyond this sequence of crisis, the bases of social democracy are challenged. If the PS still maintains historic and politic links with the social democracy of other times, their social liberal mutation is on the verge of completion. The PS becomes the equivalent of the US Democratic Party, an instrument of bourgeois alternation. In this process, what remains of "social democratic origins" is en route to disappearance. Certainly the pillar of European social democracy, the German SPD, maintains its position, but it is subordinated to the CDU in the Grand coalition. Far from resulting from the choice of grand coalition alone, the SPD maintains its positions through the economic situa-

tion of Germany and its leadership in Europe. Where the parties have directly administered austerity policies they have experienced a process of collapse, like Pasok in Greece.

In France, the PS, led by Hollande and Valls, has suffered a crushing blow and there is a cumulative dynamic of defeats which can lead to a crash in the coming months or during the next presidential election in 2017. In Italy, to general surprise Renzi and his Democratic Party obtained more than 40% of votes cast. It has contained the rise of the 5 Star Movement of Beppe Grillo. Can these results be attributed to the capacities of initiative of the Italian Prime Minister and certain measures like tax cuts? It's too soon to say, but these European elections have strengthened a Democratic Party which no longer has anything to do with Communism or socialism in the social democratic sense, but is a bourgeois party like the others.

In Spain the PSOE fell back overall, its vote falling from 6 million in 2009 to 3.5 million. In Portugal, after years of exercise of power and a net decline, being in opposition has restored the PS electoral health, but in limited proportions.

This crisis of social democracy has produced internal differentiations, but few fractures or ruptures. In recent years, only the currents around Oskar Lafontaine in Germany or Mélenchon in France have taken the step of forming their own party. In general, the pressure is such that voices are raised here and there against this or that measure of socialist governments which practice austerity. There can even be changes in the leadership personnel, but no more than that. All tendencies assume the social liberal adaptation. At this stage, unlike other historic situations, the crisis has not crystallised genuine left currents inside the PS. On the other hand if there has been the collapse of Pasok, the other socialist parties decline but do not collapse. They can even bounce back in opposition against a discredited right. It will be necessary to follow what happens in the coming months in the PS in France, because the pursuit of austerity policies could take it into freefall.

5. The Greens

They confirm the reality of political ecology in Europe. They elected fifty deputies and scored around 10% in a series of countries like France, Austria or Germany. The systemic dimensions of the current crisis, the ecological crisis, the danger of nuclear power strengthen the Green currents politically. The Greens rely on an impressive network of associations and an ever greater integration in the institutional game which has led them to participation or support for coalitions dominated by social democracy. Among certain sectors of youth, the higher layers of wage earners or the petty bourgeoisie, the Green parties remain among "the most European parties" which gives them a social and electoral base. We should however note the volatile character of this electorate: in France, the Greens have lost more than 6% since 2009, after the withdrawal of Daniel Cohn-Bendit from the European electoral scène.

6. The radical left

It maintained its positions, with confirmations and breakthroughs in Greece, Spain and Belgium.

Syriza scored more than 26%. It is confirmed as an alternative government to the coalition of New Democracy and Pasok. Resting on mobilisations and networks of social solidarity throughout the country, it appears as the main political force of the country. Beyond certain declarations of its leaders which seek the way to agreement with the EU, it remains the radical anti-austerity force of the country. It is demanding early elections. Syriza is now faced with a choice, either it defends a consistent anti-austerity policy with cancellation of the debt and the rejection of all memorandums, or it cedes to the pressures of the Greek bourgeoisie and the European Union. In this battle, the left of Syriza which proposes a government of the left with the KKE and Antarsya will play a decisive role.

These results show that in the countries of southern Europe where massive struggles against austerity have developed, there is a form of political reflec-

tion with significant results to the left of the social liberals. In Spain, Podemos obtained 7.9% and 5 deputies. This breakthrough cannot be understood without taking into account the days of national mobilization, the white and green marches and the emergence of the movement of the Indignant. To this is added a political and institutional crisis of the political model put in place after the post Francoist transition of 1978. In Spain, the two party system has also been punctured by the scores of IU and Podemos. Together they scored more than 18%. Their results pose the question of their unitary relations. The strength of Podemos lies in its references to the processes of struggle and self-organization in recent months in Spain. This movement can play a key role in the reconstruction of a unitary social and political perspective which weighs on the whole Spanish left. It is a challenge for revolutionaries who are an integral part of this process. Let's add the good results of the PTB-Gauche d'ouverture which made a real breakthrough with 5.48% in Francophone Belgium. In these countries, the rejection of austerity policies is crystallized around anti-capitalist or anti-neoliberal forces.

The Front de gauche in France achieved the same score as in 2009, but this was well below what they had hoped for, inasmuch as Mélenchon had even envisaged that his formation would beat the PS at these elections. Die linke obtained 7.5%. The Communist Parties maintained their positions, indeed improved them as in Portugal – the PCP won 12% of the vote, while the Left Bloc only scored a little over 4 % – but fell back in Greece to the benefit of Syriza and did not obtain the results hoped for in Spain where Podemos competed on equal terms with the United Left.

The revolutionary left suffered some setbacks, notably in France where the NPA – deprived of electoral propaganda for financial reasons and present in only 5 constituencies out of 8 – scored less than 1%, Lutte ouvrière obtaining 1.4%. The NPA participates in the global decline of all left lists including in relation to the last electoral consultations. After

a significant role in the unitary demonstration against austerity of April 12 and despite a good campaign, it was unable to achieve a result corresponding to its role in the class struggle.

7. Whither Europe?

That is the question posed today. We are in a phase of weak growth or long term recession. If the governments and the ECB are given instruments to ward off a new banking crisis, nobody knows if one or several of the big banks could fail. How far will the demands for repayment of the debt bleed the economies of a series of countries of the South and intermediary countries like Italy or France?

At the political level, the crisis of leadership is total. Certainly, Europe remains the richest continent, but its weight in the world declines. The austerity policies, like the different trajectories of the European economies, aggravated by the crisis, tend to explode the European framework. Again, nobody knows, after the results for UKIP in Britain, what the consequences would be of an exit of this country from the EU. For sure, the power of the economic interests of the European dominant classes, the margins of manoeuvre that the government and the directorates of the big banks and multinationals have, and the solidity of the institutions of the European states contain the crisis. But the current type of construction of the EU, without real democracy, without social, fiscal, budgetary policy, without governmental cohesion apart from unending austerity policies, empties the European projects of their content.

It is to a great extent the weakening of the workers' movement which gives these margins of manoeuvre to the European dominant classes. Here again there is a contradiction between the choices of capitalist globalization of the key sectors of the European bourgeoisie and the rise of the reactionary nationalism incarnated by the neo-fascist and populist parties, but unhappily irrigating many other political formations of right and left. The formulas and proposals by Sarkozy to withdraw from Schengen express this nationalist turn. The proposals of economic patriotism or withdrawal from the "German Europe" also reflect the nationalist pressure.

Faced with the rise of reactionary nationalism, it is necessary, once more in history, to rally all the currents, associations, activist parties who oppose the populist or neo-fascist danger. The question of unity of action and organization in struggle as in the construction of a unitary anti-austerity opposition is central. It is also necessary to distinguish necessary unitary mass mobilization on the one hand and political or programmatic agreements which self-limit the anti-capitalist struggle on the other.

In this situation, it is necessary to redouble our efforts, to oppose social and democratic urgency to the austerity policies of the employers and governments, redouble the struggle against the right and far right, maintain independence in relation to social liberalism – no governmental or parliamentary alliance with the PS – and maintain an internationalist politics, breaking with the current EU, but defending a Europe of cooperation and solidarity of peoples and workers.

SPANISH STATE:

After the abdication of the king, it's time to checkmate the regime

ESTHER VIVAS ·

Since the elephant hunt of his "majesty" in Botswana, through the indictment of his son-in-law Iñaki Urdangarín in the "Noos affair" and the involvement of the Infanta Cristina in this case, and including the many operations on the monarch's hip, costing millions and paid out of public funds, the Royal House has become a caricature of itself. One of the main justifications of "democracy" is mortally wounded, but it is not dead yet.

The announcement of the royal abdication is a final, desperate attempt to save the situation; an attempt at a "facelift" with the aim of restoring legitimacy not only to the monarchy but also to its suite of judges, politicians and opinion formers. For years, far too many years, they have lived under the shelter of this false Transition, trying to efface or hide our collective history. Our forgetfulness has been the substrate of their victory, not only moral but also political and economic.

The economic crisis, transformed into a profound social and also political crisis, has put the king and the regime of 1978 on the ropes. People have said "basta". We saw it three years ago with the emergence of the 15-M Movement; with the spread of civil disobedience; with the occupation of empty homes that were in the hands of banks, and all of that that with broad popular support despite the

criminalization of protest. More poverty means more pain, but thanks to these mobilizations it also means greater awareness of who are the winners in this situation - the bankers, the politicians – and who are the losers.

The rising demand for sovereignty in Catalonia has also thrown the regime on the ropes, highlighting the deeply anti-democratic nature of a Constitution that does not allow the right to self-determination. Today, the European elections have given the "coup de grace" to a decaying regime, with the loss of more than five million votes for the PP and the PSOE and the emergence, with the election of five members of parliament, of "Podemos". The regime is becoming nervous, very nervous.

The royal abdication is the latest rescue manoeuvre. But we must nevertheless remember that the system still has room for manoeuvre. The abdication of the king illustrates the weakness of the pillars of the regime and the strength of the people. But we do not want Juan Carlos Felipe [3] either. It's time to go out into the streets to demand the opening of constituent processes throughout the Spanish State, in order to decide what kind of future we want. We must go on the offensive in order to checkmate the regime.

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