

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV481 February 2015

GREECE

SYRIZA, socialists and the struggles ahead

PHILIPPINES

The current political situation

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Greece Economy

Philippines
Germany
Hungary
European Union
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India:
Turkey
Spanish state

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

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PHILIPPINES

The current political situation

RAYMUND DE SILVA ·

Ninety days after the President signs the BBL into law, there will be plebiscite for the qualified voters whether they agree or disagree with the BBL in the identified Bangsamoro territory. Both the Aquino administration and the MILF with their Peace Negotiating Panels have been hopeful that the peoples in those areas will vote for the approval of the BBL. They (Aquino government and the MILF) do not even consider an alternative formula for peace just in case the BBL will not be approved by the peoples.

It seems that everybody is enthusiastic to set up the transition mechanism for the Political Entity – Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA). The BTA will be the MILF's way of preparing themselves for establishing the regular Bangsamoro government in June 2016. The MILF has already set up its electoral machinery called United Bangsamoro Justice Party (UBJP) to participate in the May 2016 National and Local elections.

The voices of those who have been opposing the version of BBL as submitted in Congress, especially the Indigenous People (IPs) within the core territories of the Bangsamoro, have been stifled and even forcibly silenced by assassinations of IP leaders. As of this writing there were nine (9) leaders and members who have been murdered. Seventy two (72) more are known to be on the hit list.

The overwhelming support of the Aquino Administration and its allies in Congress has drowned other voices who dared to raise their opposition to a non-inclusive peace of the Aquino government and the MILF.

But the January 25, 2015 bloody encounter between the Special Action Force of the Philippine

National Police (SAF-PNP) and the MILF's Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF) and the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) has changed substantially the views of politicians in Congress (including the Aquino supporters) and the attitude of peoples towards trusting the MILF in the peace negotiations with the government.

The SAF-PNP had tried to serve the warrant of arrest for the international terrorist Zulkifli Bin Hir or famously known as Marwan and his assistant Basit Usman in the middle of a territory claimed by the MILF and where the BIFF (MILF breakaway) as their camp. The international terrorist – Marwan was killed during the operation but forty four (44) SAF-PNP, eighteen (18) of the MILF-BIAF and five (5) civilians were also killed in the said operation.

Two vital issues have surfaced and became subject for big debates on the continuing police function of the PNP and the peace talks with its agreement on the mechanism of the proper conduct of ceasefire between the government of the Republic of the Philippines (GPH) and the MILF.

The January 25, 2015 violent encounter in Mamasapano, Maguindanao have caused indefinite postponement of the Congress' deliberations on the BBL. It has stalled the peace talks between GPH and MILF. It has also exposed the direct and indirect role of the US in the counter-insurgency campaigns of the Aquino government. It has opened up dynamics between the PNP and the AFP in terms of their different functions vis-à-vis the peace talks. It has created unfavorable space for peace and the immediate threat of a break-up of war between the GPH and MILF and lastly but not the least is that the incident in Mamasapano has rekindled the biases and mistrust between and among the three peoples in Mindanao.

Meanwhile, the popularity of the President has been further affected and so with the peace talks which has been closely connected with his term and his popularity. President Aquino has only more than one year left in his term as President but no one from his party or allies has been identified to replace him.

All geared towards May 2016 Elections

Before the Mamasapano, Maguindanao bloody police operation, Philippine media have been pre-occupied with issues on graft and corruption hitting politicians and personalities who have made themselves available for the 2016 elections. The object of the anti-graft and corruption campaigns is the incumbent Vice President of the country who consistently topped the surveys after declaring himself available to run for the Presidency. Currently, three (3) sitting Senators are detained because of accusations of pocketing their Countryside Development Fund (CDF) known also as pork barrel fund. It is not an accident that all the three Senators belong to the opposition. Two of them are identified with the Vice President and the other has expressed his intention to run as President under the political party of the former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo who herself is currently detained in a hospital because of corruption issues during her term.

The biggest problem of the Aquino administration is that they do not have a credible and winnable candidate who will continue the programs of the President. The chosen one at least by the Liberal Party – the ruling Party – Secretary Mar Roxas – the current Secretary of the Department of Interior and Local Government – has consistently logged behind in all the surveys. This is in spite, making all the available resources of his department and the government machineries in general at his disposals and presidential projection.

The period of first quarter is already critical for the Presidential race because in the last quarter, there will be filing of candidacies for the national elective positions. During this period, it is expected that political and electoral positions and machineries have

been set up. Political movements and re-alignment should be seen on the ground for strengthening of the rank and file of those running for elected positions. There should be rallying activities around a Party/Coalition with prominent figure as their candidate in order for the local candidates to prepare themselves for the coming elections.

Meanwhile, Vice President Binay, leads and continue to strengthen the United Nationalist Alliance (UNA) a coalition which will be the electoral Party for his Presidential bid. But for several months now, he (Binay) has been the subject of non stop Senate investigations (with full media coverage) on his alleged corruption activities since when he was a Mayor of Makati City (Commercial Center of the country) more than 20 years ago. His popularity rating has consistently gone down because of these daily attacks but he has remained on the top of all these surveys. This means that all those who have been subject for surveys (including the Administration's chosen one) have not improved their ratings either.

There is another candidate, who is busy going around setting-up his machinery nationwide using his advocacy for federalism to perform these activities. Mayor Rodrigo Duterte is a well known Mayor of Davao City (Mindanao) because of his no non-sense treatment of the criminals in his city. He has been known of using extrajudicial method in dealing with criminalities in his City. He has been posturing not too be interested in the Presidency but the reason is obvious – he will be the object of criticisms, especially his known records for human rights violations. But his actions speak louder than his words. He does not declare himself as a candidate but the people identified with him have been going around and setting up machineries for his presidential candidacy.

There is a neophyte Senator (got the number one slot in the Senatorial elections 2013) who showed high popularity rating (second only to Binay) in surveys in spite of her non-declaration of her interest to the highest elected position. She is the daughter of the late and famous actor who was the oppo-

sition's bet against President Arroyo in 2010 Presidential elections. Everybody knew that Fernando Poe, Jr., the father of Senator Grace Poe, could have won the elections but was cheated by Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Unfortunately he (Fernando Poe Jr.) had died after elections.

At this point, when it is only more than a year left for the term of President Aquino but his popularity rating has consistently gone down. His not being directly involved in graft and corruption practices in the government helps a bit but people have begun to have questions in his capacity to govern and manage the affairs of the country. The Mamasapano fiasco has magnified such Presidential weaknesses.

The Aquino Resign Movement

There is a group which called themselves National Transformation Council (NTC). This is composed of religious leaders and personalities. Their advocacy is to transform the government starting with the resignation of President Noy Aquino, the Vice President and all the Cabinet members of the current Administration.

The NTC will act as caretaker government until a regular election will take place. The acknowledged head of the Council is former Defense Secretary and National Security Adviser of the former Arroyo government Norberto Gonzales who is also currently the head of Partido Demokratiko-Sosyalista ng Pilipinas (PDSP). The NTC with the active participation for several Catholic Archbishops is calling for the President and his cabinet to resign even before the Mamasapano incident. The call has intensified after the failure of the police operation in Maguindanao.

The role of the Church (eighty percent (80%) of the country's population are Catholic) has been heightened during the visit of Pope Francis in the first weeks of the year. The Pope's concerns on the glaring social inequality in the country has put on the line the program of the President on the poor and his "matuwid na daan" (straight path) banner pro-

gram. The Pope has struck down the pro-poor program when he linked corruption issues to the deteriorating situation of more than half of the country's population. His famous saying..." that corruption has deprived the poor of the resources needed for them to live with decency and dignity..." has been as if directed to the Aquino administration.

The Pope did mention the value of families and the urgent need to safeguard them against social disintegration because of the high social cost paid for by families who are forced to work outside the country because of the need to earn a decent living. The Pope has pointed out the need to have dignified and humane employment which should be made available by the government.

The Pope has also pointed out that a peace in the South (Mindanao) can only be successful and sustainable if it is inclusive. The Pope had emphasized that the issues and concerns of the Indigenous People should be given due consideration in building peace in Mindanao.

The visit of the Pope is considered a big success that in effect it has given the Church a renewed energy for its evangelization work with the so-called poorest of the poor. Even after the Pope has long gone back to Vatican his much appreciated visit has been the talks and topics in town. Serious concerns have been raised on how the Aquino administration thru its Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) tried to gather all the street children and their families and hide them inside expensive resorts. This was done so that the Pope would not see them along the roads he had to pass. This kind of news had seemed to eclipse even the record breaking of the six (6) millions who gathered for the Pope's public mass. And it has put the current administration into defensive is normal because of its attempt of hiding the concrete realities from its important visitors such as the Pope, while pretending that everything is normal. This is reminding people of typical of the Marcos dictatorial period when beautiful fences were built to cover up and hide the houses and shanties of the thousands

of urban poor along the road where dignitaries and visitors would be passing.

Peace Talks with the MILF and the Mamasapano Encounter

President Aquino plans to end his term in June 2016 with the MILF Peace talks consummated. This means that the Bangsamoro government will be already installed and becomes functional.

The January 25, 2015 Mamasapano bloody encounter has definitely delayed if not all together frustrated the Presidential plan.

The mission of the PNP/SAF to serve the warrant of arrest to an international terrorist Zulkifli Bin Hir alias Marwan and his assistant Basit Usman in the middle of the claimed MILF territory could not simply be done without affecting the ceasefire and current peace agreements between the two parties (GPH and MILF).

The MILF has plenty of explanations to do why it allows those two famous terrorists to stay in their claimed territories. Given the nature and the dynamics of the MILF and its communities the reason of it not knowing the presence of Marwan and Usman would not simply hold water.

The Aquino government has plenty of explanations to do as well when it plans and implements its mission to make the arrests in a complex situation in Mamasapano. It (government) knows fully well that aside from the MILF there are other groups like the BIFF and private armed groups (Ampatuan) in the area. The PNP/SAF could not simply enter and serve its mission and get out without getting serious reactions from those armed groups. It would be understandable that it (SAF) would not coordinate with the MILF in accomplishing its mission.

The Aquino government would like "to have its cake and eat it too..." as the saying goes.

When the armed confrontation heightened and intensified, the PNP/SAF were practically left on their own to die serving their mission. The very

slow or even lack and late reinforcement during the decisive period when they (SAF) were still alive was a clear and deliberate sign that the Aquino government would prefer to save the peace talks with the MILF rather than save the lives of PNP/SAF. The timely intervention of the Armed Forces if the Philippines 6th Division and the more than three hundred (300) SAF members just very near the clash site would have save the lives of the forty four (44) SAF men but because there was no clear order to make the reinforcement those 44 SAF were simply butchered by the combined forces of the MILF, BIFF and private armed groups. And in fact, there was an order (direct from President Aquino) which they (government officials) not to escalate the military clash by introducing reinforcements so as not make MILF think that we are attacking them – thus, endangering the peace talks.

The remaining SAF officers and men were simply saved because the US which have been active from Day One of OPLAN EXODUS (the opplan to get Marwan and Usman) had to intervene so as to get the cut off finger of Marwan for DNA testing. That was why after the remaining officers and men of SAF were off the encounter ground, the SAF had to directly deliver/hand over the Marwan specimen to the FBI agents waiting at the nearest airport.

The MILF would claim that the Mamasapano clash was a misencounter because the PNP/SAF did not coordinate their operation with them. But their (MILF) not able to explain the presence of Marwan and Usman in their territory and the manner in which the SAF were butchered (finished off at close range) while recording the killings and sending these videos to the families of the SAF and to social media could hardly stand up the mis-encounter justification of the bloody armed clash.

Blaming the BIFF for the carnage is not helping either with regards to the MILF's defense of the so called mis-encounter. In fact, the MILF has to give satisfying answer on why it is allowing the BIFF moving around freely in the MILF claimed territory. Does the organizational solution on the previous massacres done by the leaders of the BIFF who

were once the leaders of the 105TH base command of the MILF? The 105th base command was once led by Umbra Kato who did the massacres on the civilians especially against the Christians and the Indigenous Peoples (IPs) as their reaction when the Supreme Court declared the Memorandum of Agreement on the Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) in 2008 as unconstitutional. The MILF's leadership was strongly asked to investigate Umbra Kato and Bravo (Lanao provinces) about those criminal acts. Kato simply has founded the BIFF and the MILF lost jurisdiction over him. Kato's second in command took over the leadership of the 105th Base Command with the same membership. It should be important to factor in the dynamics of people in this part of Maguindanao. Many of them are related with each other by affinity or by marriage.

There has been no justice serve on the victims of the massacres of the 2008 MOA-AD and Umbra Kato since then operate freely in the MILF claimed territory until he was struck down by sickness.

The Aquino government and its peace panel should have pursued this case because it surely has big impact in the peace negotiation. But the President and his peace advisers and panel intentionally became blind to this situation justifying their act as looking at the bigger picture.

There are obvious signs that the Aquino government should have been alarmed by the MILF and BIFF relationship. The fact that the MILF leadership has been comfortable having their arms manufacturing activities in the areas where the BIFF also operates is saying an important message and that is both have trusted each other. The government and its panel should have been seriously alarmed that the BIFF has openly declared thru its spokesperson – Abu Misry Mama – that the BIFF is affiliated with the Islamic States of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and willing to send fighters to places where ISIS has been fighting or willing to do their (ISIS) bid in the country. In the Mamasapano massacre the pictures of the ISIS' style execution of its victims (beheadings) can be related to the butchering done by the

combined forces of the MILF and BIFF to the wounded SAF lying helpless on the ground.

Such acts should be part of correcting the historical injustice which has been the battle cry of the MILF. Giving justice to the victims of the recent past should be delivering a positive message to the present generation that there is no selective justice in pursuing peace in Mindanao.

The extreme and very emotional reactions of peoples, especially the relatives of the SAF victims to the inhuman acts inflicted on their loved ones should be understood in this context.

In fact, an important reality which has unfolded from this unfortunate event is that peoples throughout the country have suddenly become interested in the peace talks between the GPH and MILF. Before the Mamasapano massacre, only those directly involved and people from Mindanao were interested in the peace talks but now it seems that everybody has to participate to make sure that the government will not sell out to the MILF. This phenomena can be observed from the North (Luzon) and in Visayas (Central) but most especially from Mindanao, even those who are outside of the identified Bangsamoro territory.

On the other hand those personalities and non government organizations and institutions who have been acting like non partisans during the pre Mamasapano incident have been exposed of their interests to have the peace between the GPH and the MILF even if it is very obvious that it(peace) is non inclusive and not done based on justice. Their self serving interest has been uncovered and that they have been after the peace dividends and they are making sure to get from the funds coming in for the peace agreement.

The murdered 44 SAF have been considered heroes and were given heroes welcome and burial in their respective municipalities throughout the country.

Peoples have put the blame on the present Aquino government for the deaths of the SAF men. This is the main reason why even if the President himself

appeared twice in national television to explain what had happened in January 25, 2015 and what was his role in it nobody would believe him especially the relatives of the 44 SAF officers and men.

Trust and confidence have been greatly affected in that single event. Peoples have lost their trust for the success of the peace talks with the MILF. The Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) which will lay down the legal foundation for the establishment of the Bangsamoro government has been put on hold (Philippine Congress had been deliberating on it for its promulgation) indefinitely. And since much has been put on the President's trust and popularity, it has gone down now. The peace talks have gone down together with the popularity and peoples' trust with the President.

People throughout the country, have now become active stakeholders of the peace process between the GPH and MILF. They are delivering strong messages that the peace which should be established will be the one based on justice, especially on the SAF murdered in Mamasapano and it should be inclusive not only the MILF but other Moro groups as well and the Indigenous Peoples and the Christians (Migrant Settlers).

The BBL and the Peace Process on Suspended Animation

Other groups like the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) have raised some questions on the correctness of creating a new law like the BBL for establishing the new Bangsamoro political entity. For these groups the Republic Act 9054 – a law which created the expanded Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) should only be enhanced. ARMM is the result of the 1996 peace agreement between the Philippine government and the MNLF.

The Aquino government and the MILF have considered the ARMM as a failed political experiment and this kind of status quo could not remain in establishing the Bangsamoro political entity.

In the agreed BBL version of the government and the MILF panels, lessons from the ARMM's failure

were not included. The socio, economic and political set up of the region should be studied deeper. The role of the Indigenous Political Structures should be factored in vis-à-vis the role of the elected political leaders based on the local government code. Even the influence of State machineries and its functions in the barangay or even municipal levels should be analyzed.

In many areas in the ARMM, the elected political officials could not be seen except during election or when they received their Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) which many of these officials considered as their personal budget. There are no banks or functional financial mechanism from the State machineries and therefore the main financial transaction are done through an informal economy and financing which are controlled by the local rich traders. Many of these informal businessmen are the government officials themselves or their puppets in the areas.

As stated above all of these government cum businessmen do not stay in their municipalities but have bought and built big houses in the cities and even in Manila.

These people/politicians stay and maintain their power because they also have arms and weapons and they have unwritten agreement with groups like the MILF to respect each other. Civil and Criminal cases are resolved through the Shariah courts. But it is the Council of Elders – respected peoples in the village of the municipality who would often times resolve the problem/conflict because the peoples trust and could freely go to them.

These facts could be seen from the ARMM experiences and they should serve as lessons to be learned and be put into BBL. The MILF is mainly political-military machinery and its structures do not have the civil society having a prominent role in its functioning.

The MILF has just formed the United Bangsamoro Justice Party (UBJP) as its main electoral and political mechanism towards direct governance of the Bangsamoro government. In the composition of its

official, the leadership and the key MILF leaders have taken up positions starting with Al Haj Murad Ebrahim, the Chair of the MILF has also become the head of the UBJP. Most likely he will be elected as the Chief Minister of the Bangsamoro government. This multi-task of the MILF leadership and personnel will be replicated down to the basic level of governance. Already the traditional politicians have shown interests to the new electoral/political party. They will soon have strong if not have total control of the Bangsamoro.

At this stage, a menu is prepared for a sure failed political institution.

The Mamasapano situation is a case in point here. The mayor does not have control over his municipality. He could not even go to all his thirteen (13) barangays. Aside from the municipal building there are schools in big barangays but no other government instrumentalities in town. The Mayor can stay in power because he belongs to the Ampatuan clan (grandson of the former governor of Maguindanao – Datu Andal Ampatuan) The mayor's brother – a suspect of the 2009 Maguindanao massacre – just like Datu Andal except that he avoided the arrest and now he led more than 200 fully armed group in Mamasapano both hiding from the arresting law enforcers and protecting the brother who is the Mayor. The MILF and the BIFF cannot touch the Mayor. In the same manner, the Mayor cannot go to the areas of the groups.

Important lessons from the MNLF- ARMM experience were never considered. Valid criticism were made to Professor Nur Misuari – the Chair of the MNLF when he got multi role after the 1996 Final Peace Agreement. He maintained his chairmanship with the MNLF. He accepted being the governor of the ARMM, he became the Chair of the Southern Philippine Center for Peace and Development (SPCPD) and held other various posts. He never shared important positions and tasks with other members of the MNLF leadership. He could not do all the tasks and roles at the same time as proven by concrete experience.

The indefinite postponement of the discussion of the BBL in Congress can give everyone the additional and needed time to deeply review its content in the light of what had happened in Mamasapano. The concepts of territory, citizenship, governance, resource sharing and generation, police and security, justice, etc will be analyzed by both houses of Congress without the pressures from the President and the executive just like in the pre-Mamasapano incident.

At this stage, it is definite that the BBL which will be passed by Congress will not be the version agreed upon by the GPH and MILF panels. The MILF Chair had already given a some sort of warning to the leadership of Congress that the MILF will not accept a watered down version of the BBL.

Representatives of the MILF had already delivered to the leadership of the IPs the message that they should trust MILF to consider their issues on Ancestral Domain and governance as long as the IPs would back down with their advocacy campaigns to have their autonomy within the Bangsamoro government.

After the Mamasapano bloody encounter, the MILF together with the Aquino government with its peace panel have become defensive. The families and relatives of the forty four (44) SAF/PNP strongly believe that their loved ones were sacrificed in the altar of peace of GPH and the MILF.

Peoples from the North to the South of the country do not believe the explanation of the President about his role and responsibility in the January 25, 2015 incident.

Definitely the popularity of the President and his government has become so low that the support of the peace talk with the MILF has been dragged with it.

Everyday, it has become crystal clear that the next President will be the one to handle the continuation of the peace process unless there will be extra constitutional move from within or outside the Aquino

government to either continue his term or his government will be replaced by a transitory government.

In the coming days, people will celebrate anniversary of the People Power uprising. Definitely calls for the resignation of the President and his government will be highlighted. There will be merging of different political and social movements to rally around the issue of Resign All – the stepping down of the President, Vice President and all his cabinet members. The Peace talks with the MILF will definitely be set aside at least for the moment.

Reactions from the MILF will be expected to be in the form of the Military actions (just like the 2008 MOA-AD). Proportionate reactions or moves will be implemented by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Movements on the ground towards this reaction can already be observed from the two forces.

Meanwhile, the investors will have a "wait and see" attitude and if the situation of war will intensify they (investors) will simply pull out and wait for another opportunity.

The Role of the US

In the last few years, China has been making its presence more visible in the Asia-Pacific Region. Together with its becoming the second biggest economy in the world (second from the US and displacing Japan) it tries to impose its presence in the Spratly islands claimed by the Philippines, Vietnam and other Southeast Asia countries and it is establishing its military bases in those islands e.g. construction of airports.

With this development, since last year, the US has declared its Asian pivot – which simply means that it will make its presence more than visible while it maintains its seventh fleet in the region. It will try to maintain its presence in places like Okinawa in Japan amidst intensifying protests by the Japanese people. With the re-election of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Abe as its Prime Minister, at least the US bases in the area will be secured for now.

In the case of the Philippines, the US has been able to continue its stay and is even able to enhance its presence in the country with stronger legal foundation. The already existing arrangement based on the mutually agreed document called the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) where it (US) does not have to build and maintain its military bases in the country but is able to go anywhere in the country for military purposes.

Now, the US is able to enhance its presence in the country through the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement or EDCA, where the US forces can be involved in indirect war against terrorism and other external threats to the Philippines. Both countries are able to provide legal protection to the US forces' presence and be embedded in the camps of the AFP. This is also to advance the implementation of the already agreed Mutual Defense Treaty. Such agreement includes inter-operability, capacity building, strengthening of AFP external defense, maritime security, maritime domain awareness, humanitarian assistance and disaster response.

US Involvement in the Mamasapano Incident

The police operation to get a Malaysian terrorist who is believed to be the bomber of the Bali resorts in Indonesia and series of bombings in the Philippines and his Filipino assistant – is called OPLAN EXODUS. The US forces' hands are everywhere from offering the prizes of their heads – Marwan has \$6 Millions and Usman \$3 Millions. The US provided the direct training activities of the selected Special Action Force Seaborne Company in a resort in Zamboanga City.

In the actual operation it has been known that there were four members of the US forces who stayed with the Operational Command in the nearby municipality of Sharif Aguak, Maguindanao.

Unmanned drones had been used to monitor the areas days before the implementation of the OPLAN Exodus.

And when finally the remaining 84th Seaborne SAF Company was extracted– the US through the FBI agents make sure to directly get the specimen of Marwan for DNA testing.

It was very clear that the US is only after the proof that the one killed was the terrorist Marwan- and nothing to help save the lives of the SAF/PNP personnel.

During the hearings of different Investigative bodies, especially the Congress, the President thru his Cabinet and generals have been trying to cover up the decisive role of the US.

But since the US role in the failed police operation from the point of view of the high number of SAF/PNP casualties but success in the US interest – Marwan's death was confirmed – the peoples have become aware of how the Aquino government has defaulted his basic role to protect its citizens and sovereignty to the US. The consequence of this treason like action of the President can never be underestimated.

The Meaning of Some Indicators of the Philippine Economy

The Aquino Administration has been boasting that last year (2014) it got high Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with 6.1% which accordingly second only to China. It got 6.9% in the last quarter of last year and was able to pull up the annual average of its GNP. The prime movers of the GNP increase were government spending using the money from what it (Aquino government) termed as Development Acceleration Program (DAP). This is the pooling together of different savings from the approved General Appropriated budget and spends it base on the Presidential discretion. Last month part of this DAP has been declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. The government spending includes the various construction activities and the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) which is the dole out spending of government where money is literally distributed to the identified as poorest of the poor.

The second biggest source of the GDP is the remittances of the country's migrant workers which is becoming bigger everyday. These migrant workers who can be located in almost all countries of the world have an average monthly remittance of more than 2 Billion USD which is more than \$24 Billion in a year or comprising almost 50% of the country annual budget for 2015 (P2.6 Trillions).

More than 50% of its labor forces of 45 millions out of 100 million total number of its population is either unemployed or underemployed.

More than 30 millions of its people considered themselves living below the poverty level if it will be based on the UN Standard of poverty level – \$1.50 daily earning.

The below 5% inflation rate is more a result of the decreased of the prices of oil and other petroleum products rather than the results of higher purchasing power of its consumers.

The other factors which contributed in the increased of the country's GNP are the service sector, Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), Manufacturing and Agriculture.

These contributions will surely be affected by this year (2015) opening of market of members of South East Asian countries as part of their Regional Market Unification and Development.

Even the big amount as contribution of the migrant workers will surely be affected by the very unstable conditions of several host countries, especially in the Middle East.

In brief the economic indicators can hardly sustain for the basic reason that they are not founded on industrial base capacity of the country. Its industries are mainly semi-process and extractive.

But what is clear is that the more the Aquino government announces the improvement of the economy the more number of the country's population are living below poverty level. In short, the more the Philippine economy has been said to improve the more people have suffered extreme poverty.

This is typical neoliberal capitalist in action in a country like the Philippines.

Conclusion

The unfortunate event in Mamasapano has provided a much needed wake up call for peoples not only Mindanao but the whole country as well.

Just as the peace agreement between the government of the Philippines and the MILF is about to be finalized by the approval of the BBL which will become part of the law of the land – the Mamasapano bloody incident happened.

The questions of trust and confidence on the MILF have been put in the open. Its (MILF) real role in the SAF/PNP massacre has triggered up debates in the sincerity and intentions of the MILF in achieving genuine and sustainable peace in Mindanao.

The coming in of investors even before the peace agreement is consummated is a concrete sign that what is at stake here is really the very rich natural resources in Mindanao which the national government needs to open up to foreign investors to further propel its neo-liberal project for development.

The peace agreement of the government and the MILF (if consummated) is getting the right to exploit what is left to the natural resources of the

country in Mindanao. This is the main reason why the right of the Indigenous Peoples (IPs) over their ancestral domains and the very rich natural minerals in them has never been considered. Their (IPs) opposition to their exclusion to the peace that the MILF and the government is bulding, has been considered as works of peace spoilers.

It took the forty four (44) lives of the SAF/PNP to stop the peace momentum engineered by the Philippine government and the MILF.

Revolutionary and progressive organizations and groups should take this rare opportunity to organize and rally the three peoples in Mindanao in particular and the country in general in supporting the right to self determination of the Bangsamoro which will not hinder and diminish the right to self determination of the Indigenous People.

Programs and activities should be geared towards the elimination of the national oppression without neglecting the full realization of the rights of other minority nationalities. Solidarity among the poor and the toiling masses of the majority nationality and minority nationalities should be established and strengthened.

This is the only sure way to build durable and sustainable peace in this part of the world.

GREECE

'Going on this way can only mean defeat'

STATHIS KOUVELAKIS ·

What is the symbolic importance of Syriza's victory?

Syriza's victory represents a historic turning point. It is the first time in European electoral history that a party of the radical Left – that is, to the left of social democracy – has won the elections and entered government.

Up till now, the only times that parties from this political family exercised governmental roles they were part of wider coalitions, and even that was in very particular circumstances. This unprecedented success undoubtedly marks a turning point, one that is all the more important in that Europe is in the grip of a social and economic crisis that has led to growing political turmoil.

Some have noted that in the countries of Northern and Central Europe far-Right forces and the radicalised Right are the ones benefiting from this. Conversely, in the peripheral countries, which have been subjected to the harshest austerity policies, it is instead the forces of the radical Left that seem to be raising their head. We see this in Greece but also in Spain and Ireland.

And that places heavy responsibilities on Syriza's shoulders?

Yes, indeed, it has very serious responsibilities. And this means that if it were to fail, that would have a really serious effect on the balance of forces in the period to come.

Since Syriza did not win a parliamentary majority, on the day after its victory it announced a coalition with the Independent Greeks (ANEL), a split from New Democracy. What explains this coalition, how has it been put together, and what do the electorate think of it?

There are two misunderstandings about ANEL that we ought to shake off right away. Firstly, it is not a far-Right party, as many media wrongly suggest. It is effectively a faction of New Democracy that has combined with a few people who have defected from other political forces, some of them from the Left.

In France we would call this kind of party 'sovereigntyist', though we should also bear in mind that sovereigntyist and patriotic ideas do not have the same meaning in a major power like France with a history of imperialism and colonialism, and a country like Greece that has been dominated throughout its history.

ANEL is a party that has taken a position against the Memorandum and against austerity policies – and it has done so on a patriotic basis. But it also represents a 'social' tendency that was once a constituent part of New Democracy, which, let's not forget, was up till recently a mass party with a popular electorate and a significant base among trade unionists.

The second thing to note is that there is no grand strategy, here. It was a pragmatic choice, corresponding to the given constraints of the current moment. Syriza knew that it would face a very difficult situation, and it needed a majority in Parliament.

Since the Greek Communist Party (KKE) has for many years refused any sort of political coalition with Syriza, the only possible allies were on the Right or centre-Right. And Syriza was sure to avoid the trap of allying with To Potami. This party is totally a creature of the system. It presents itself as a 'joker', ready to participate in absolutely any governing coalition.

Moreover, that is why foreign media constantly posed To Potami as an alternative, thinking that this party would force Syriza to make concessions. That is precisely what Syriza wanted to avoid, and that is why it chose to ally with a party that would not cause it any difficulties in its negotiations to get rid of the Memorandum. So if Syriza makes any retreats – as is the case at the moment – then it only has itself to blame.

The whole media campaign against Syriza presenting ANEL as a far-Right and xenophobic party – speaking of a 'Red-Brown' coalition, like [the Le Monde journalist] Mr. Quatremer, for example – sought to punish Syriza for refusing to ally with To Potami and thus to conform to the system's demands.

The reaction in Greece has been very positive, though. It ought to be understood that the opposition between supporters and opponents of the Memorandum has become the central dividing line in Greek political life, even though it has not erased the division between Left and Right. It made a lot more sense to ally with ANEL than with To Potami.

It's now a month since the election. What is your assessment of Syriza's record so far?

The new government has announced a first set of measures, expressing its desire for transparency and increased democracy. The changing of the nationality code – handing automatic Greek citizenship to immigrants' children born in Greece – is a considerable shake-up of Greek society's definition of nationality, citizenship and even national identity.

Another objective of these measures is media transparency, putting an end to the entanglement of political personnel and business interests linked to the state – a combination that often includes media moguls. That is not anything particular to Greece, as Berlusconi in Italy and Bouygues in France demonstrate, but in Greece it has reached really huge proportions.

The distribution of cabinet portfolios shows that Syriza was not going to give up any ground, at that level. Notably, the Interior Ministry was handed to a leading figure in the anti-racist movements, involved in struggles supporting immigrants; and the new president of the Greek Parliament, Zoe Constantopolou, is well-known for her fight against corruption and her involvement in the struggle for individual freedoms. So that sends a strong message.

From a social and economic perspective, the re-establishment of workplace rights – which the previous governments had got rid of – is another important measure that Syriza has announced, as are the re-hiring of laid-off civil servants; the re-connection of electricity for households that had previously been cut off; and the re-establishment of the ERT (public radio and TV). These announcements seek to demonstrate the new government's break with the previous governments' policies serving the Memorandum.

This set of measures – which correspond to Syriza's mandate and are meant to put an end to austerity policies – has quickly come up against the demands imposed by the European Union and the Troika. These latter have forced the Greek government into a series of retreats, paralysing the implementation of Syriza's programme. Only just after having been elected, the new government has run into difficulties that give us a glimpse of what a grave situation we will face if it fails.

What does the accord signed on 20 February tell us?

The agreement insists on the full and timely repayment of Greece's debts. Most importantly, it foresees the existing programme being followed through in full, which means the country agreeing to remain under the supervision of the Troika – or as it's now called, 'the institutions'.

Indeed, the Greek government has committed to not taking any unilateral measures that might endanger the budgetary objectives laid down by the creditors.

This accord thus neutralises the Syriza government's activity and its capacity to implement its programme. We ought to be clear – it keeps almost the entire Memorandum framework in place.

What explains such a rapid defeat?

Firstly, right from the start the European institutions exercised enormous pressure. This began on 4 February when the European Central Bank announced that it had stopped the refinancing of the Greek banks – because it no longer accepted Greek debt bonds – at the same time as there was massive capital flight out of the country.

Having been around €2bn a week, according to reliable sources capital flight hit around €1.5bn every 24 hours in the last few days. My information from Athens is that the Greek banks could not have opened on Tuesday if Greece had not come to an agreement with Europe. The ECB has blackmailed Greece in exactly the same way as it did Cyprus in 2013 and Ireland in 2010.

The Greek government is being strangled, exploiting its weakest link, namely, the banking system. There was increasing pressure on Greece during the Eurogroup meetings, in an effort to force it to accept the terms of the Memorandum. If Germany was the most vindictive country – and there is a degree of theatre at moments like this – the others were no different. No one took a stance against Germany.

Greeks saw some hope in France when François Hollande was elected. Did that country absolutely refuse to come to Greece's aid?

If you took a superficial view, you might have expected that. But you can't implement austerity and vote through the Macron bill [for economic liberalisation] and at the same time offer political help to a country that wants to break with austerity.

What are Syriza's responsibilities now?

We ought to be clear. Some of the debates that we have had in Syriza have now been resolved in a

negative way. The idea that we could break with austerity policies and yet avoid confrontation with the European Union has been refuted in practice. The majority tendency in Syriza avoided giving a clear answer to what would happen if Greece's creditors refused to negotiate.

Those who upheld this position also thought that our European partners would be obliged to accept Syriza's legitimacy and thus accept the Greek government's demands. And we can clearly see that this is not the case. The dominant tendency in the Syriza leadership has the illusion that it is possible to change things even within the existing European Union framework.

These institutions have shown their true face, which is the imposition of extremely harsh neoliberal policies and other policies leading to the economic and social marginalisation of entire countries.

What explains these 'illusions'?

There is a real stumbling block, not just a psychological barrier but also one that concerns political strategy. Like almost all the European radical Left, Syriza believes in the idea that it is possible to reform and transform the existing European institutions from within.

That's the whole problem. Syriza ever more clearly dug itself into a position refusing not only to break from the Euro but even to consider this a possible threat it could make during the negotiations.

And indeed we have seen that neither Tsipras or Varoufakis ever made use of this possibility. This tendency refuses to take full account of what the EU institutions and the integration process consist of – yet this is a process that has neoliberalism in its DNA.

These institutions were created in order to entrench neoliberal policies and liberate them from any kind of popular control. We cannot break with austerity policies and the Memorandum measures unless we mount a confrontation with the European Union, and leave the Eurozone if need

be. During the negotiations Greece showed that it feared 'Grexit' more than its interlocutors did, and that was a fatal error.

What conclusions ought we draw from this accord?

We could describe it as a major defeat for Syriza, possibly even a fatal one, and this failure affects each and every one of Syriza's components. The Left did not succeed in imposing its point of view, having been defeated by the leadership's strategy, ever since the 2012 elections, of shifting closer to the centre. The idea was that since we had already won as many votes on the Left as we could, what we now had to do was go in search of centrist voters.

This electoralist logic is mistaken, because given the extent of the social crisis the tendency of public opinion is not at all the strengthening of the centre ground. On the contrary, it is radicalising, and it is this radicalisation that explains the audience for Golden Dawn as well as for Syriza.

There is a really fundamental error of analysis, here. For a political force of the anti-austerity Left to give up on essential points of its programme can only lead to defeat. And sadly that is precisely what we are seeing play out at the moment.

The Syriza government will thus have no choice other than to administer the Memorandum framework. The small changes it can make will certainly be improvements, but they will not succeed in transforming the totally disastrous economic and social situation. This will disappoint the hopes and expectations that the popular electorate placed in Syriza.

Going on this way can only mean defeat. I think it is possible that Syriza could disintegrate, and that there could be a reconfiguration of the current political alliances. If Syriza continues with this policy then there is no reason why pro-Memorandum forces should go on refusing to collaborate with it. To Potami, PASOK and even a wing of New Democracy could do so – and it was precisely this latter that Syriza was giving a nod and a wink to

when it chose Pavlopoulos, a leading figure of New Democracy's centrist wing, for President of the Republic.

How might the Greek people react?

Syriza's victory gave the Greek people hope again. After the ECB started with its blackmail we saw people spontaneously heading into the streets to give their support to Syriza. The current retreat risks putting a stop to all this, leading to very severe disappointment.

Should we fear disappointed voters turning to Golden Dawn?

The current success of far-Right parties in Europe essentially owes to the fact that very large sections of public opinion see them as genuine anti-systemic forces. They seem more credible and more radical than the Left.

Thanks to the extent of the mobilisations between 2010 and 2012 the electorate that has broken from the traditional ruling parties has mostly turned to the Left.

Nonetheless, the possible recomposition of politics entails the enormous danger of us abandoning the terrain of challenging the existing order to the far Right.

Syriza has been forced to accept continuing with Troika supervision of Greece. This feeling of national humiliation is very important to understanding the breakthrough that Golden Dawn has made. Its rise is really a regressive nationalist reaction to this feeling of national humiliation, combined with economic and social breakdown.

European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker recently declared that 'There can be no democratic choice against the European treaties'. Are our societies – in Greece as well as elsewhere in Europe – really democratic?

The Juncker quote sums up the reality that we face. Since the 1980s the construction of the European Union has been the vehicle of neoliberal policies.

Neoliberalism is in its DNA, it is written into its treaties. Its underlying logic is constitutively anti-democratic.

It seeks to dissolve the instances of national control, establishing a detached supranational order freed from any mechanisms of popular control. And this is what has driven oppositional political forces to paralysis. Syriza's defeat faced with the

European Union is the most striking illustration of this – and also the saddest.

For any force that wants to oppose the dominant economic policy decisions, it is indispensable that they break with this construction.

23 February 2015

Translated by David Broder for Verso.

[See the original piece here.](#)

GERMANY

PEGIDA – an ultra-reactionary, Islamophobic and racist movement

MANUEL KELLNER ·

After this, an initiative in the name of PEGIDA ("Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes" – "Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West") was launched by one Lutz Bachmann, of Dresden, who became its spokesperson. At first only a few hundred came to the "Monday demonstrations" in this town in Saxony in eastern Germany, chanting among other things "Wir sind das Volk" ("We are the people"), a conscious allusion to the mass demonstrations in 1989 against the SED regime in the GDR. Then it became thousands, and by mid-December it was 15,000 (and even more according to some estimates). There were around 6,500 counter-demonstrators. The initiative spread to other towns and regions, and the movement was quickly at the centre of public political debate in Germany. Some politicians like Chancellor Angela Merkel distanced themselves from PEGIDA, seen as bad for Germany's world image. But many others said that "people's concerns should be taken seriously". What concerns? Unemployment, precariousness, increasingly grotesque social inequality, the destruction of our natural bases of survival? No, the concern with being flooded by an ocean of foreigners with Muslim "preachers of hate" and Islamic terrorists.

Lutz Bachmann has published a platform ("Positionspapier der PEGIDA") with 19 points of which points 1, 3 and 5 and partially 10 have the obvious

function of an alibi: to welcome refugees, house them humanely, assign more social workers to them and the affirmation of not being against "well integrated" Muslims living in Germany. But these points are not articulated by PEGIDA speakers at demonstrations, others are. Among others: the duty of "foreigners" to integrate themselves, a more equitable allocation of refugees inside the EU, more financial resources for the police to monitor them, the consistent application of asylum laws and expulsions, zero tolerance for criminal asylum seekers and immigrants, safeguarding and protection of Western Judeo-Christian culture and so on, and opposition to "gender mainstreaming" and the imposition of a "politically correct" language.

Far right organisers

In the public discourse and comments of the participants, all is much more robust. Refugees, Muslims, immigrants are the target of hate speech. The political world of the established parties is attacked as complicit with the Islamists and "foreign" elements. Refugees, according to Lutz Bachmann, live in luxury, while German mothers can no longer buy Christmas presents for their children. And Katrin Oertel, another member of PEGIDA's organising committee in Dresden, says that immigrants should "adapt to German norms, mores and culture" – which is line with the positions articulated by the last congress of the Bavarian CSU.

Lutz Bachmann is not too well placed to agitate against "criminal immigrants". He has been prosecuted himself several times – among other things for burglary, drug dealing, driving without a licence and having fled German justice by going to South Africa. In the organizing personnel of PEGIDA we

find several well known far rightists, including neo-Nazis. The organising committee of KÖGIDA, PEGIDA's subsidiary in Cologne, includes one Melanie Dittmer, a fascist since early youth, who believes the Holocaust to be an invention of the victors of the Second World War, and wishes to save Germany from a nightmare like that of London, where she claims the most common name for newly born children is Mohammed. The leader who announced the KÖGIDA demonstration of January 5 officially to the police, Sebastian Nobile, has long been active in neo-Nazi structures like the banned "German Defence League", which has good contacts with the murderous "Blood and honour" group, and in other far right organizations.

The counter-mobilisation

It should be said that even in Dresden, the number of PEGIDA demonstrators seemed to drop and the number of counter-demonstrators increase, and in other German cities, like Berlin, Munich, Münster and others, the number of counter-demonstrators was much greater. It was January 5 in Cologne which symbolized the reversal of things.

On that evening the Kölner Dom, Cologne's cathedral, was not illuminated. The lights were turned off for other churches, also, and for the chamber of industry and commerce, the big hotels and the Rhine bridges. The KÖGIDA demonstrators were only a few hundred, in the shadows of night, but the counter-demonstrators were thousands, at least 10,000 but probably more like 25,000 (the figure given by internal communications of police on the spot).

The difficulty in giving exact figures stems from the massive police intervention massive against the counter-demonstrators, dispersing them, erecting metal grills blocking the immense crowd seeking to approach the small group of KÖGIDA. But the mechanical pressure of the crowds was so impressive that ultimately the police advised the KÖGIDA demonstrators not to march across one of the Rhine bridges as planned and in the end not to march at all.

This was a catastrophic setback for KÖGIDA, to the point that its organizers said they would henceforth not demonstrate in Cologne. It is not by chance that after the Charlie Hebdo killings, KÖGIDA reversed this decision and said it would demonstrate every Wednesday in Cologne near the cathedral – while the organizers of the counter-mobilizations said they would respond with the biggest demonstrations possible.

A problem to think about

In Cologne, there are two united action committees which prepare actions against PEDIGA and any other racist and xenophobic demonstration. There are anti-fascist initiatives and left organizations, as well as trade unions like the DGB and the SPD. But it is the political (apart from the far right), associative and institutional world as a whole which appears as a united front on these occasions, including the traditional bourgeois parties and the employers' organisations.

And in Dresden, after the Charlie Hebdo attack, there was a demonstration of over 20,000 for tolerance, against violence, PEDIGA and racism, called by virtually everyone, including the regional government led by the CDU.

Of course, we can celebrate the fact that many more people were ready to mobilise against racist and Islamophobic acts than to follow the calls of PEGIDA and its ilk. But these PEDIGA demonstrations articulate a radicalisation of a whole layer of the population, often among the middle classes, who respond enthusiastically to the denunciations of the «"lying state press", the "parties of the bloc" (a subtle illusion to the legal parties grouped around the "leading party", the SED, in the GDR), the "corrupt bureaucrats and bigwigs" who do not respond to the aspirations of ordinary German people.

We should then discuss the possibilities of giving a more specific class and internationalist content to the anti-fascist mobilisations. It is the political forces defending the established order and the interests of big capital which daily create the reasons

for reactionary radicalisations. More precisely: who, by an inhuman policy and unacceptable words create themselves a propitious atmosphere for right populism and racist campaigns.

Apart from the vaguely humanist "politically correct" discourse, the politicians of the established pro-capitalist parties oppose PEDIGA and racist radicalizations with considerations on the importance of "well qualified" immigration for the German economy, to finance pensions and pay taxes – but PEDIGA itself talks about "good" well integrated immigrants.

While formally placing himself within the context of the great movement of national unity against PEGIDA and similar movements (he cannot contradict his own party leader who is moreover chancellor of the German government), Saxony's interior minister Markus Ulkig (CDU) has announced to the applause of the PEGIDA demonstrators the creation of new special police units "against criminal asylum seekers" and other "notorious malefactors" ("Intensivtäter").

An ultra right potential

This recalls the first half of the 1990s, when attacks on asylum seekers multiplied, solemnly condemned of course by a political world which nonetheless implemented the main demands of the racist crazies and transformed the right of exile incorporated in the "Grundgesetz", effectively Germany's constitution, into a "right" granted only grudgingly. Something similar is being prepared now: a rhetoric of fine words which accompanies a hardening of the already extremely restrictive treatment of the small number of refugees who succeed in getting to Germany despite the murderous fortress put there to keep them out.

The PEDIGA mobilizations did not fall from the sky. Before them, in Germany, there were a great number of racist actions and mobilizations directed against refugees. From January to November 2014, the figure for refugees in Germany rose to 130,000. Even if the data show that the disposition to racist

radicalisation does not depend on the amount of refugees or their share of the population (in Dresden, for example, both figures are especially low), it is true that there was in 2014, a great number of actions against the lodging of refugees in wealthy neighbourhoods as well as poor ones, in the west as in the east of Germany. Often, they were mounted together by the German inhabitants of the neighbourhoods and organized far right and neo Nazi forces.

The association "Pro Asyl" counted 220 mobilizations directed against refugees from January to November 2014, and in the same period 31 acts of vandalism against them, 24 incendiary attacks against their places of habitation and 33 physical attacks against specific refugees.

Opinion polls show the rise of racist, xenophobic and Islamophobic prejudices in the German population. In 2011, 25.8% were strictly against a less restrictive treatment of asylum seekers, in 2014 it was 76%. In 2011, 30.2% felt themselves "a foreigner in their own country" because of the large number of Muslims; in 2014 it was 43%. Now, a majority of 55.9% think that Roma have criminal tendencies, while in 2011 it was still a (significant) minority of 42%.

One can estimate at 12% the hard core far right potential in Germany (and the Die Linke party and other smaller left parties and organizations have about the same potential), ready to mobilize in demonstrations, if they are not too far from their respective residences. Only a part is ready to vote for the ultra-conservative, ultra-neoliberal and right populist AfD (which according to the Forsa institute, is polling about 5% in terms of voting intentions). Some members of this party seek to collaborate with PEGIDA, and its leader Bernd Lucke (an ultra free market economics lecturer) has said on his Facebook page that PEGIDA's demands were "legitimate". But both he and his associate Olaf Henkel (former president of one of the two big employers' associations), are taking their distance in relation to PEGIDA, for fear of losing their serious image among bourgeois liberal and conservative

voters. Others to their right in the AfD revolt against this distancing, and this gives a crisis of leadership in the party.

PEDIGA is an attempt to break the isolation and dispersion of the far right to achieve significant mo-

bilisations and break from the image of right wing extremism to appear as a force rooted "in the midst of German society". It is quite possible that this initiative will ultimately founder – but it will certainly not be the last one.

GERMANY

Where does Pegida come from?

MANUEL KELLNER ·

According to a study carried out by a team around the political scientist Hans Vogtländer of the Technical University of Dresden [1], the typical Pegida demonstrator lives in Dresden or Leipzig and is aged around 50, draws an income slightly above the average and does not feel linked to a specific religious grouping or political party. The representative nature of this study is doubtful, since two thirds of those questioned chose not to reply to the questions.

According to sources originating from the Antifa milieu (far left and radical left), the NPD (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, a well organised party of the traditional far right) gave the signal not to talk to the press – the "lying press" ("Lügenpresse") and "the system" are the current expressions taken from the historic Nazis used by far right circles as well as by a number of the organisers and participant in the Pegida demonstrations. If so, that confirms the influence of the far right within Pegida. However, it also invalidates the results of the study in question, since only a minority responded to the questions.

The extremism of the milieu

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of December 24, 2014 evoked a more profound study on Islamophobia in Germany based on a representative telephone poll carried out by Heinz Bude and Ernst-Dieter Lantermann from the university of Kassel in 2011 at the initiative of the *Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung* [2]. All those of a clearly Islamophobic tendency were particularly proud of their German ancestry and are particularly mistrustful of the state and its institutions. But within

this there are three distinct groups with different characteristics.

The first group represents the "extremism of the milieu" for the authors of the study. Those in this group are sure of themselves and believe they have realised their aspirations in life. 38% of them have impression of being among the "winners" from the economic development of recent years (against 14% who see themselves as losers). However, more than half are pessimistic about the future. They want a society again based on the traditional values of discipline, security and professional performance and a return to clarity in social life, without disturbance from those who think and live differently. Satisfied with themselves, they judge others harshly, and fear their situation could deteriorate. 50% of those in this group are aged 50 or more, 14% 30 or less. This group represents 9% of the population.

Those in the second group live in precarious social and financial situations, with little training or education and are less sure of themselves. They have not realised what they wanted in life and more than two thirds of them believe they never will. More than half of this group think they have lost out in relation to recent economic development. Those in this group fell socially marginalised and fear becoming victims of a growing "foreign" part of the population. 63% of them are over 50, 11% less than 30. This group represents about 13% of the population.

The members of the third group are well educated and trained. They feel themselves socially recognised, but nonetheless live in precariousness. They have the impression that they have done gained what they deserve. 43% of them feel they have lost out from economic development, and 72% are profoundly pessimistic about the future. They are "open" to other cultures, but not to the Muslim

world. 71% of those in this group feel that Muslim culture has no place in the Western world, nearly half wish to limit Muslim immigration and nearly a third wish to ban any public demonstration of the Muslim religion in Germany. In this group, half are aged 50 or more and 17% 30 or less. 13% of the German population are in this group.

Radicalised petty bourgeoisie

The social base of the historic Italian fascists and German Nazis was primarily petty bourgeois. It isn't necessary to be poor and precarious to be part of the potential for populist mobilisations of the right and far right. But precariousness and the fear of social decline play their roles. Also there is a specificity to racist prejudices against the Muslim world.

The middle classes tend to be in the camp of the probable winners. It is then a workers' movement on the defensive for decades and the continuing crisis of credibility of socialist and emancipatory responses to serious social and economic problems which feed the potential of far right initiatives and reactionary radicalisations. The price to pay for the decline of revolutionary hope is the rise of counter-revolutionary despair.

It is true that some *déclassé* elements inside the working class have joined the camp of petty bourgeois revolt, and it is true also that in Germany neo-Nazis have attempted to break through among unionised youth milieus in a number of industrial enterprises. However, the fundamentally petty bourgeois character of the far right potential remains.

It is then important that the fight against this tendency combines the broadest possible unity of action against the far right and right populist mobilisations with an explicit critique of the established policies with relation to the treatment of refugees and immigrants as in the social and imperialist foreign policy areas. We should stress the true conflicts of interests and contrast them with the purely ideological and illusory conflicts.

Specificity of Dresden?

It is true that in Dresden the Pegida movement has had some spectacular successes in mobilisation. Why? Germans call Dresden "the valley of the ignorant" ("Das Tal der Ahnungslosen"). This is because West German television could not be received in Dresden at the time prior to the overthrow of the GDR. Leipzig saw the mass demonstrations every Monday against the regime of the SED (the single ruling party under the GDR). In Dresden, passivity was the norm.

Juliane Nagel, the sole Saxon deputy for the Die Linke party, who won his seat in the state parliament by direct election in his constituency, has attempted an explanation [3]: The inhabitants of Dresden experienced the rule of the SED, and then after 1990 the uninterrupted rule of the CDU at the head of various coalitions. It was also quite an authoritarian regime, characterised for example by a more severe repression against far left anti-fascists than elsewhere in Germany. For Nagel, this created propitious conditions for the development of the Pegida/Legida movement.

The CDU is especially right wing in Saxony. The minister-president of the Land of Saxony, Stanislaw Tillich, has proclaimed the need for "dialogue" with the Pegida demonstrators, while responding to chancellor Angela Merkel's statement that Islam was part of Germany (a statement she was quick to relativise) that if so, it wasn't part of Saxony. Also Dresden has for a long time been the scene of very strong far right mobilisations on February 13, the anniversary of the Allied bombing of the city near the end of the Second World War.

The official government policy has already decided to implement a number of the demands of the Pegida demonstrators. For example, the Saxon minister of the interior has stated that Tunisia will be declared a "safe" country so as to deny any claim for asylum for refugees from that country. Also the general secretary of the CDU in Saxony has said it is necessary to "revise" asylum rights as a whole.

Juliane Nagel points to a manifest cooperation of the Pegida movement with the right populist AfD in Dresden. The leadership of the AfD in Dresden is opposed to the federal AfD leadership represented by Bernd Lucke. It does not wish to reduce the party's profile to opposition to the Euro, and wants to

exploit the themes dear to those radicalising to the right: action against refugees, against "unassimilated" immigrants and against Muslims. There is a manifest continuity, at least in Saxony, between the right wing of the CDU, the AfD, Pegida, the NPD and militant Nazi circles.

HUNGARY

Hungary's war on women

ANDREW RYDER ·

A public service announcement (PSA) produced by the Hungarian government has provoked worldwide outrage by placing the blame for sexual assault on survivors. The video depicts young women dressing provocatively, drinking and dancing, with the consequence of an attack by a stranger, before ending with the words, "You are responsible. You can do something about it."

The media initiative coincided with a statement issued by police in Vas County on November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, warning women that flirting might be expected to "elicit violence."

Justifiably outraged, Hungarian feminists were quick to respond. Keret, a consortium of Hungarian women's rights organizations, issued a letter of protest titled "Clothes Do Not Make the Victims!" In this statement, Keret says that the broadcasts are produced by "misogyny and contempt for women," that the video propagates misconceptions, and that the government's claims are incompatible with international human rights standards and Hungary's commitments to these.

SlutWalk Budapest organized a November 30 demonstration that began at 3:30 in the afternoon at Déak Ferenc Square with scores of protestors demanding that the Hungarian government abandon its deplorable campaign and replace it with one that raises awareness about the facts regarding rape and the rights of survivors.

SlutWalk is a movement of protest marches that first occurred three years ago in Toronto, Ontario, in response to comments by a police officer who suggested a woman's choice of dress was a primary cause of sexual violence. Demonstrations inspired

by the Toronto protests have subsequently taken place in cities all over the world.

These protests explicitly counter the message conveyed by the Hungarian PSAs that victims of assault are themselves responsible for the acts of violence committed against them, simply as an effect of their dress or behavior. As Jen Roesch wrote during the initial outpouring of SlutWalk events:

We should reject outright the victim blaming that says a woman "asked for it" if she dresses a certain way or has had previous sexual partners. But we must go further and build an anti-sexist movement that can empower women to confidently accept or refuse sex according to their own desires—and create the kind of culture in which men understand and respect the difference.

The content of the videos is so blatant in its illustration of what feminists have named "rape culture" that many viewers initially react with disbelief. It is actually somewhat rare to find such an explicit attempt to force women to police themselves—all under the guise of protecting them. For this reason, it is worth considering the ideology that the Hungarian state wishes to disseminate, and how this is related to its larger political agenda.

FIRST, THE video presents the perpetrator of violence as an "outsider." This provides a valuable function for the right-wing populist worldview developed by the ruling party of Hungary, Fidesz. The state has an interest in encouraging fear of those who are different or unfamiliar. As Roesch explained in this speech:

When rape and sexual assault become defined primarily as issues of criminality, it becomes exceedingly difficult to define that outside the boundaries

of how society defines it. The typical criminal once again becomes the stranger on the street, usually black, brown or poor.

However, the main purpose of the video seems to be regulating and disciplining the behavior of women. But why has this become a state priority at this particular time? The video must be placed in the context of the conditions facing women in Hungarian society as a whole. For example, between 2006 and 2014, Hungary's place in the World Economic Forum's gender-equality ranking fell from 55 to 93.

Responsibility for this decline lies squarely with the policies of the ruling party, which has maintained a two-thirds supermajority since 2010. Fidesz's rule has resulted in savage cuts to the system of social provisioning, amounting to what economist Zsuzsa Ferge has justly described as a "war on the poor."

In the words of Tithi Bhattacharya, "the changes that take place in the dynamics of social provisioning and the extent to which it can or cannot take place within the enclosure of 'safe' spaces also determine the contours of gender relationships." The state's refusal to provide basic needs for food and shelter effectively outsources these requirements to women, who are expected to "naturally" provide care labor without cost to capital.

In order to achieve this, the state must advocate an ideology of traditional femininity, according to which women are "responsible" and "self-sacrificing." For this reason, it won't come as a surprise that the elimination of social provisioning by Hungary's right-wing populists also coincides with a fervent new push for "Christian values," interpreted by the party in highly traditional, chauvinist and patriarchal terms. The PSAs, then, are a propa-

ganda effort by the state-owned media to enforce this role by means of terror.

In recent months, a series of popular protests have countered the initiatives of the Hungarian state. Protesters first got a taste of their power when they forced the government to abandon its plans for an Internet tax. Subsequently, large demonstrations have taken place against corruption and against cuts to retirement funds.

For this reason, the gap between state policies and the actual needs of the Hungarian people is especially evident. The popular resistance to the government's backwards campaign against sexual violence is a further example of a growing anger at Hungary's authoritarian capitalist state. The victim-blaming television spots are of a piece with other governmental abuses of power, because they are part of a unified strategy of centralized authority and indifference to the social costs of capital accumulation.

In response, it is necessary to build solidarity among all of the popular movements that reject the authoritarian populism that presently monopolizes state power in Hungary. These struggles can only achieve their goals by recognizing a common affinity. Five years ago, G.M. Tamás, a Hungarian Marxist intellectual, put it this way:

Reaction is teaching East Europeans how these struggles hang together. We are learning our lessons the hard way. We don't need to be told that socialists and feminists, gay and lesbian activists, minority-rights campaigners and trade unionists belong together because we all are being clobbered by the same enemy.

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GREECE

Is Syriza Retreating?

STATHIS KOUVELAKIS ·

To use a worn-out cliché, "the times are critical." In fact, they are more than just that: we are at the edge of a crucial temporal sequence. The whole endeavor of a Syriza government will be judged by its reaction to the unprecedented blackmail and ultimatums it is receiving from its tragically misnamed European "partners."

And the news from the frontline is not pleasant. To be sure, it is very difficult to have a clear view of the current status of the negotiations — "negotiations" being a oxymoron given the sheer asymmetry in the balance of forces, and the fact that one side has a gun (the European Central Bank's) pointed at its head. What is clear, however, is that the Greek government has backtracked on crucial aspects, especially concerning its commitments towards the people that brought it into office.

Before examining the substance of the request for an extension of the "Master Financial Assistance Facility Agreement" submitted on Wednesday by the Greek government to Brussels, let's have a closer look at the "Moscovici document" leaked by the Greek government during the Eurogroup meeting last Monday, which it has declared itself willing to sign.

This document rules out "unilateral action," sets primary surpluses of an undefined volume as a budgetary target, and recognizes the entirety of the debt. All future adjustments made concerning the restructuring of the debt will have to be in line with the Eurogroup's decisions in November 2012.

Essentially, the implementation of the fundamental measures of Syriza's Thessaloniki election program is made subject to the prior approval of the lenders, effectively amounting to the program's annulment.

Additionally, it recognizes the odious terms of the lending agreements, thereby further weakening the Greek negotiating position on the matter. It is obvious that by accepting such a framework as a supposedly "honorable compromise," the Syriza government is having its hands tied.

The request for an extension of the Master Financial Assistance Facility Agreement includes all of the above-mentioned points and adds to those — for the first time — the recognition of "the supervision under the [European Union] and ECB framework and, in the same spirit, with the International Monetary Fund for the duration of the extended Agreement (point f)." In other words, the troika is back but with a different name. The Greek media has already started talking about "the Institutions."

But even that is not enough for the EU and German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble. Having understood that the Greek side — eager to avoid any rupture and even any unilateral move — is on a constant path of retreat, the "partners" have opted for total surrender as their primary aim.

By teaching the Syriza government a lesson, they simultaneously issue a warning to Podemos and any other force in Europe that may attempt to challenge austerity, the memoranda, and debt peonage. The German side has either way rejected the Greek request for the Master Financial Assistance Facility Agreement, apparently aiming for further Greek concessions and the full humiliation of the Greek left-wing government.

And herein, maybe, lies hope. It can't be ruled out that the escalating demands of the EU and the lenders will be rejected by a government that has undertaken some basic commitments to its people. And, more importantly, that they will be rejected by a people that is believing in hope again and taking

to the country's streets and squares. A retreat should not be treated as unavoidable, and the Greek government deserves support to the extent that it holds firm in the war unleashed against it.

Whatever the conclusion, one thing is certain. All the reassuring arguments that have circulated in the past few years — about a European "bluff," about the possibility of overthrowing austerity within the eurozone framework, of separating lending agreements and memoranda, of solutions in the

lines of the 1953 London conference on the German debt (that is, of a favorable restructuring for the borrower agreed by the lender) — in other words, the constituent elements of the narrative of the "good euro" — have all collapsed.

At some point, we are owed explanations about all this as well.

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Jacobin

EUROPEAN UNION

Syriza and Podemos: the way towards power for the People?

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

In fact, the question is faced by any left-wing movement that forms a government in a capitalist society. When an electoral coalition or left-wing party arrives in government, it does not hold the real power: economic power (via the possession and control of financial and industrial groups, the major private media, large-scale commerce, etc.) remains in the hands of the capitalist class, the "richest 1%" (not even!, it is less than 1% of the population). Moreover, this capitalist class controls the State, the legal apparatus, the ministries of the Economy and Finance, the central bank, etc. In Greece and Spain, as in Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela or Chile [2], a government determined to carry out real structural changes has to enter into conflict with the holders of economic power in order to weaken and then do away with the control by the capitalist class of the major means of production, services and communication, and of the State apparatus.

Let us attempt a historical comparison. After 1789, when, by means of the Revolution, the Bourgeoisie took over political power in France, it already held the economic power. Before achieving political power, the French capitalists were the King of France's creditors and owners of the main levers of economic power (banking, commerce, manufacturing and some land). After coming to political power, they expelled the representatives of the former ruling classes (the nobility and clergy) from the State apparatus, and dominated them or merged

with them. The State became a well-oiled machine serving the accumulation of capital and profits.

Unlike the capitalist class, the People is not able to take economic power if it does not accede to government. It is not possible for the People to repeat the progressive ascension towards power achieved by the Bourgeoisie in the context of Feudal Society or small-scale merchandise production. The People does not accumulate large-scale material wealth, and does not direct the industrial firms, banks, major commerce or other services. It is on the basis of political power (i.e. government) that the People can endeavour to transform the economic structure and begin the construction of a new type of State based on self-management. By holding the reins of government, the Left can access the institutional, political and financial levers required to initiate profound changes in favour of the majority of the population. The essential preconditions for the whole process are the self-organisation of the People, and self-activity in the public sphere and in the workplace.

In order to carry out real structural changes, it is of fundamental importance to set up an interactive relationship between the left-wing government and the People.

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The latter needs to increase its level of auto-organisation and construct grass-roots organisations of popular power and control. This interactive, dialectic relationship can become conflictual if the government hesitates to put in place the measures demanded by the grass roots. The People's support

for promised change and the pressure the People can exert are vital for convincing a left-wing to further pursue the process of structural change, involving the radical redistribution of wealth in favour of those who produce it. It is also vital for defending the government from creditors, from the holders of the previous regime, from the owners of the major means of production, and from foreign governments. Achieving structural changes involves ending capitalist ownership in key areas such as finance and energy by transferring them to the public sector (public services under citizen control) and also supporting or reinforcing other socially beneficial forms of ownership: small private properties (particularly for agriculture, small-scale industry, shops and services), cooperative ownership, and collective ownership based on free association [3].

In two of the three South American countries mentioned above (Venezuela in 2002-2003 [4] and Bolivia between 2006 and 2008 [5]), the government was in open conflict with the capitalist class [6], but the decisive structural changes to the economic system have not (yet) been carried out. The societies of these countries remain clearly capitalist [7] . There has been obvious real progress in favour of the People: adoption in all three countries of new constitutions resulting from profoundly democratic constitutive processes (election of a constitutive assembly by universal suffrage; drawing up of a new constitution adopted by the constitutive assembly after broad national debate; referendum to approve the new constitution); broad-based public re-control of natural resources [8]; increased taxation of the very rich (particularly in Ecuador) and major national and foreign private companies; significant improvements to public services and their objectives; reduction of social inequalities; strengthening of the rights of indigenous peoples; recovery of national dignity with respect to the great powers, in particular the United States.

We can only understand the politics of these countries if we take into account the great popular protests that have punctuated their history. In

Ecuador, four right-wing presidents were forced to abandon power between 1997 and 2005 due to large-scale protests. In Bolivia, major battles against water privatisation took place in April 2000 and late 2004. Protests concerning the privatisation of natural gas in October 2003 led to the fall of President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, who fled the country (to the United States). As early as 1989, Venezuela was swept by considerable popular struggles, which inaugurated the major combats against the International Monetary Fund that shook the planet during the 1990s and early 2000s. But there were even more spectacular events to come, with the huge popular protests of 12 April 2002, spontaneous demonstrations of the rejection of the putsch against Hugo Chavez. These protests led directly to Chavez returning to the Miraflores presidential palace the very next day.

The democratic political changes in these three countries are systematically left unmentioned in the press of the most industrialised countries. On the contrary, a denigration campaign is systematically orchestrated in order to present the three countries' heads of state as populist and authoritarian leaders.

The experiences of these three Andean countries in adopting new constitutions are highly pertinent. They should be a source of inspiration for the peoples and political movements of other countries. Just compare the situation with that of Europe, with the lack of democratic procedure concerning the adoption of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 or the TSCG in 2014. That said, the new approaches being tested out in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador are also subject to contradictions and significant limitations, which need to be analysed [9].

Major popular protests are a decisive factor for the existence and survival of left-wing governments. We could of course also speak of the great popular protests of 1936 in France, which led Léon Blum – who would otherwise have contented himself with "managing honestly" the system of the Bourgeoisie – to implement truly socialist measures, not to mention the protests in Spain during the same peri-

od, or those that shook much of Europe after the Second World War.

Back to Syriza and Podemos

If governments, currently directed by SYRIZA and in the future by Podemos, really want to break with the austerity and privatisation policies being implemented throughout Europe, they will immediately enter into conflict with powerful conservative forces at both national and European Union level. Simply by stating that their government wishes to apply measures desired by the population, who reject austerity on a massive scale, SYRIZA now and Podemos in the future, are encountering very stiff opposition from European bodies, the majority of European Union governments, and the directors and shareholders of the major private companies, not forgetting the IMF.

Even voluntarily limiting their programme for change, they are encountering strong opposition because the propertied classes and European bodies (which are intimately linked and mutually supportive) want to push further the most formidable attack, coordinated at European scale, against the economic and social rights of the People, not to mention the desire to limit severely the exercising of democratic rights [10].

It would be an illusion to think that it is possible to convince the European authorities and the heads of the (mainly financial and industrial) major companies to abandon the neo-liberal course that has been reinforced since 2010. We should underline that François Hollande and Matteo Renzi, who timidly propose slightly loosening the bridle of austerity, are at the same time seeking to apply the German model in their respective countries: further casualisation of collective negotiating rights and the advances achieved by employees [11]. They are no allies to Syriza today or Podemos tomorrow.

Another element to be taken into consideration when we compare the situation of the left-wing government in Greece today (or others in the future) with that experience by Hugo Chavez (as from 2004), Evo Morales or Rafael Correa. Starting in

2004, the considerable increase in the price of the raw materials (oil, gas, ores ...) that their countries export, enabled them to greatly increase tax revenues, which were used to implement vast social programmes and major public investment projects. The governments of these three Andean countries applied a model that could be characterised as neo-Keynesian developmentalist [12]: heavy public investment, increase in working-class consumption, raising of low salaries, nationalisations (in the case of Venezuela and Bolivia) accompanied by generous compensation for national owners and foreign parent companies.

The living conditions of the poorest people in these countries were considerably improved, as was their infrastructure, and the profits of local capitalists were not affected (in the financial sector, private profits even increased). It is easy to see that a left-wing government in a peripheral European Union country cannot have the same room to manoeuvre as the governments of the three Andean countries mentioned. The countries on the fringe of the European Union are crushed by an unbearable burden of debt. The European authorities intend to exert all the pressure they can, as was shown by the reaction of the European Central Bank with regard to Greece in early February 2015.

The inevitable conclusion is that there is no easy way to implement an economic and social programme that breaks with austerity and privatisation. Left-wing governments will have to disobey creditors, the European authorities and the IMF (who are largely mixed up together) in order to be faithful to their electoral promises.

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They have immense legitimacy and support both in their own countries and at international level, given the extent of the rejection of austerity and of European Union diktats. The refusal to pay a substantial part of the debt will be a key element in the government strategy [13], as will the decision not to

continue with privatisation and to fully re-establish the social rights affected by austerity policies. This combination is vital because, amongst the creditors, there is the intention of raising the voices of those who propose reducing the Greek debt burden in return for the continuation of the policies of reform (for which read counter-reform, privatisation, casualisation of work contracts and social rights ...).

It is difficult to see how a left-wing government can avoid socialising the banking sector (in other words expropriating private shareholders and transforming the banks into a public service controlled by the People), taking strict measures to control the movement of capital, imposing a crisis tax on the wealth of the richest 1 %, refusing loans from the Troika

conditional upon the continuation of austerity and privatisation, and refusing to reimburse a debt that is largely illegitimate, illegal, and unbearable in terms of human rights, even odious. One of the numerous instruments available to a left-wing government to encourage participation and popular support while at the same time reinforcing its position vis-à-vis illegitimate creditors, is to audit the debt with active citizen participation in order to identify the part of the debt that they must refuse to pay and which must be repudiated. From that point, everything becomes possible at last.

Translated by Adam Clark-Gimmig

CADTM-><http://cadtm.org/Syriza-and-Podemos-the-way-towards>]

SWITZERLAND

The soaring Swiss franc and class politics

JEAN BATOU ·

The 99 per cent will pick up the bill

Why such a decision? First, to avoid having to buy extra billions of euros to counter the foreseeable soaring ascension of the franc. In reality, the appeal of the Swiss franc is based, at least in part, on a very low level of debt of Swiss public administrations, which has been steadily decreasing since 2004, while that of the eurozone has exploded since 2008. In 2013, public debt accounted for only 36.3 per cent of Swiss GDP, against 92.6 per cent for the eurozone. Furthermore, the quantitative easing announced by the ECB will further increase this differential.

This turn, decided at the discretion of the three members of the managing board of the SNB, will have a negative impact on the daily lives of millions of people, first of all in Switzerland, where it will serve as a pretext for job cuts, as well as for lower outlays by businesses (on wages, taxes, social security contributions) which will justify further cuts in public spending and benefits. Abroad too, where many local authorities, in particular in Germany and France, are going to be affected because they denominated their loans in Swiss francs, and will see interest payments on their debt explode from 3 per cent to 12 per cent or even 17 per cent. The same is true for hundreds of thousands of households in Central and Eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary, Romania, Croatia, etc.) whose mortgages were fixed in Swiss francs.

A family quarrel

No matter! The SNB president, Thomas Jordan, is a dogmatic monetarist, a paranoiac about inflation,

coupled with a Eurosceptic of the first hour, whose doctoral thesis in 1993 already criticized the proposed creation of a single European currency. That is why his appointment as head of the SNB in 2012 was applauded by the *Weltwoche* and by Christoph Blocher (nationalist right). His decision to abolish the ceiling exchange rate against the euro is that of the ruling circles in Switzerland, who intend to play their own role on the international stage. For them, to provide support, even indirectly, to the policy of monetary easing of Mario Draghi was inconceivable. This counterstroke, however, has nothing to do with the defence of the general interest.

In Switzerland, employers' circles are brandishing the threat of layoffs and relocations in order to obtain new privileges from the state, as well as new concessions from the trade union apparatuses and the Swiss Socialist Party (PSS). For their part, the leading circles of the PSS and the USS (Swiss trade union confederation) deplore the decision of the SNB and call for action to mitigate the rise of the franc. In reality, their principal intention is for the authorities and employers to negotiate with them the nature of the potion that they are about to prescribe for the people. All this looks like a family quarrel, since no one challenges the fundamental policy choices of the SNB. Besides, is the president of its bank council not also the socialist former head of the Neuchâtel cantonal government, a champion of lower corporate taxes?

A hyper-competitive economy

In 2013, with the euro at 1.20 Swiss francs, Switzerland's balance of trade showed a record surplus of 28.6 billion Swiss francs (12 per cent), which has grown steadily since 2005, despite the continued appreciation of the franc. Even better... leaving aside the eurozone, where Switzerland ex-

ports more than half of its products, its trade surplus was 45 per cent! It therefore seems reasonable to postulate that Swiss industry is able to withstand a further revaluation of the franc by 10 per cent against the euro, if it stabilizes at €1.05 to 1.10 Swiss francs (which is the objective of the SNB). It will also be weaker – by between 5 and 10 per cent – compared to the US dollar and the Chinese yuan. It should be noted that two thirds of Switzerland's imports, from the eurozone, will be significantly cheaper, while the more than half of its exports which are destined for the rest of the world will suffer less severe price increases. If we take into account services, income and transfers, the current account balance of Switzerland is three times greater than its trade surplus! This achievement bears witness to the outstanding competitiveness of its economy, which has been for several years number one on the World Economic Forum's ranking.

The French economist Paul Jorion is therefore mistaken when he says on his blog that "the Swiss are resolving to sacrifice their last agricultural and industrial activities so as not to be Swiss are resolving to sacrifice their last agricultural and industrial activities so as not to be swept away financially by the mechanical collapse of the eurozone (...)" (January 18). On the contrary, industrial output per capita in Switzerland is still the highest in the world. By maintaining the ceiling rate of 1.20 francs to €1 for more than three years, the SNB also gave respite for industry to face up to the rise in the value of the franc – by nearly 30 per cent against the euro between the end of 2007 and the beginning of 2011 – and for it to be able to approach the upturn from a position of strength. However, since the long-awaited recovery did not materialize, the SNB took note of the fact that a further decline of the euro was inevitable. It also considered that Swiss industry could deal with a new rise in the value of the Swiss franc, of probably less than 10 per cent over all its export markets, especially since a large part of its activities is already located abroad, where it suffers no disadvantage because of the exchange

rate and will on the contrary be able to strengthen its position by taking over competitors cheaply.

Employers' blackmail

Employers expect the authorities to improve the "framework conditions" of the economy. This involves accelerating the third reform of corporate taxation, which should ensure for private companies a new tax saving of 3 to 4 billion francs per year, while reducing unit labour costs, as Federal Councillor Johann Schneider-Ammann, following many others, recently advocated in Davos. To ensure the triumph of their interests, employers can rely fully on divisions among workers, particularly after the vote on February 9 against "mass immigration". Are German, French and Italian border workers not already stigmatized because they gain from the exchange rate? That is why the most exposed sectors of business, particularly in the field of tourism, will seek to make the foreign labour force play the role of variable adjustment.

It is probable that the most fragile sectors of the Swiss economy will experience difficulties, which they will seek to pass on to workers. However, it is not workers who should foot the bill for the decisions of the SNB and the high level of the franc, which is largely the result of international speculation. Have not the ruling circles – the banks in particular – encouraged this speculation for decades by refusing any controls over the movements of capital? That is why trade unions and a left worthy of the name, instead of calling for national unity to defend the Swiss economy, should demand that the federal government and the SNB, who did not hesitate for a second to make tens of billions available to save UBS in 2008, put under public control and refinance companies whose existence could be threatened by the rise of the franc, in order to defend wages and the right to employment.

What answer from the left?

The *Wochenzeitung*, newspaper of the German-Swiss alternative left, recently challenged the position of Daniel Lampart, chief economist of the USS

and member of the board of the SNB, who criticized the decision of the managing board of the central bank. For this weekly paper, the exchange rate ceiling against the euro was in fact nothing more than a hidden subsidy to Swiss exporters; which is not wrong, but a bit insufficient ... In fact, by removing the currency ceiling, the SNB now intends to use international speculation on the franc as a lever to further increase the competitiveness of the Swiss financial sector at the expense of workers, users of public service users and recipients of social benefits. As we can see, the debate on the defence or not of the currency ceiling ignores the substance of the matter. To design an alternative economic policy, it is in reality necessary to look beyond the exchange rate policy.

A left worthy of the name should demand that the central bank defend the interests of the big majori-

ty of the population. For example, the government and the SNB could have attempted to resist the speculative rise of the franc by accepting debt ratios and deficits comparable, in Switzerland, to those of its main trading partners. Since autumn 2011, instead of spending 300 billion francs to buy euros, the central bank could have lent a similar amount to public authorities to support a large-scale plan of support for research, education, health, pensions, social housing, defence of the environment (insulation of buildings), etc. By bringing the public debt to the level of Germany's, which is still quite "reasonable", the SNB would have helped to slow the rise of the franc while "serving the general interests of the country" (or rather of the "population"), as the Constitution mandates it to do.

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INDIA:

A travesty of tea and tribals

SUSHOVAN DHAR ·

The venue, Banarhat Tea Garden playground, is located within 15 kilometers of the closed Red Bank, Dharanipur and Surendranagar Tea Estates that have been virtually shut-down since the last 12 years. These non-descript locations sometimes hit headlines when starvation and chronic malnutrition take the lives of the closed tea-garden workers and their family members. The otherwise picturesque Dooars, at the foothills of the Himalayan West Bengal and Bhutan has turned into a veritable valley of death with tea garden workers suffering due to low wages, poor quality rations and inadequate medical facilities. It is a shame and matter of utter disgust that the government, instead of bringing the real culprits to books, decides to organize a festival that makes fun of the dead. And not one or ten, but thousands of deaths due to malnutrition, starvation and undernourishment. Matters that could have otherwise been easily prevented.

According to a survey done on body mass index (BMI) by rights activist and doctor Binayak Sen and five other organisations, in the erstwhile closed Raipur tea garden in the same district "40 per cent of its residents have a BMI lower than 18.5, indicative of being underweight, and 140 people in 539 examined had BMI lower than 14, a sign of malnourishment." The report points towards the dire living conditions in the closed tea gardens in West Bengal and exposes the sub-human conditions that people are compelled to endure.

Turning a deaf ear to such alarming developments, the Trinamool Government in the state - (in)fa-

mous for its ardent mela culture where millions of rupees are disbursed in extravagance – tries to showcase its "talents" leaving the tribals and the tea-workers in a quandary. Critics say that these melas or fairs are organised to conceal the failures of the government and also dish out money to local beneficiaries and contractors. Besides, these are great public propaganda exercises for a party in a desperate need to repair its tarnished image owing to unfulfilled expectations and widespread corruptions. Though, the multiple scams, including Saradha ponzi scheme, has hit the government so hard that its image seems beyond any repair. The party can only hope to stay in power with the opposition votes squarely shared between the CPI (M) and the BJP, as testified by the recent assembly and parliamentary by-polls in Krishnagunj and Bongaon respectively.

While workers reel under pathetic wages, currently Rupees 90-95/day, the ministers of the government including the one in charge of labour, resort to falsehood about improving the lot of the labourers and the implementation of minimum wages in the sector. This enclave economy has witnessed notorious collusions between the owners and the successive governments reducing the workers to penury, permanently. Even, in the face of a strong and unified resistance from workers, the government takes the mantle of dragging them into dubious wage deals that would see their hard won gains further eroded. Any Lady Macbeth to say- "Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand"?

In a landmark judgment on Kamani Metals & Alloys Ltd vs Their Workmen, the Supreme Court of India on 24 January 1967 ruled that "a minimum wage which, in any event, must be paid, irrespective of the tent of profits, the financial condition of

the establishment or the availability of workmen on lower wages. This minimum wage is independent of the kind of industry and applies to all alike big or small. It sets the lowest limit below which wages cannot be allowed to sink in all humanity." The government is resolute to connive with the tea-garden owners to violate every word and spirit of this opinion. West Bengal is the only "owner's pride" in the country after the neighbouring Assam government, also notorious for gross violations of workers' rights, issued necessary notifications towards the implementation of minimum wages, last month. Let us not forget that the health of the tea industry depends a great deal on the health of the workers as this is highly a labour intensive industry.

And the timing could not be better with the industry poised to witness tea prices climbing by 9% to

an average of Rupees 200 (\$3.2) per kg in 2015 as consumption rises in a recovering economy, according to McLeod Russel India, the world's biggest tea grower. ASSOCHAM, the oldest and a leading apex-body of the trade associations of India, projected the industry to achieve a turnover of Rs. 33,000 crore (\$5.4 billion) by this year making plantation owners richer and leaving workers earn the lowest wage of all organized sectors in the country.

Surely, after forcing a black-wage agreement on the workers, the government could only resort to such travesty to woo the plantation workers and the tribals. And, no wonder there is hardly any turnout of lesser mortals to witness such a farce.

Radical Socialist

TURKEY

Fighting for Women's Rights in Turkey

MATTIA GALLO ·

Mattia Gallo: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said that women are not equal to men. His public statement is only one piece of a policy pursued by his party of conservative neo – liberalism, a policy that increases precarity and poverty for men and women, and which tries to control and subordinate the role of women. What have been the effects of this policy on Turkish society since 2002, the year that brought Erdogan's party, AKP, to power? What are the issues that feminists have faced?

Selin Cagatay: This is not the first time that Erdogan has stated his disagreement with gender equality. In 2010 when he was the Prime Minister he said, "I do not believe in the equality of men and women. I believe in equal opportunities. Men and women are different and complementary." More strikingly, he said this at a consultation meeting with women's NGOs, which included long-standing feminist organizations, during which he addressed women exclusively as mothers.

In the following years, AKP governments launched a rigorous campaign to monopolize the politics of gender in Turkey. This campaign rests upon two pillars: (1) women's flexible, precarious inclusion in the labor force – that is, the exploitation of women's paid labor while maintaining their subjection to male control; and (2) women's exclusive responsibility for housework and care work in the familial sphere – a full-fledged exploitation of women's unpaid labor. The consequence of this campaign for women is the perpetuation of the sexual division of labor and the overselling of fertility and motherhood. In other words, what we call "women's entrapment between paid and unpaid labor."

The AKP's catch-phrase for this campaign is "Strengthening the Family." In practice, this means that women are to be the main (if not the only) providers of housework and care work. This hampers their access to paid employment, which pushes them into low-paid, flexible and insecure jobs. Women in return become dependent on the men in their families. Needless to say, this isn't specific to Turkey but is a global trend, especially after the 2008 economic crisis. Many governments in Europe and elsewhere take measures that will result in the further exploitation of women's labor in paid employment and guarantee the reproduction of the labor force while maintaining the patriarchal organization of gender relations.

However, this takes a peculiar form in Turkey under the AKP regime: the imposition of a Sunni-Islamic worldview. This is because religion provides a legitimate framework for the exploitation of women's bodies and their labor. Women should be pious, preferably covered, materially and emotionally dependent on men. They should behave according to their "fiyat" (purpose of creation), as it is popularly said these days. The AKP and conservative women's organizations, which operate as the party's auxiliaries among women, call this "gender equity" and they claim that they've gone beyond gender equality by replacing the abstract term "equality" with an Islamic understanding of "justice."

The result of AKP's neoliberal-conservative campaign is devastating especially in the fields of women's employment, sexual rights, and violence against women. Here I will note some of the very recent developments in these fields.

Despite all the efforts made to use women as a cheap source of labor, women's labor force participation hovers around 30%. Why is this so? We can

understand this by looking at the time-use data provided by the state itself. Women spend four times more time than men on domestic tasks, including care work. When asked, women point at household responsibilities as the main obstacle to their participation in paid employment. Moreover women's unemployment is on the rise: officially 13.3%, but actually 25.2% when you add those who are not looking for a job because they are "hopeless." Women's unemployment increases also with their level of education. That is, the unemployment of women with higher education is twice as much as the unemployment of men with higher education. Apparently, employers do not think that hiring women is as profitable as hiring men.

This situation is supported by the AKP's population politics which deprive women of their sexual rights. Following Erdoğan's claim that "abortion is murder" in 2012, the government took measures to regulate abortion and birth control. Even if the AKP did not ban abortion, the introduction of doctor's right to conscientious objection made abortion inaccessible, especially for women of the lower classes. Getting an abortion at a state hospital is virtually impossible in many cities and towns in Turkey. Similarly, previously state-provided means of birth control are now much harder for women to access. These policies and many others are in line with Erdoğan's insistence that every woman should give birth to three to five children. Only this month, the government launched a program to "protect the family and ensure a dynamic population" where it promises a increasing cash allowance for women who give birth. When the promotion of motherhood is this aggressive without any emphasis on the father's role in care-taking and sharing other household responsibilities, it is not realistic to expect gender equality in the field of employment.

Finally, violence against women. In 2009, feminist organizations in Turkey found out that femicide in Turkey under the seven years of AKP rule since 2002 had increased by a scandalous rate of 1400%. The fact that at least three women were murdered every single day caused a great furor among differ-

ent sections of Turkish society. The AKP responded to this by passing a new law to eliminate violence against women in 2012 but this law seeks to protect women only within the family, meaning that it doesn't address women who are not married. The law also prioritizes solutions to violence against women within the family institution instead of ensuring that women pursue their lives independently from the perpetrator.

Five years later, the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs conducted research on violence against women. And they didn't share the results with the general public! The results, which were recently leaked to the media, are as follows: Women experience physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence at an unchanging rate of 40% in the last six years. 89% of them do not seek any official help. The most severe cases of violence are faced by women who are divorced or who have left their partners. Similarly, femicide is most prevalent among this group of women. This means that women face the most extreme cases of violence when they attempt to become independent of men. Here, the religious-conservative ideological imposition that women should behave according to their purpose of creation is the discourse that perpetuates violence against women because it encourages men to "punish" women who step outside the confines of patriarchal family.

MG: In June 2013 the protests of Gezi Park broke out in Taksim Square and mobilizations continued for a long time after. What was the role and importance of women in this cycle of protests? In this regard, what were the initiatives organized after Erdoğan's claims that "women are not equal to men"?

SG: When we discuss women's participation in the Gezi-inspired protests, we must distinguish between women's and feminists' presence in the revolt. Women, just like men, took part in the protests because the issues at stake were directly related to their lives. Again, just like men, women belonged to different political groups that partici-

pated in the protests: Kemalists, Kurds, worker's unions, left/socialist organizations, LGBT activists, anti-capitalist Muslims, etc. Women and men together expressed their dissatisfaction with the AKP and its politics such as the commodification of urban space, the exploitation of natural resources and the destruction of forests, the conservative, anti-secular and authoritarian administration of the public sphere, the increasing exploitation of waged-labor, the replacement of universal welfare provisions with poor relief and conditional social allowance, and so on. In this sense, women's participation was not particularly different from that of men.

On the other hand, the AKP's sexist, conservative, and anti-secular take on gender issues like the government's failure to eliminate violence against women, misogynist comments by high-rank party members including (or primarily by) Erdoğan and the attacks on women's sexual rights like the attempt to ban abortion in 2012, contributed to women's involvement in the protests. Moreover, women generally have more interest in reclaiming the public sphere because the authoritarian regulation of public space perpetuates the patriarchal control over their lives.

When we come to feminists, they also actively took part in the protests individually as well as collectively. We were a constituent of the organizing committee inside Gezi Park, but we also organized a number of events and demonstrations as "feminists" during the protests. Our specific political contribution was to link the "public" matters that were politicized during the protests to the less visible "private" matters, in particular to women's oppression in the familial sphere. In other words, feminists protested against the authoritarian, conservative regulation of the whole social organization, not only of the public sphere. So we provided the link between the anti-democratic administration of the public space and the increasingly conservative regulation of gender relations both in public and private.

The protests triggered a significant political mobilization in the social opposition in Turkey. Neighborhood forums, squatted houses, green initiatives, and formation of groups against the commodification of urban space are some examples. Women are of course part of these initiatives. Following the protests feminism too became one of the influential political discourses for the young population mobilized by the revolt. Therefore, many young women are now recruited into our ranks or they closely follow feminist politics. Another important outcome of the Gezi-inspired protests was the rise of social media activism. This significantly strengthened the hand of feminists in responding immediately to the misogynist attitudes or claims of the cabinet members or other high-rank state officials or Islamist intellectuals. These responses are also more visible and more popular thanks to the prevalence of online social media.

MG: When was the Sosyalist Feminist Kolektif born? What is its analysis of the situation of Turkish society? What are the campaigns and initiatives that this organization has led since it was born?

SG: As a group of feminists, we founded the SFK in Istanbul in 2008. The SFK instantly grew into a collective with some 250 members and organized in five cities: Istanbul, Ankara, Eskişehir, Izmir and Adana, plus individual members in other cities and abroad. The SFK was born out of the need for strengthening the anti-systemic grassroots feminism in Turkey. We thought that the feminist movement was becoming increasingly dependent on the state and capital and therefore less radical. We knew that neither the state nor capitalist institutions would genuinely support women in becoming collectively autonomous from men. Therefore, we are a completely autonomous collective; we don't receive funding from or cooperate with state or capitalist structures. This way we are able to both build our own independent agenda and mobilize women into grassroots activism at the same time.

The SFK has a materialist understanding of feminism. Women's labor lies at the center of our analysis; women's paid, unpaid, productive, reproductive, emotional labor. Through the concept of women's labor, we show how patriarchy and capitalism operate as two different but mutually coexisting systems of oppression. Our political project is to mobilize women against conservative-Islamist neoliberalism in Turkey to overthrow the patriarchal control over their lives.

In this aim we previously ran campaigns with a focus on women's labor, especially on women's unpaid labor in the family. For example, in the campaign "We want our due back from men!" we demanded equal share of housework and care work between men, women, and the state. Similarly, in our campaign "There's life outside the family!" we drew attention to women's entrapment in oppressive familial relations.

Currently the SFK is involved in a number of joint initiatives with other feminist individuals and organizations. Among these, "Immediate Action against Femicide" urges the government to take specifically preventive measures against femicide, for example by opening shelters instead of increasing the pun-

ishment for the murderer. In other words, in order to eliminate violence against women we demand women's empowerment not as a family member but as an autonomous individual. Similarly, the campaign, "Abortion is a Right, Decision Belongs to Women" demands free and unconditional access to abortion and that abortion be defined as part of women's right to health. Women's Initiative for Peace, on the other hand, is a platform where we contribute to women's involvement in the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish conflict with our feminist agenda. The current war in Syria and its consequences for women refugees in Turkey is right now the most burning issue that the Initiative deals with.

Other than these, we organize public discussions and publish the quarterly journal *Feminist Politika*. At the same time, we are highly involved in street activism where we collaborate with other feminist groups and individual activists. While our activities mostly focus on local issues, we also take part in feminist conferences and gatherings abroad in order to share experiences with socialist feminists in other countries.

LeftEast

GREECE

Syriza's victory seen by a dockworker, union leader from the Port of Piraeus

GIORGOS GOGOS ·

Giorgos Gogos is a Greek dockworker and union leader from the Port of Piraeus. A member of SYRIZA, he is active at the regional and union levels of the party and is engaged in local organizing efforts in Piraeus, the large urban industrial area surrounding the port outside of Athens. Katy Fox-Hodess is a doctoral student in Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley writing her dissertation on international solidarity among dockworkers' unions. She spoke with Gogos on January 31 following the recent election in Greece

Katy Fox-Hodess: How have people in your community reacted to the election results?

Giorgos Gogos: Generally, it was accepted with great enthusiasm by many people, not only by those who voted for SYRIZA but other people who traditionally belonged to other parties and couldn't escape from those commitments. Everybody I think was saying, ok, let's see what this new route is like and we have to try, somehow, a new way of approaching the whole problem.

K: When you say other parties, you mean PASOK and the Communist Party?

G: PASOK and New Democracy, mostly. From the Communist Party, anyway, I don't have many acquaintances, but I think that people who don't belong to the structure of the party, who are not members of the party, accept this election result with relief. In the beginning, we can say there was a negative reaction, they were questioning the possibility of co-governing with ANEL, the Independent Greeks, that is actually a populist right-wing party,

though all of their discourse is actually quite anti-Troika, anti-memorandum. But I think after the formation of the new government, the new elected government, many people realize that there is going to have to be cooperation within the government. The new government has been quite coherent and we have the first announcements from several ministers confirming to the people that the main guidelines of the pre-election program are going to be implemented at once.

K: What has the reaction been in the port?

G: In the port, we were really happy, especially after hearing the first announcements by the new Minister of Maritime Affairs. He reconfirmed that the privatization process of all ports, but especially the Port of Piraeus and the Port of Thessaloniki, will stop.

K: One of the first announcements SYRIZA made after the election was about stopping the privatization of the ports. Why do you think SYRIZA has made this such a priority and why is it important to fight for public ports?

G: You know we are saying in the port that everyone who was against the dockworkers in Piraeus port lost power, lost the government, they were eliminated, so don't fight against us. Ok, so this is a very macho explanation, it's not political. For SYRIZA, privatization in general is something that's not acceptable. The privatization that was going on very, very quickly was the privatization of the ports, and especially the Port of Piraeus. So I think that it was symbolic, and at the same time, an important message, that we're not going to privatize. And of course, it's very important that Piraeus port workers and dockworkers have shown their

determination, their devotion to defend the public port.

First of all, it's a strategic point for a country such as Greece, not only because of the many islands that connect the people living there and traveling there, not only because it's the main gate of ingoing and outgoing cargo and goods. It's also because when a state-owned company passes to private investors, the private investors care only for their profits and nothing else. So the people's transportation needs will not be served. Apart from this, it affects the society and the economy in general. It was and it will be profitable. It didn't have losses in any year over the past fifty years. And a government like SYRIZA needs profitable public entities so as to redistribute the public wealth. Apart from this, our jobs would be lost, our labor rights and the organization of our job would be challenged and in danger, and it's affecting our families, so we are fighting also for our jobs and for our children.

K: Are you optimistic that SYRIZA will be successful in this process of confronting COSCO and the troika and stopping the process of port privatizations?

G: SYRIZA will be strong only if they will remain committed to the pre-elections program. In addition to this, they need the support of the people and society. For example, of course we are sure that they are going to have pressure from abroad, from China and from the European Union and from the troika and from member states in Europe. But all this pressure will be less effective if people stand with the decisions of the government. One of the first things that Alexis Tsipras said yesterday to [Eurogroup Chair] Dijsselbloem was that he wants to do things differently than the people who were in power before him. He said he wants to follow the commitments that he made to the people. It's important to hear that from a leader, the Prime Minister, to say that he will follow the program that he showed to the people and was voted for. This way, they cannot reverse their plans or in case they have to reverse their plans, they will have to ask for the opinion of the people and the society first.

I have trust in my comrades in SYRIZA. And I have trust not only that they will be accountable but that they will follow what they have been saying. I have trust that they have received the message from society, which says go do what you have told us you will do. Of course, we know that as a union, we have our autonomy, we are not going to follow something that a member of SYRIZA says or a minister of SYRIZA says – we have a very healthy cooperation and an honest one.

K: Is it important for the union and for the coalition in Piraeus to continue to organize and be mobilized to provide pressure from below for SYRIZA to keep its promises?

G: Of course. Organization and mobilization of the union in general, and especially in a sector like ours, is a necessity and a precondition for anything you want to do at any time. No matter which party's in power, no matter what the decisions are. Until now, all the decisions have been negative for the unions – it's the first time in Greece we face something pro-labor, anti-privatization and so on. But we still want to be mobilized. We don't want people to remain on their couches, but instead we want to be on alert in order to promote our demands so that they will not disappoint us. And we want to promote our demands and the decisions of the government that the European Union or other countries do not accept and are pressuring the Greek government to back down on. And already we have started to have this discussion among ourselves. Everybody was happy all this week, it was the first time we were laughing after the announcement of the new government, but at the same time, or the next day, we were starting to talk about it, to say, now we have a government that says no to privatization, but in case they are pressured by Europe to sacrifice the ports, what are we going to do? We're going to stand outside of the door of the Maritime Affairs Ministry and our port, and we will continue our fight.

K: The same day that SYRIZA announced it would stop the port privatization process, they also announced that they would rehire

the cleaners from the Ministry of Finance and thousands of people who were illegally fired from the public sector. What is the significance of prioritizing these decisions?

G: It's very symbolic, first of all, because this group of women were very militant, very active, and very much present in every struggle taking place in Athens. So it's very symbolic and a very good example, not in all senses because they made certain mistakes in my opinion, and we have some others who can say a lot of things, but they still remain like heroes. But I don't like to use the word hero because you put a hero over there and you forget him and you are doing bullshit on the other side. So they're people like us, they were women like us and they were very devoted to their struggle. So it's very important for SYRIZA to support them and to solve their problem. It encourages other unions to be this devoted.

K: What is the significance of the election for workers and unions in Greece in general?

G: It's the highest moment of democracy. This is a moment in which all of us are called to choose who is going to represent us and support and defend our rights and our positions. We are not afraid of elections. On the contrary, I think Greek people should be asked more frequently. For example, it is constitutionally permissible to have referendums, so I think the new government will use this process and will mobilize people in this way to be participants and not an audience. This is important. It needs time. It's not a matter that will change in one or two or five years. But if a left government can remain powerful for more than five years, for two governmental cycles, and build strong foundations, it will change the our mentality as citizens. We believe in this because as a trade union, we use elections frequently, we have collective decision making processes.

K: Do you believe SYRIZA will prioritize reversing the anti-labor legislation of the last

government, which targeted collective bargaining and unions?

G: It's one of the first things they say they are going to cure. They are going to reverse all of these negative laws which prevent collective bargaining and return all the laws that were protective to the less powerful part of the market, which is labor and not the employers. It's a commitment and I think it's one of the first laws they are going to reverse.

K: What is your opinion on the alliance between SYRIZA and ANEL?

G: In the beginning, I was quite skeptical. But the majority of 149 MP's gives them the opportunity to have a role in this government. Greek society in general is not so progressive. A big percentage of Greek society is quite conservative, not only in its way of thinking, in its way of acting, but in its way of approaching several issues, for example, sexual orientation or human rights concerning immigrants. These are issues that many Greek people are not in favor of. They are quite conservative. The vast majority of Greek people are not so religious, but quite attached to the tradition connected to the Orthodox church. The oath that the new Prime Minister, Tsipras, gave was political, with respect to the leader of the Greek church, saying that I'm going to give a political oath but also I want your good wishes for this government to go on. It sends a message. So you need a conservative party that can support you in this struggle, in the common fight against the memorandum policies, and after that, I think the Greek people will realize that recognizing, for example, the marriage between LGBT people, it's not crucial, you're not going to be affected, you're not going to be infected, it's a human right. So you are more powerful having a conservative party in this and having already some time, a year, six months in power, and having shown that you believe in what you are saying and you fight for it and you want to implement it. It's important to have a conservative audience in such a government so as to transmit some ideas. It's more clever, let's say, to have them inside, and honest, in the sense that you can say to them, for example, ok guys, we

have a problem with some thousands of kids that are born here in Greece, their parents were citizens of other countries and they have no citizenship, but they are Greeks, they are brought up here, they have been taught in Greek schools, they are our children's friends, so we should give them citizenship, they are Greek people.

K: So you are saying that having ANEL in the coalition forces SYRIZA to try to speak to and convince people on the right?

G: Yes, Yes. And I think it's the best vehicle to minimize conservatism in Greece. Maybe what I'm saying is too romantic and has no political explanation, but it's my personal impression. I've seen this in my union. Some conservative people have seen members of our union, left guys, who are committed and hard-working, and through their example, they are persuaded that no matter if you left wing or right wing, when somebody is fighting for something that is right, and if they trust you more and they are convinced but you voted for SYRIZA, it's ok. If you want to make bread, you put in flour and water and you mix it together and after that you have bread. This process I think will take place in the government and will be expanded to society.

K: Is there not a risk that SYRIZA will move to the right?

G: No, not from ANEL. I don't think there is this danger from ANEL being inside the government. If we will have this move, it will be from other agents outside of the government, more powerful players in this game, the state or big capitalists – the whole system, let's say. But not from ANEL.

K: What are the biggest challenges or pressures SYRIZA will face to push its agenda?

G: First of all, if we leave the case of the port and privatizations and all of that, this anti-privatization policy will be the vehicle for the troika to press us. For example, if you don't follow our program, we'll stop your liquidity. The first thing they have to do is address the debt crisis at the European level. It's not easy. There are several articles this week, for

example, about how Prime Ministers Mariano Rajoy in Spain and Pedro Passos Coelho in Portugal, reject this proposal. They say it will be damaging for all of us and the markets will punish us, just like what Antonis Samaras, the former Prime Minister, would say, for example. But I think that if this cause is taken up by the people and the European social democratic parties that still have some significant part of left discourse in them, I think that more alliances and more allies will be found. This is the first thing. Because the debt is not only strangling us, it's also pressing more healthy economies. Germany itself has such problems. It's not obvious now, but sooner or later it will come. And on the other hand, for internal affairs, I think they should start giving signs that the citizens are the priority, not the companies. They should start, for example, as I said, by ameliorating labor laws, and also making changes in the health and education system, and making a serious effort to tax big wealth. These will be signs to society and to the poorest part of the society that something has changed, that they're not the same as the others, that the rich are not untouchable and the rest of us will not be fucked over once again.

K: Do you believe that the coalition with ANEL will last?

G: I don't know. It's a big question mark. I don't think that this form of government will last much time. I don't know if it's going to be one year or two years but I don't think it will last for four years. They are going to face serious challenges in the near future. I put a deadline, let's say, in the summer, when we're going to face the first serious problem in paying back some of the debt. If we don't have any alternative resources for paying this money, I think we will have new elections. So SYRIZA has until that time to show to the people what the direction is, that it's different than the previous government, so they will reaffirm, maybe with better results, the new government. Actually, I wouldn't like to see this coalition last for four years. I would like to see the left party get more powerful through this coalition in order to have a light at the

end of the tunnel soon and to go to elections again with a greater percentage for SYRIZA, so it has an absolute majority.

K: To support SYRIZA, in general, what should workers and unions in Greece be doing?

G: They should be more active and respond to the calls for dialogue. There is a commitment from SYRIZA's side that no decision will be taken without a dialogue between the government and the affected or interested parties. So first of all we have to be working harder to have proposals, so as to have something to say and not to simply say no or yes with obedience, but to continue to be critical. On the other hand, we have to start processes, procedures, and initiatives in order to realize we are not the only ones with a problem, but next to us there are also people with more problems or less problems. This way we can have horizontal and vertical relations with other adjacent institutions.

It's not difficult for this to happen, especially in Piraeus, because we have the labor center. Unfortunately, the power rests with the Communist Party link in trade unionism, and they're not so cooperative. They not only have certain structures and discourses, but they follow certain directives from the party. And their intention is to get more power for the party instead of developing a more coherent program and becoming closer to private workers. I think we have a lot of work ahead of us if we want to be constructive and if we want to expand the idea of solidarity and co-action. I think the days of each sector fighting on their own are over. It's not effective anymore. And in case SYRIZA does not do well and loses power, a more conservative government will certainly come to power. So we need to make the most of this time, not only to change things for the better, but in case we have negative results, to be more prepared to face the conservatism that will come for sure. But this is the pessimistic view. We have a more optimistic view, to be constructive, draw up proposals, and make our self-criticism – why we didn't succeed as trade unions before, what things have to be

changed within the structures and the processes to be more democratic and less clientelistic. We have a lot to do.

K: How is the relationship between SYRIZA and the labor unions? Are there strong ties?

G: No, they don't have strong connections because actually within the trade union structures, SYRIZA's percentages are the same as they were five years ago. So people from SYRIZA in trade unions are in the minority. Although society has changed, due to clientelism, personal connections, and all these rotten systems, democratic ways of breathing are not allowed. So SYRIZA in power is in a better position to put these processes in the front and center. But I don't know how big the resistance will be, especially from the Communist side. Because, unfortunately, the Communist Party is part of this clientelism and has especially non-democratic ways of holding power within the unions. I've heard terrible stories, and I know they're not just stories, about how unions that belong to the Communist party use very undemocratic means to keep their power.

K: In other words, the principle problem is the structure of the unions – they are clientelistic and not very democratic – which makes it difficult for SYRIZA to gain a foothold in the unions?

G: They were very close to the parties that were in power. SYRIZA must not fall into the trap of using their power in government to sow the same seeds in this field. It must leave the trade unions alone to change themselves.

K: One criticism of SYRIZA is that the party is dominated by university intellectuals, not people from the union movement – do you share this view?

G: It is more or less true. But as I told you, the problem is that people in the unions who are members of SYRIZA are few in number. And to be honest, personally speaking, I don't promote myself in SYRIZA as a trade unionist and in my trade union

as a member of SYRIZA. They are two different roles. I try to distinguish and behave according to where I am. Of course, between these two roles, the priority for me is to be a dockworker and to protect as much as I can the rights of my colleagues and my job. But apart from this, I need some political tools to make this happen. I think there will be fewer university guys and more trade unionists over time. But also I have to tell you that trade unionism in Greece is quite devalued.

K: There is a negative opinion of trade unions?

G: Yes, because of the very big connection between the parties of New Democracy and PASOK with the trade unions. I think I told you before that many presidents of the Confederation of Greek Workers, after the end of their term, became ministers, without explaining or having any process open to the people or open to the unions. It was just a very personal decision, passing from one role to the other. So all these behaviors created problems and people were leaving the unions. What we're trying to do in our union is to fight this. Of course we have few things in common with such behaviors. On the contrary, we have very open approaches, we try to mobilize people, we try to involve new members and young members in decision making in the union, so while we might not one of the best, I think we have a very good approach to this. And we think that unionism is a tool to have common demands and to fight for our common demands. It should not be seen as only a step for one person to become more powerful or more dominant. Whoever holds these positions has to serve for the good of everybody, not to serve their personal interests.

K: The Piraeus B electoral district near the port had among the strongest support for SYRIZA in the elections in 2012 and in 2015. Why has there been such strong support there?

G: Generally, in the poorest areas, SYRIZA got the biggest percentages. The vote was quite class oriented. In Piraeus, and in the wider area of Piraeus,

I think the seriousness of the approach of SYRIZA, the sincere intervention, you know, all the activities of the last three years, have awarded SYRIZA with this percentage of the vote.

K: You have been very active in organizing with the party in Piraeus. What kinds of activities has SYRIZA been involved in there?

G: Solidarity for All in Piraeus, an organization supported mainly by SYRIZA, serves daily meals. There are also the "solidarity lessons", free classes for students who cannot afford to have private lessons for the university exams, as well as social pharmacies and social doctors, checking people for free and prescribing and so on. These are immediate actions for the society done without checking people's status, unlike Golden Dawn. Every vulnerable person is accepted. It's a healthy intervention in society. Of course we are trying to tell people that they should mobilize and collectively demand their rights. But it's not to make them be a member of SYRIZA or to work for SYRIZA and so on.

There is also a coordinating body of anti-fascists in Piraeus and we are in it. We don't have our own campaigns. We try to support the common struggles, the anti-fascist struggles. On the contrary, the Communist Party is unfortunately out of this, with their own intervention, which is very low, I have to tell you. They don't make frequent protests, and so on, although they were a target and they are still a target of fascists. But they are very afraid to get involved in a common struggle. On the other hand, we have very good relations with people from ANTARSYA, especially in anti-fascist struggles, despite our differences. I don't think there is an anti-fascist movement or manifestation, in Piraeus at least, that we do not participate in.

K: support for Golden Dawn is less than it was one, two, or three years ago. Why do you think this is?

G: In my opinion, they should be even less powerful, they should lose more than 5% of the percentage. Unfortunately, they kept 6.5% or something like this. It's a big percentage if you consider that

their leadership is in prison, that they don't have the financial resources they used to have, and, most importantly, that it is now publicly well-known that they are engaged in criminal activities. So it's an unfortunate result and it's quite painful to have 6,000 or so of your neighbors vote for Golden Dawn. I expect from SYRIZA first of all to put them on trial, to give them a fair trial, and at the same time, from the perspective of being in government, to promote anti-fascism and anti-racism so as to start changing the mentality of those people who are now voting for Golden Dawn, to change their orientation and to be clear with society about their criminal face.

K: As a union leader and a SYRIZA member, when you speak to members of your own union or to workers in Piraeus in general who aren't members or supporters of SYRIZA, what kinds of arguments do people make and how do you respond and try to organize them?

G: First of all, they are afraid that they are going to act like the previous governments. They say now that they are not going to privatize the port and finally they will do it. So these are the main arguments I hear. What I say honestly is that I don't believe they will do it, but in case they are pressured or they change their mind, I'm sure that they are going to fight from a better position. We are going to have for sure a more democratic government. I'm certain we are going to take part in an open dialogue, and anyway, not only our ability to fight but our responsibility to fight is here. And we are going to be against anyone, even if it's SYRIZA in power, who undermines our rights and our jobs. It's clear.

K: Are there other strategic sectors that you would like to see pass to public ownership?

G: Energy companies, for sure, I don't have to mention the health system and education system, universities, trains and roads, should be taken back from subcontractors that have taken a very big amount of money. For example, I traveled to my village which is 350 km from Athens recently dur-

ing the Christmas holidays and we paid 45 euros for the tolls, for the roads that were paid to be constructed by the state. I want to see my dad but I don't want to pay 45 euros to go and see him. So for all these sectors, I think they should remain public.

K: What is your opinion of the arguments made by SYRIZA figures like Costas Lapavistas in favor of Greece leaving the Eurozone?

G: Personally, I think the euro as a currency is a means, it's not the objective. It's the means to have an economy. What is an economy? An economy is ok if it serves people and provides a certain level of security to the people – jobs, health systems, education. So in those terms, the euro is a tool. Apart from this, it is a political issue. I would prefer to see what chances we have inside the Eurozone. And after that, for sure inside the European Union, which is something different. And after that if they insist, if they say, you have to keep getting fucked over, you have to be sacrificed so as to remain in the Eurozone, no. I think that if that moment comes, we should go to a referendum and decide altogether. And from Lapavistas' side, I was following him during 2011 and 2012 – for two years, I was following his speeches. I was quite open to hearing such opinions but I was not persuaded that they have a clear answer especially for the first period of a transfer from the euro to a local currency. They didn't convince me that they have something concrete to propose to the people for those first critical six months of transition. And you know, our society is not trained or educated to suffer under such terms. For example, if you leave the euro, the iPhone will be three or four times more expensive. I don't care. I don't give a damn. But many people give a damn about some items that they don't even have the power to buy in euros. So I'm ready to wait for gasoline and to do my part and not to demand more but I know many guys around me that would be happy to simply take their share and their family's share for the month. So I think we're not trained well enough to confront such a danger.

K: There have been some criticisms that SYRIZA has moved toward personalistic leadership and is becoming too focused on individual politicians – do you share this view?

G: It's becoming too presidential, yes. That's true. I'm one of these guys that are criticizing Tsipras although I recognize that he is very charismatic, very clever, very efficient. He can represent our core ideas and all this that we call SYRIZA. Unfortunately, the last six months, we have seen that the party procedures were not respected and some decisions were taken with a small group around the president. This is a problem. This is a problem which we have addressed within the organs of the party. It's something that we cannot prevent now, now that he is Prime Minister. This kind of thing will happen more and more, I think. But I hope that the collective reactions, the collective interventions will ameliorate this. And of course I'm not saying that he's like Georgios Papandreou or Samaras. He's a left guy. And he's not going to act in such a way. But ok, within the left spectrum, he has made some mistakes – not respecting the organs of the party – and he was trying especially during the pre-election period to put things as far back as possible so as to have less collective procedures. I'm also critical of this. But I don't know if it's personal decisions or people surrounding him. For example, there are one or two guys that are not so clever, in my opinion, that don't have such a collective way of acting, though I don't want to minimize his responsibilities. I prefer to give responsibility to a team, a party, a union. That's why I'm accusing the team of leadership. It's not just one man.

K: Do you participate in a political current within SYRIZA?

G: I was participating in the meetings of AKOA, the Renewing Communist Ecological Left, a Eurocommunist party and one of the founding members of SYRIZA. Inside SYRIZA, AKOA, with two smaller groups, created ANASA, which in Greek means breathe. ANASA became an official

political current. It doesn't have a structure, there is an open dialogue between ANASA and some guys from the majority of the party, meaning close to Tsipras and close to the president's group. They're critical and they created what is called the Group of Fifty-Three, fifty-three members of the central committee. So this Group of Fifty-Three, it's getting bigger and bigger, it's not fifty-three anymore, it's more. We don't have a very strict structure. Actually it's a group for dialogue that is trying to promote collectivity within the party, trying to prevent factionalism, trying to prevent the leadership from making decisions without being approved by the collective, and trying to prevent the presidential leadership group from making mistakes and taking decisions out of the hands of the party.

K: What can worker movements in general learn from this experience?

G: This topic we could talk about for some hours. Look, the motto that SYRIZA used during the pre-election period was that hope is coming. So now we feel that hope has come and we think it's a great opportunity for the working class to start breathing. In my personal opinion, it's a period of responsibility for all of us to go beyond ourselves, not to have the first demand be for our union, for ourselves, but to try to develop more collective demands, more fundamental demands, and to start the hard work of positive criticism, of serious impact proposals. Because I think now we are fighting from a better position, but we are still fighting. It doesn't mean that just because we have a very charismatic Prime Minister with good ministers that this is the end of the story, no. I've known these guys for many years. They are guys like ourselves. So I can imagine that if I were in that position how important it could be for me to have the support of the people. I would feel more secure having people back me. Not to follow them and to say yes to everything they say, no, but to support the right decisions, to keep our presence and to keep our signature being active in every decision they take. It's really serious and I feel more responsibility because as General Secretary of the union, it's a lot of work for me to

mobilize people, having fulfilled their main demand, meaning that the port is not going to be sold but I want the state to own it. It's difficult. But it's the only way we're going to succeed, knowing that the program is not something revolutionary. It's a clear social democratic program. But in order to achieve a socialist society, we need some time so as to pass through a real social democratic path with socialism as the end goal.

K: What is the significance of the election for workers outside of Greece?

G: I have to tell you that I have received from our friends who are dockworkers in Europe many, many messages, congratulations, very optimistic messages. They are waiting, at least the people I am in contact with, and they are very close to my mentality, they were very happy. And they really want to see this government succeed, because they feel that this will trigger changes in this direction in their countries. I do believe that the governmental change in Greece will have a snowball effect.

K: What can people outside of Greece do to support the political process in Greece?

G: First of all, they should not listen to the mainstream mass media and should try to find alternative information. It's really important. I'm following what the mass media in Germany has been saying these past two or three days and it's really too biased. They are against the new government and they don't tell the truth. The second thing is that they should show their solidarity actively. For example, I know that today (January 31) PODEMOS are having a big manifestation in Madrid, so as to criticize Rajoy for his statements at the European meeting about European debt. These kinds of actions are really encouraging the Greek people and encouraging Greece's new elected government to go on. To Europeans, I have to say that we have to remain together and to remain together as nations, not as companies or as multinationals. SYRIZA is another Greek experiment. Greece was an experiment in austerity for the past five years and now I think it will be an experiment in prosperity.

31 January 2015

Viewpoint

ECONOMY

Swiss leaks / HSBC : Drug and Bank Lords

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

It has been revealed that HSBC was accused of failing to respect regulations, to prevent money laundering, on nearly \$700 billion of transfers and over \$9.4 billion in US currency purchases from HSBC Mexico. The bank also violated sanctions against Iran, Sudan and Burma, amongst others. Although HSBC is openly contemptuous towards the law, it has hardly been subjected to any legal consequences. In December 2012, HSBC was condemned to a fine of \$1.9 billion – about one week of revenue – as the full and final penalty for its money laundering activities. Although aiding and abetting terrorist organisations, and drug trafficking, are punishable by five years in prison not one director or employee has been criminally prosecuted. Bank directors have a free hand to take part in drug trafficking, sanction violations, or any other crime.

The *International Herald Tribune* (IHT) has inquired as to what was said behind the doors of the Justice department about this case. According to certain information, several prosecutors wanted HSBC to plead guilty and recognise that it had violated the law, which obliges banks to inform the authorities of any transaction of over \$10,000 dollars that might be suspicious. This plea would have led to HSBC losing its United States banking licence and an end to its activities in that country. After several months of negotiation, it was eventually decided not to press criminal charges in order to avoid the Bank's closure. It was even decided to avoid too much tarnishing of the Bank's image. [5] This small fine of \$1.9 billion was completed by a period of probation: should the authorities discover, between 2013 and 2018, that HSBC has not put

an end to these practices (there has been no condemnation), the justice department may reopen the case. This result may be summed up as: *"Naughty child! penance of one week's pay and don't do it again for five years."* this is clearly an example of a bank that is *'Too Big to Jail'*.

During a Senatorial Commission concerning HSBC in July 2013, Elizabeth Warren (D. Massachusetts) interrogated David Cohen, under-secretary at the Treasury responsible for actions against terrorism and financial espionage, appearing for the US Treasury. She made the following points: the United States government takes money laundering very seriously. It is possible to close a bank that engages in this activity. Those condemned can be definitively prohibited from conducting banking and financial activities and may be condemned to prison sentences. Now, in December 2012 HSBC admitted to laundering \$881 million for Mexican and Columbian drug cartels, and the Bank also admitted to many sanctions violations over a long period. HSBC has paid a fine, but no individuals were sanctioned and the closing of the bank in the US has not been mentioned. She asked, *'What does it take? How many billions of dollars do you have to launder for drug lords, and how many economic sanctions do you have to violate before someone will consider shutting down a financial institution?'* The treasury representative dodged the issue saying the question was too complex to give an answer. [6] The Senator concluded that a cocaine dealer would go to prison and for a very long time if he repeats his fault whilst bankers who launder hundreds of millions of narcodollars can sleep easily in their own beds at night with no fear of being condemned. [7]

Stephen Green, CEO of HSBC (2003-2010),

becomes British Minister for Commerce

Stephen Green is a vivid illustration of the symbiotic relationship between finance and government. In this case, it goes ever further, because he does not content himself with serving the interests of big capital as a banker and a minister. His 'ministries' go as far as being an ordained priest of the Church of England. He has written two books on the subject of business and ethics, notably **Serving God, Serving Mammon?** [8] The title refers to the biblical quotation, 'No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24).' Mammon is symbolic of wealth, greed, and profit. This name comes up in Aramaic, Hebrew, and Phoenician. Mammon is sometimes compared to Satan. As for Stephen Green, he has received university honours and is obviously untouchable.

He started his career at the British Ministry of Overseas Development, before going to the private international consultancy company, McKinsey. In 1982, he was hired by HSBC the biggest British bank where he was rapidly promoted to positions of high responsibility. He was named Executive Director in 2003, and became HSBC chairman in 2006, where he remained until 2010.

The accusations by US authorities of laundering \$881 million of drug money, and other illicit transactions relate to the 2003-2010 period. According to the 334-page Senate report published in 2012, Stephen Green had been informed by an employee, in 2005, that HSBC had installed money-laundering operations in Mexico and doubtful transactions had taken place.

Still in 2005, the financial services company Bloomberg, based in New York, accused HSBC of laundering drug money. Stephen Green replied that the accusations were, 'singular and wholly irresponsible,' putting the reputation of a great and trustworthy international bank into doubt. In 2008, US federal authorities informed Stephen Green that Mexican authorities had discovered the existence of a money laundering operation involv-

ing HSBC in Mexico, and an HSBC branch in the Cayman islands. The agency remarked that such activity could imply penal responsibility for HSBC. [9] There followed a series of rather soft warnings compared to the gravity of the accusations. HSBC promised to change its behaviour, but continued its criminal practices.

Finally, HSBC was issued a Cease and Desist Order in October 2010 to put an end to these nefarious activities. [10] At the end of 2012, following the publication of the Senatorial Commission's report and months of discussion between different US security agencies, HSBC was fined \$1.9 billion dollars.

Stephen Green cannot claim he did not know what his bank was up to not only in Mexico and in off-shore tax havens, but also in the Middle East and in the US. He was CEO of his group, and had also been a director of HSBC Bank Bermuda Ltd. [11], HSBC Mexico, HSBC Middle East. He had also been president of HSBC Private Banking Holdings (Suisse) SA, and of HSBC North America Holdings Inc..

When the US decision to impose a heavy fine on HSBC for drug money laundering was made public in 2012, Stephen Green was no longer at HSBC. He was now minister in the British Cabinet under James Cameron...

With hindsight, Stephen Green's timing was spot-on, a work of art. In February 2010, he published a book entitled: *Good value: Reflections on Money, Morality and an Uncertain World*. The foreword asks the following question: '*Can one be both an ethical person and an effective business person? Stephen Green, an ordained priest and the chairman of HSBC, thinks so* [12].' Of course, the 'ethical person' and the 'effective business person' are identifiable in the author, priest, and HSBC chairman Stephen Green. The propaganda is well coordinated, at the same time he is awarded the honorary degree Doctor Honoris Causa by London University's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).

In October 2010, for the second time, the US justice department orders HSBC to stop its criminal activities. Before this information is made public, Stephen Green jumps the boat. The following month, at the request of David Cameron, he received honours and was appointed Baron Green of Hurstpierpoint, which is in West Sussex. Unbelievable, for a shady businessman, who laundered millions of dollars of drug money, to become on 22 November 2010, a Life peer, a member of the House of Lords. Stranger than criminal fiction!

He resigned from his position at HSBC in December 2010 to become Minister of State for Trade and Investment in February 2011. [13] In this way, he continued to serve the interests of the British corporations, with whom he has very close relations, because he has been Vice- President of the Confederation of British Industry since May 2010. Stephen Green also used his know-how to promote London as a candidate for the 2012 Olympic Games candidate, which were held in July, exactly when the US Senate published its report on the HSBC affair. Stephen Green refused to reply to questions from members of the House of Lords on this scandal. He was protected by the president of the House of Lords Conservative Party group under pretext that a Minister is not answerable to Parliament for matters that do not concern his Ministry portfolio. [14]

In 2013, David Cameron commended Lord Green for his superb job in favour of British exports, commercial treaties and in particular for his work on the EU – US transatlantic treaty. [15] He has also achieved much in developing the sale of British armaments throughout the world. He finished his term in December 2013, and now devotes his precious time to speaking at conferences (probably in exchange for important fees) and to receive the honours that so many academic institutions heap upon him.

His career is certainly not over. His hypocrisy has no limits. In March 2009, at the same time that HSBC was totally involved in the famous money laundering affair, he had the cheek to declare at a

press conference, concerning the responsibility for the crisis which started in 2007-2008: *'Underlying all these events is a question about the culture and ethics of the industry. It is as if, too often, people had given up asking whether something was the right thing to do, and focused only on whether it was legal and complied with the rules.'* and, *'there have been too many who have profoundly damaged the industry's reputation.'* [16] That is how Stephen Green, rascal and rogue, above the law speaks to the lackeys who all rush to repeat his good words all over the mainstream press.

In February 2015, *'The World Today'*, the review of the honourable British 'Royal Institute of International affairs', published a long interview of Stephen Green in order to show off his great erudition in Worldly affairs; a propaganda exercise to the advantage of a high-rise Bankster. The title mentions much *'A former chairman of HSBC, life-long Germanophile and committed Christian, Lord Green of Hurstpierpoint talks about the future of the eurozone, empty cathedrals and what makes Chinese leaders anxious'.* In the interview Stephen Green said, *'It's important to approach business life with a sense of values and responsibility: you can't conclude that banking is off limits. It would imply that banking is intrinsically an evil domain of activity and no self-respecting person should be in it. That's nonsense'*. No questions were asked concerning the tax evasions organised by HSBC or on the laundering of drug money; an omission?

Conclusion

Green and all his HSBC cronies who have organised money laundering should answer for their crimes before the courts and be severely condemned to periods of loss of liberty and of community service. HSBC should be shut down and its directors sacked. The bank should be split into smaller units under public control with a strictly defined public service objective

Translation by Mike Krolikowski

CADTM

Social and democratic rights radically challenged!

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

The mainstream media often mention the dangers of the Eurozone falling apart, the failure of austerity policies to fan the embers of the economy, tensions between Berlin and Paris or Rome, or even London and the Eurozone, disagreements between ECB directors, the enormous difficulty in agreeing on the EU budget or the wincing of certain European governments concerning IMF remarks about austerity levels. These problems are real but they should not overshadow the essential issues.

The leaders of the strongest European countries and of big business alike are delighted to have created a common economic, commercial, and political zone in which European transnational corporations and the major Eurozone economies benefit from the collapse of the Eurozone's Southern economies. The stronger economies gain a competitive advantage over their North American and Chinese competitors. Their objective at this point is not to revive growth to reduce differences between the stronger and weaker economies of the EU.

Furthermore the European elites see the economic collapse in the South as an opportunity to privatise public companies on a large scale and acquire common goods at give-away prices, helped by the Troika (ECB IMF and European Commission) with the active complicity of the peripheral governments. Big Capital in the Southern European countries is in favour of this prospect, hoping to get a piece of the cake it has been ogling for a long time. The grabbing of public sector companies in Greece and Portugal foreshadows what will happen in Spain and Italy, where public companies are relatively much bigger in respect to the size of their economies. The leaders of the strongest European

economies are hoping to pass another wave of important privatisations in their own countries.

The collusion between governments and big business has gone public. At the head of several governments, in important ministerial posts and at the presidency of the ECB, we find men and women who are part and parcel of the world of high finance, [1] in particular former directors of Goldman Sachs. [2] Certain high-profile politicians are rewarded with jobs in big banks once they have fulfilled their loyal service to Big Capital. [3] This revolving-door complicity is not new; it is just more obvious and systematic than at any time over the last fifty years.

To imagine that the policies imposed by the European elite have failed because economic growth has not returned would be to totally miss the point. The goal of the board of the ECB, the European Commission, the governments of the strongest EU economies, the boardrooms of the banks and other big companies is neither a quick return to growth nor the reduction of inequalities in the Eurozone and the EU that would favour a more coherent system and the return of prosperity.

One fundamental issue is paramount, and that is the capacity of the elites, who have meekly put themselves at the service of the multinationals, to manage crises, even chaotic situations, in the interests of these big companies. The scale of the crisis is presented as the motive justifying a shock therapy against the economic and social rights of the European peoples.

The very principles of our cultural, social and economic rights are being challenged eroded down to their bases, as are the civil and political rights to elect political representatives. Indeed, the European Parliament does not genuinely exercise

any legislative power, the Troika dictates the legal acts to the national parliaments of the countries that it has subjected. Other parliaments have their sovereignty and power severely limited by various European treaties, such as the TSCG, which set unacceptable fiscal constraints, adopted without democratic consultation. Other such rights are also being violated: the effective exercise of universal suffrage, the right to reject treaties, the right to amend the Constitution through a democratic constituent process, the right to organise protests and see them through to success. The EU and its member countries resort to authoritarian methods, with representatives of the economic oligarchy again directly exercising power.

To push the greatest offensive, on a European scale, since WWII against the human rights of the populations, the governments and employers have a full panoply of arms available: rampant unemployment, repayment of public debt, later retirements, end of unemployment benefits, labour precariousness, reducing wages and benefits, job cuts in the private and the public sectors, the constraint of a balanced budget that is a pretext for severe cuts in social and public spending and the pursuit of ever greater competitiveness between EU Member States and in the face of worldwide competition.

Capital's objective is to further threaten stable employment, radically reduce the capacity of workers to organise, and substantially push down direct and indirect wages while at the same time maintaining enormous disparities within the EU so as to sharpen the blade of labour competition. First, there are the inequalities between women and men, between workers with permanent or temporary jobs, between full-time and part-time workers, between generations having gained pension rights based on systems that are universal and obligatory and younger generations faced with ever more individualised and uncertain systems; not to mention over-exploited clandestine workers who have no benefits or labour-related social rights.

The inequality gap has widened over the last twenty years, pushed by employers' initiatives and helped along by successive governments (including left-wing governments). There are also the different inequalities between workers in the different EU countries.

Then there are inequalities between workers in the different EU countries. The differences between workers in the principal and secondary economies within the EU complement those found within national boundaries. Workers' wages in the stronger countries (Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden,) are two or three times higher than the wages of Greek, Portuguese, or Slovenian workers. The minimum wage in Bulgaria (156 Euros a month in 2013) is 1/8th to 1/9th that of countries such as France, Belgium or the Netherlands. [4]

In South America, although there are great disparities between the stronger economies (Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela) and the weaker ones (Bolivia, Ecuador, and Paraguay), there is no more than a fourfold difference in the legal minimum wage there—which is much less significant than in the EU. This difference clearly shows how strong the competition among European workers is today.

The European authorities also strengthen the "Fortress Europe" policies by blotting out the rights of non European nationals to enter the European territories. As they "refine" their criminal methods they cause thousands of deaths among applicants fleeing to the European shores. The right to asylum itself is trampled upon.

It is clear, that behind the smoke screen of official announcements, a terribly unjust and deadly logic is at work. It is high time it be exposed, in order to better resist it and defeat it.

Translated by CADTM

CADTM

SPANISH STATE

"Anticapitalistas" movement: we are neither being born nor dying; we are transforming ourselves

BRAIS FERNÁNDEZ ·

Brais Fernandez and Raul Camargo

It was not an easy decision. First, it is obvious that we did not take this decision in an entirely free way, although we were fully aware of its significance.

A sector of Podemos, at present a majority in its leadership, has created a paradoxical situation: while "persecuting" Izquierda Anticapitalista for being a party, it is building a highly vertically party, with a General Secretary, with a faction-brand called Clara que Podemos [1] as a majority in the leading bodies.

Podemos is ending up by building itself as a classic party structure, while the "original party" Izquierda Anticapitalista, is transformed into a movement, seeking to adapt its organizational form to the new times. A Hegelian irony: what appears as new is rapidly aging, while what is allegedly old is renewing itself.

A point of clarification before continuing. Abandoning the legal form does not mean abandoning a coming together based on common ideas. In fact we are becoming more so and we want to organize a broader, more open movement for socialism and democracy.

In this last and at the same time first congress, the fundamental debate focused on revolutionary strategy and on the forms that the real movement of those below is taking on. How can we help to build breaches, possibilities of radical change, starting from the concrete situation?

Our hypothesis is being constructed starting from the real processes of the class struggle. Thus, we find two experiences particularly revealing: the Greek experience, with its dialectic between social struggle in the streets and workplaces, combined

with the electoral assault articulated by SYRIZA, and the experience of the 15M movement in the Spanish State, with its innovative forms of self-organization and popular mobilization, which are the structure that inspires the circles (local branches) of Podemos.

In short, our task is to contribute to the electoral victory of Podemos, building Popular Power, that is to say, spaces that make it possible to democratize society, to move forward towards social management of the commons, distributing wealth among those who produce it. This is an exceptional historic moment, one in which talking about change is not an abstraction, but a latent necessity. We also know that the possibilities do not concretize themselves on their own: without an activism that is committed, organized, trained, implanted in the neighborhoods and in the reality of the working class, no transformation is possible; at most, a renewal of elites. Therefore our movement is an activist, militant movement, which seeks to build hegemony, not a normal party or an electoral structure.

There was also an analysis of the limits that we have encountered in recent years. Clearly the broad anti-capitalist party model we built has encountered certain limits that have made us adjust our perspective. First, because the 15M movement generated new forms of politicization, which did not look to the organizations of the radical left (and much less to the institutional left) as a reference.

Then the brutal intensification of capitalist crisis is forcing us to rethink the lines between anti-neoliberalism and anti-capitalism, understanding the processes of rupture involving large social majorities, the elements that are decisive in order to

change history, starting from the rejection of austerity and the lack of democracy. To bring the movement up to date in order to adapt it to the political programme that can today open fissures that are irreconcilable with capital; every hypothesis has to be ratified, rectified and retaken, starting from practice.

There are many debates and many battles to explain. We are still on the left, not in a symbolic or identity sense (a word without practice says nothing), but because we learn and we situate ourselves in a political and cultural tradition that was embraced by millions of people, the same people who won the rights are today being taken from us, but without ceasing to be aware that "left", like "communism" (undoubtedly the word that best defines

us, if words were not contaminated by history) have often been words used for unworthy interests; Yesterday, sometimes, to justify dictatorships, today sometimes to fragment the left.

We come out of this congress stronger and with more challenges. This is a difference that is characteristic of the times in which we live: our tasks and possibilities are greater than ever, our resources remain insufficient in proportion in order to address them. The next few years will be crucial to see if we are able to compensate for this gap. For now, let us go forward.

Brais Fernandez and Raul Camargo are part of the "Anticapitalistas" movement and participate in Podemos.

GREECE

SYRIZA, socialists and the struggles ahead

ANTONIS DAVANELLOS ·

SYRIZA won a tremendous victory in the January 25 elections because it promised an alternative to the catastrophic economic and social crisis that Greece has endured for more than five years. But with the government of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras only two weeks old, the political and financial elite of Europe, from Germany's Angela Merkel and Wolfgang Schäuble to Mario Draghi, head of the European Central Bank (ECB), have rejected all proposals to negotiate Greece's huge foreign debt or relax the austerity conditions imposed as a condition for the bailout of the country's economic system. With a showdown approaching, all eyes are on the struggle in Greece and the hope it holds for the future.

Antonis Davanellos and Sotiris Martalis are members of the Greek socialist organization Internationalist Workers Left (DEA), a co-founder of SYRIZA a decade ago and now a leading force in the Left Platform inside SYRIZA. Both are members of SYRIZA's Central Committee. On February 7, Antonis and Sotiris spoke to an audience of socialists in the U.S. via videoconference about SYRIZA's election victory, the first days of the new government and the struggles that lie ahead. After an opening presentation, the two responded to numerous questions from the audience. Here, we publish their comments, edited and supplemented for publication at SocialistWorker.org.

Antonis Davanellos: Opening Presentation

The first thing to understand is the importance of January 25 as a victory for the left, as well as for SYRIZA. This has happened in a country where, in the past century, there were two dictatorships and a

civil war, in which the left suffered terrible defeats. This is the first major political victory for the radical left in the whole period since the 1940s.

This victory is based on the mass resistance of the working class in Greece over the past five or six years. So you can understand that throughout the population, throughout the country, there is a feeling of joy and celebration.

This feeling of celebration has been reinforced by what the ministers of the new government have said in just the first weeks after the election. The government will officially be in power on Monday, February 9, but before that, when the new ministers were taking over their ministries, they were already saying and doing important things.

For example, one was sworn in and immediately announced that the ongoing privatization of the port of Piraeus, the largest seaport in Greece, will end. Another said that as of that day, the privatization of the Public Electricity Co. (DEI) would be reversed. There were announcements that the layoffs in the public sector would end, and 3,500 workers could return to work.

Also during this time, Tsipras made an agreement with the Independent Greeks [known by the initials ANEL, a right-wing party that is also against the Memorandums] to be a part of the government, going against the position of SYRIZA that it would form a government of the left.

It seems that some people outside Greece think that SYRIZA has made a deal with a party that is similar to Golden Dawn. This is not the case. The Independent Greeks are a party that comes from the right. They have also taken a clear position against the Memorandums, which has forced them to change their conservative positions on specific questions. For example, ANEL supports privatiza-

tion in its basic program. Yet over the past five years, it has been against any concrete proposal for privatization because they were carried out under the Memorandums.

After the agreement with ANEL was announced, our organization produced a statement opposing this alliance with the Independent Greeks. We said that this went against the declarations from the conferences of SYRIZA that rejected alliances with center-left parties—surely this meant the center-right as well. We said that the alliance with ANEL would be a transmission belt for conservative pressures on the government.

But to be honest, in the days ahead, I think your attention should not be on the Independent Greeks as much as other factors that are much more crucial in determining what the government will or will not do. The threat posed by the Independent Greeks will be an easy problem for us to solve compared to the bigger problems—dealing with the international lenders, with the existing ruling class in Greece, and with the existing state.

After the formation of the government, the negotiations with Greece's creditors began, and what we have seen is the European Union and European Commission, the European Central Bank, along with the German government, taking a very hard position. They are trying to humiliate the newly elected government in Greece, with a clear aim of isolating and eventually overthrowing that government.

Facing them is the new Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, who is not a member of SYRIZA. He is an ex-social democrat who was selected by the SYRIZA leadership to be a minister. He is trying to maneuver against the pressure exerted by the EU by changing the basic positions of SYRIZA around the question of debt, in the hopes of making a compromise with Wolfgang Schäuble [the finance minister of Germany].

We don't know what the outcome of this maneuvering will be. This is a new and unpredictable situation. But we do know the importance of the

changes in Greece—they are immense, inside the country, and outside it.

Within Greece, there is a sense that we must support the government, but also that the government must not compromise with the creditors. Two nights ago, on February 5, after a last-minute appeal and very little organization, more than 10,000 people were in Syntagma Square to show their support for the government, but at the same time to demand that the government not retreat.

This will be a very complicated situation. Even if the leadership of SYRIZA wants to make a compromise, it isn't at all certain it can do so. There is a lot of evidence that the working class movement in Greece is willing to fight, and now that there is hope as a result of the SYRIZA victory, I think it can fight even better.

But we must also remember the importance of the change internationally. A few days ago, I was in Germany, speaking to a public meeting about the government of the left in Greece, and as people there said, this is the first time in 20 years that there has been a public discussion in Germany about another possible road than neoliberalism. That is very important. You can see the alternative in Spain—the second example of left-wing success in elections after SYRIZA is Podemos. This is a real political threat to the ruling classes of Europe and the EU leadership.

I don't know exactly what will happen—nobody knows. We may win, and we may be defeated. We don't know the end of the story. The only thing that I can tell you is that we will fight to win. Nobody should forget that SYRIZA is a particular kind of political party—it is a network of activists and militants with a strong left that isn't defeated.

Antonis Davanellos: First Round of Answers

We were asked about the reaction of the mass movements to the new government. It is too early to say. The government has not even, at this point, officially presented its program, so we are really at the beginning.

There was a demonstration several days ago in Syntagma Square in support of the government and against Schäuble's threats. Plus, there are discussions and meetings in unions and at many workplaces, talking about the demands that can be presented to the government, and how to push it for solutions. But that is the point we are at right now.

It is still early. For example, the workers at ERT [the public radio and TV station closed down by the government in 2013, which led to an occupation of the main production facility] are saying that for now, they will wait for the government to present its solution for reopening the station. We are in discussions with those workers—about the need to mobilize to make this happen quicker. But this shows the feeling is that up until now, the government is doing well.

As for the Left Platform and the left inside SYRIZA, all the radical currents inside SYRIZA, with the exception of DEA, are participating in the government.

For example, the Left Current, which together with us forms the Left Platform, has four important ministers in the new government. The radical wing among supporters of the current that Tsipras is part of—the Left Unity current—has five ministers. DEA has elected two members of parliament—one is a member of DEA and one is a supporter from Kalamata. Both are women, and one is the youngest member of parliament in Greece.

As for the attitude of the ruling class in Greece toward SYRIZA and the conflict there, for the moment, this is secondary, because the principal question is the negotiations with Europe over the debt.

The Greek ruling class isn't supporting the government, but is asking it to compromise with the EU. For its part, the leadership of SYRIZA is trying to convince the ruling class, through the media and so on, that Tsipras will find a solution without a major crisis. But all of this is speculative, because it is based on the estimation that Schäuble will accept a compromise and also that the social base of

SYRIZA and its membership will accept a compromise.

In reality, that isn't a certainty at all—on either side. I think that Schäuble cannot accept even Yanis Varoufakis' more moderate proposal, which is in conflict with the positions SYRIZA has committed to in its declarations. And at the same time, you can already hear voices inside SYRIZA protesting against the concessions of Varoufakis' plan.

I think this is just the first chapter of the book. The second chapter will be about taxing the corporations and the rich; stopping the privatizations and reclaiming the major companies and enterprises that have been privatized; and above all, the question of controlling the banks.

There was a question about Golden Dawn, Islamophobia and the line of SYRIZA toward immigrants in Greece. The showing of Golden Dawn was the only dark spot in the elections that we were unhappy about. Their result was a little bit weaker than the last elections, but they still won over 6 percent of the vote.

The main thing to say is that Golden Dawn has been forced to change how it operates in order to keep its influence. Up to six months ago, it was organized around armed violence in the streets—attacks by Nazi thugs against immigrants, gays, unionists and left-wing activists.

After the death of Pavlos Fyssas [a left-wing hip-hop artist murdered by a Golden Dawn member in September 2013] and the mass mobilizations that forced New Democracy and the state to take legal action against Golden Dawn, this orientation collapsed. Now the Nazis are considering whether they should turn toward an electoral strategy and perhaps try to cooperate with Antonis Samaras [the former prime minister and leader of the main center-right party New Democracy].

This is because a huge crisis has opened up inside New Democracy, following the election defeat. There is a confrontation between Samaras' hard-line right strategy and policies and the traditional

center-right positions of people around Kostas Karamanlis. Many of Karamanlis' followers are accusing Samaras that of having transformed New Democracy into a far-right groupuscule.

On the question of Islamophobia, SYRIZA is a party that has grown up fighting against racism. So for the vast majority of our members and followers, Islamophobia is something they protest. Local branches of SYRIZA are organizing in support of immigrants and fighting against Islamophobia—but this is mainly at the grassroots.

The new government has appointed Tasia Christodouloupoulou, a radical, anti-racist activist, as the minister responsible for questions of immigration. All the other parties, starting with ANEL and continuing through New Democracy and PASOK, are objecting and asking how a radical activist can be a minister and carry out the laws on immigration.

In a month's time, there will be a demonstration demanding legalization for immigrants, giving full civil rights to the children of immigrants, accepting refugees who are fleeing war, and eliminating the camps where immigrants are detained. So you can see that this is an ongoing battle, but we are in a much better position now than we were.

On the relationship of SYRIZA and the other parties in Greece, the first point is that this wasn't just an election victory for SYRIZA, but a major political victory.

Look at the overall picture. SYRIZA won 36.3 percent of the vote. Then you have New Democracy, the former ruling party, at 27.8 percent, and all the other parties—including PASOK, previously the main party of the center left—are around 6 percent or less. This shows the dominance of SYRIZA in the new parliament, which gives the government many options to strengthen its position—but only if they use them.

For example, one of the first acts of the new parliament was to elect a speaker, and the candidate put forward by SYRIZA, Zoe Konstantopoulou, got 235

votes out of 300. That means that many more members of parliament than just SYRIZA—the MPs of the Communist Party, the center-left parties—voted for SYRIZA's candidate.

As for two other parties of the left, the Communist Party and ANTARSYA, the Communist Party has maintained its hostility toward cooperating with SYRIZA, which people call sectarian. In my mind, their attitude is not merely sectarian, but completely abstentionist and passive. They continue to attack SYRIZA first and New Democracy second. The party maintained that it would not support SYRIZA in a vote of tolerance in parliament [which would have allowed SYRIZA to lead a government on its own],

I will say that I think Tsipras gave a big present to the leadership of the Communist Party by immediately making an agreement to form a government with the support of the Independent Greeks. If he had insisted on going to parliament to present the program of a SYRIZA government and then asked for a vote of tolerance—the course we supported—I think the Communist Party would have been in a very difficult position in maintaining its sectarian position, without losing further support.

ANTARSYA [a coalition of anti-capitalist organizations that got less than 1 percent of the vote and does not have representation in parliament] is in trouble. Its electoral showing was a little better than in the parliamentary elections in June 2012, but still less than what it got in May 2012. For now, the coalition has many differences within it. One part is rightly supporting the SYRIZA government, while another is continuing its rejection.

That is where things stand with SYRIZA and the other parties of the left. Given that, I think the question of the balance of forces inside SYRIZA is the more important question.

On the left inside SYRIZA is the Left Platform, which is made up of DEA and the Left Current. At the conference, the Left Platform had 30 percent of the vote of SYRIZA members, and it is accepted by

everyone that after the conference, the Left Platform became stronger.

The new development was a split among the supporters of Tsipras in his Left Unity current. This split to the left was presented publicly through an open letter signed by 53 cadres of SYRIZA—so we refer to them as "the 53." The important thing is that if you add the support for the Left Platform to the support for the 53, together, they are a strong part of the Central Committee of SYRIZA.

This explains why Tsipras and the party leadership didn't call meetings of the Central Committee and acted by themselves in the lead-up to the election. They were able to get away with this, but the pressure inside the party about these questions of democracy is strong and building.

The leadership is apparently planning a reorganization of the party, which would mean a new conference held very soon, and the election of a new Central Committee. With this, Tsipras may hope he can change the balance of forces inside SYRIZA away from the left and back in his favor. Will it work? We will see. It will not be easy. But to be absolutely honest, this new situation after the elections is confusing and chaotic, and nobody knows exactly what will come next.

I said earlier that the rest of the left inside SYRIZA, other than DEA, has agreed to participate in the government. We have decided not to participate—not just governmental offices, but also in the machinery of the state. We will try to remain a force inside the social movements and in the Left Platform inside SYRIZA.

I will say a few things about DEA at this point. We are still a small organization, though we are double our size from when we began. The most important thing to say is that we are a very healthy organization, with connections in many unions, social movements and the local organizations of SYRIZA. We have done this openly as members of DEA, representing our organization.

We have strengthened DEA—for example, with a serious campaign around our newspaper. We are producing a much bigger newspaper, and for the first time, we are selling our paper not only through members, but at newsstands, which is an important step forward for us.

There are some inside SYRIZA who think that the left is isolated right now. We don't feel this way. We know that our position within SYRIZA is a minority, but we have a very big audience that is in contact with us, and that respects the political positions we are taking.

I also want to comment on the situation outside of Greece in Europe. The politics of austerity and neoliberalism still dominate, and the gains for the right wing in countries like France and Italy are one part of the picture. But we shouldn't lose sight of the signs of change. SYRIZA's election victory in Greece is one example. The strong support for Podemos in Spain is another. Sinn Féin has made gains in Ireland, and there is good news from Portugal for the first time in some years. And in Germany, there are signs that the situation is shifting.

Still, having said this, it is absolutely clear that a majority of the governments and all the governing institutions of Europe will attack the agenda that SYRIZA is putting forward. Against this, all the radicals inside SYRIZA have a common slogan: Not one step back. We insist on our program and will work to achieve it—to use a reference from the movement in the United States—by any means necessary.

And "by any means necessary," that includes understanding that the confrontation with the European Union might mean an exit from the euro and a return to a national currency. We do not support this as a first choice, or worse, as a method to save Greek capitalism from the crisis. This is not a Plan B for an economic revival in Greece, as some economists have put forward. Rather, it is a political position stating that we are determined to over-

throw austerity, and we will finish the job by any means necessary.

Sotiris Martalis: First Round of Answers

I want to comment on the question about the relationship between SYRIZA, the trade unions and the Communist Party.

SYRIZA's forces in the unions have increased over the last period, but until now, the majority in most unions are social democrats. On most questions, they win, with the support of more conservative forces. But in the past year, there have been a number of splits, with the forces of SYRIZA in a stronger position—which has led some social democrats to approach us with support or offers of alliances. We believe that this will continue and that SYRIZA will continue to become a stronger force in the trade unions.

Members of the Communist Party have had a sectarian policy inside the unions as well as in politics. For a long time, the Communist Party and ANTARSYA had similar demands to SYRIZA of stopping the layoffs and rehiring public-sector workers, opening up public services and enterprises that were closed and stopping the wage cuts. Now they talk about demanding that the government immediately increase salaries by 35 percent or more, to the level they were at in 2009. So you can see that this is not a policy of pushing SYRIZA from the left, but of dividing the struggle.

I agree with Antonis that DEA is not isolated within SYRIZA—we know a large part of the left inside the Party sees DEA as an important part of the Left Platform and will continue to find ways to work with us. I also want to say that in December, DEA had a unity conference with a smaller organization, Kokkino, which has joined forces with DEA so we are now stronger and better able to build inside SYRIZA.

As far as the attitude of workers and popular forces toward the new government, there were many symbolic steps that won a lot of support for SYRIZA. For example, on the day after the election, Tsipras

made a point of going to national resistance monument in Kaisariani, where the Nazis executed 200 people, most of them Communists, on May Day in 1944, during the occupation of Greece in the Second World War. Tsipras laid a wreath in memory of the victims.

Also on that first day, workers took down the barriers surrounding parliament, which were put up to stop demonstrators. At the same time, the new ministers were announcing that SYRIZA would honor its promises to implement measures like restoring the minimum wage to 751 euros a month from 530 euros, to re-establish collective labor agreements, to go back to not taxing people's first 12,000 euros of income and so on.

All this gave a lot of momentum to the government, and a lot of hope to people that it will stand up for its commitments. Now, we have to see how the government deals with the international lenders so that it will have money to honor these promises.

Antonis Davanellos: Second Round of Answers

I want to first talk about the working class movement before the elections. It's obvious that Greece had a huge resistance movement until 2012. From 2010 to 2012, there were several dozen general strikes and many other major workplace battles, which were the backbone of mass demonstrations involving hundreds of thousands of people.

This experience was important for the working class in many ways, but most of all, it taught workers that to win even their minimum demands against austerity, they had to defeat the government and reject the Troika. Greek workers tried to do this through their own struggles and demonstrations, but at that point, they encountered the naked force of the state. We have faced not just the police, but military special forces, with all their weapons.

It was a very difficult experience, and by 2012, workers had turned their hopes toward elections to defeat the Memorandum governments. The conclusion can be summed up as this: We prefer the way

of struggle, with the working class in the middle of the political scene, but we can't choose the conditions we face.

It is important to say that this wasn't a turn to the right since 2012—that is absolutely clear. This is why SYRIZA won—because the mass of the working class is attempting to make changes in their conditions by supporting a left alternative in elections.

At the same time, of course, there were workers and social struggles that did continue. I think that is an important fact for everybody to remember, because it means the conditions exist for a huge movement to reappear very quickly. That sends a message to the ruling class, but also to the new government.

I'll also say something about the Movement of the Squares, the rise of the popular assemblies and so on. Looking back, it has not had as much of an impact as many people outside Greece may think. For a period, the occupations of public spaces were very important, but the movement didn't leave much behind.

I think that here in Greece—though this is not the case in many countries—the central social force of the resistance movement has been the organized working class. By organized, I mean organized in workplaces for the possibility of strikes and struggles. In Greece, we didn't have the same kind of sentiment that people have called "anti-party" or "anti-political." It is important to recognize that the majority of workers felt that to change their lives, they needed to support a left-wing party in the elections.

In the concrete circumstances of today, various forces on the left, including DEA as well as the Left Current within SYRIZA, support the idea of reconstructing the popular committees—that is, uniting local organizations of resistance. We are at the beginning stages of this—something we are discussing and planning for, but have not yet done.

In Spain, the development of the resistance was different. There, the occupation movement of the "in-

dignados" was a much stronger ingredient in the resistance. I think this is the basis of the creation of Podemos. Within Podemos, we have a relationship with Izquierda Anticapitalista. We think this is the most serious effort to organize within Podemos against the influence of these anti-politics or anti-left ideas that could seriously damage this movement that has created so many hopes.

For Greece, the Podemos movement is very important. Maybe the most important event for us after the election was the massive demonstration in Madrid organized by Podemos—with hundreds of thousands of people demonstrating in solidarity with Greece, showing the unity of the resistance across Europe.

Someone asked about the social democratic parties in Greece and why they have not responded to the crisis by moving to the left. I think the explanation lies in what the social democratic parties have done over the past 20 or 30 years. They have moved so far to the right, and this involved creating relationships with the ruling classes that they can't break now. I think it is impossible for the Social Democratic Party in Germany to return to what the SPD was in the 1970s.

Given this, I think the only way forward is what we have done in Greece. For the left to grow, it must sweep aside the social democratic parties. In Greece, PASOK, which was once one of the strongest social democratic parties in Europe, basically doesn't exist anymore. It won less than 5 percent of the vote, and it can no longer mobilize people to demonstrations.

As for the question about the importance of raising the minimum wage to the pre-Memorandum level, this is critical. It is not really about the conditions of the workers who are paid at the minimum wage. More importantly, this measure, along with the restoration of collective labor agreements, sends a political message to the majority of the working class that we starting to make gains, and there is more to come in the future. Our newspaper's front-

page headline right now is: "We will take everything back."

The minimum wage influences income at all levels. If the minimum salary is growing, it will push up all salaries above it. So this is very important, and I'm sure we will see that the ruling class will pressure Tsipras to delay and retreat on this.

What obstacles does SYRIZA present for mobilizations of the working class? I think the answer to this question is: It doesn't. We must change our way of thinking, at least with the conditions that exist in Greece. We cannot explain everything wrong by saying the problems are caused by the leadership. There is something else very important, which is the balance of forces inside society.

That does not mean that the leadership of SYRIZA has no responsibility for what happens. It has serious responsibilities that we demand it live up to. But in reality, there is no magic button that Tsipras can push and the working class will mobilize inside Greece.

It is very important that our political current has a transitional strategy and tactics. We are starting from the real conditions of the working class movement and trying to put forward concrete steps to make gains and increase the confidence of workers. I want to take this opportunity to again thank Haymarket Books for its help in publishing a book in Greek on the Fourth Congress of the Communist International [Toward the United Front: Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International, 1922]. We thought that with our relationship to SYRIZA, we were opening up a new path for socialists, but with these documents, we realized that the path was begun some years ago. To introduce these ideas in a book for the Greek left was a big help for us.

That leads me to talking about the lessons from the experience of SYRIZA for other countries. Here, I must be very honest. It is not possible to translate these lessons directly for anyone on the left internationally. SYRIZA is the concrete result of the

concrete conditions of the concrete class struggle in Greece.

Nobody can explain the political development of SYRIZA without the massive mobilization of working class three years ago. This was the basis of SYRIZA's rise and its victory in the elections, but that was not the only factor. Ten years ago in Greece, there were huge mobilizations against capitalist globalization, the creation of the Greek Social Forum and a movement against war. These are also part of the roots of SYRIZA.

After this experience, we tried to continue what we started in the Greek Social Forum with a political formation. Ten years after the founding of SYRIZA, we are happy to say that we have done very well—but that is a period of 10 years of fighting, of specific developments of the Greek left and so on. So we cannot give lessons to anyone.

But having said that, as I said before, it is very important for any political current to hold some basic strategic ideas, and here, I think the concept of transitional demands and strategies is very important. That's why we make reference to Lenin and Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg. There are times when we are in a small minority, and there are times when we feel like we are swimming with the stream with these ideas.

I will talk more about the question of exiting the euro. As I said before, our approach to this question is in the context of what will bring us closer to socialism. So our approach is absolutely not the same as the economists who think that exiting the euro will ease Greece's crisis within the bounds of capitalism.

That's why we don't feel that we are saying the same thing as Costas Lapavistas [the left-wing economist and now a member of parliament representing SYRIZA]. Costas is a radical. His proposals for exiting the euro are coming from the left, but we can't agree with the idea that changing the currency will pull Greek society out of the crisis. If the balance of forces between workers and the ruling class remains the same, the shift to a national currency

could be a disaster for workers by making them bear the brunt of a huge devaluation.

Shifting to a national currency based on a permanent devaluation in order for the Greek economy to become more competitive with other countries is not exactly a march toward social liberation. It can be a march toward worse misery and poverty.

On the other hand, however, we prefer Lapavistas' economic ideas to those of Yanis Varoufakis. The ideas of Varoufakis are simply social democratic. He believes he has clever mechanisms for negotiations on the debt, where Greece will pay all of the debt, but in a way where nobody loses—not Greek workers, not the creditors, not anybody. He is proposing that Greece be able to issue new bonds, where the payments are tied to growth in the Greek economy, to the Euribor measure of interest rates offered by banks, and to other things.

I think that Varoufakis' hope to avoid a confrontation with the ruling class and save the Greek economy through his new financial ideas is simply a social democratic fantasy that will lead to a big setback. And I'm not sure at all that Schäuble will accept what Varoufakis is proposing. In just a few days, the finance ministers from the Eurozone will meet to discuss the plan and make a decision. So a moment of truth is coming for the new government.

As I said before, we don't start from the question of whether Greece should keep the euro or leave. We start from the idea that we must organize our class to confront and reverse austerity, and in this way, we can open the way for exiting the era of neoliberalism and moving toward socialism.

I will finish with the question of SYRIZA's agreement with ANEL and the discussion inside the Left Platform. We don't agree with making an alliance with ANEL. It isn't mainly because ANEL is tied up with the Greek Orthodox Church or that it is a hard-line Greek nationalist party. All this is true, but the main problem is that the presence of ANEL inside a government of the left will be the transmis-

sion belt for the ruling class to put more pressure on the government.

That's why we opposed the agreement with ANEL from the beginning, and why you can be sure that we will be the first to push for kicking the ANEL founder, Panos Kammenos, out of the government when this becomes possible. Frankly, I think that will be easy when the time comes.

But there is a different danger that people need to be aware of. Martin Schulz, the president of the European Parliament and leader of the European alliance of center-left parties, visited Athens and said it was a shame for SYRIZA to make an alliance with the Independent Greeks. But his alternative was that SYRIZA should create an alliance with PASOK.

That is pure hypocrisy. For the past three years, the European social democrats were supporting a government in which PASOK participated under the rule of New Democracy and a hard right prime minister who has connections with Golden Dawn. And now they talk about fighting the right?

I think that Tsipras made the agreement with the Independent Greeks because he wanted to form a government the next day after the elections. If he was obliged to move in the way we proposed—to wait for two weeks until the new session of parliament opened and seek a vote of tolerance for SYRIZA to govern alone—that would have meant the prime minister from New Democracy, Antonis Samaras, would have remained in place for two weeks, and been in a position to organize some very damaging things, like a bank run or closing some large enterprises in order to create a climate of panic. And that might have created the conditions for parliament not to accept the result of the elections.

So I think that Tsipras moved so quickly because he was afraid that two weeks is a long and dangerous time in conditions like these. That's why the discussion about ANEL is calmer inside Greece. Everybody knows that this is problem, but it is a problem we can confront. There are more danger-

ous threats for the left than ANEL's presence in the government.

So the discussions within the Left Platform are very difficult. In crucial political moments, the political background and education of every part of SYRIZA will come to the surface. So, for example, because of our political tradition, it was easier for DEA to recognize the problems with Varoufakis' ideas—and not as easy for the comrades of the Left Current, who come from a Stalinist background, where the popular front is a prominent legacy.

So there is confusion among the left in SYRIZA, but with the concrete experiences we are going through now, we can confront this confusion. For example, before the parliament opened, we worked together with other currents in SYRIZA to stop any tendency in the party from undermining the importance of the commitment on the minimum wage and other proposals SYRIZA has made.

So that is the situation. It is very difficult and complicated, and the only thing we can say is that we will fight as hard as we can within this situation for the goals and strategies of the left.

Sotiris Martalis: Second Round of Answers

I have one point to add to the question about whether the ruling class could try to build another

social democratic party to counteract the popularity of SYRIZA. In reality, they have tried this, with the creation of a new party named Potami, which means "river." Potami is a creation with a lot of support from the mass media, and it doesn't have a clear line.

The real problem for the ruling class is not which social democratic party to create or rebuild, but the political defeat of the center-left, which has given SYRIZA political hegemony. On the center-left, there are three parties, one of which didn't reach the 3 percent necessary to get into parliament—so those parties are very weak.

One question SYRIZA must face now is what happens when former leaders of these social democratic parties try to come to SYRIZA. SYRIZA has problems just based on its size. Its membership is around 35,000 people, and it won 2,250,000 votes—that's a very big gap. So that's another problem that reality has presented to SYRIZA, and that it must solve.

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Transcription by Karen Domínguez Burke

Socialist Worker

CLIMATE CHANGE

A European agreement?

DANIEL TANURO ·

A 40% reduction in emissions

The heads of state and government of the EU agreed on three new objectives: reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases by at least 40% by 2030 (compared to 1990), increasing the share of renewable energy to 27% of energy consumption and increasing energy efficiency by 27 %. The third objective is not binding; the first two are to be achieved at the level of the EU as a whole.

It is clear from the reports of the IPCC that, to have one chance in two of not exceeding two degrees Celsius of temperature increase compared to the 18th century, the developed countries, because they are mainly responsible for global warming, should reduce their emissions by 80-95% by 2050, passing by an intermediate step of 25-40% by 2020. The agreement concluded on October 24 targets the higher end of the range, but ten years late.

A misleading figure

Most importantly, the figure of 40% is misleading because it ignores "grey emissions", in other words emissions caused by the production of goods consumed in Europe but imported from other countries. The accounting of emissions is based on the place of production, not on the place of consumption. This mode of calculation has been adopted in the framework of international negotiations. It is not neutral. Indeed, given that an increasing share of goods consumed in developed countries is produced in the emerging countries, an accounting system based on places of production means that a part of the emissions due to rich countries is attributed to poor ones. This gives a distorted image

of the responsibility of the former and of their efforts at "mitigation" of global warming.

Of course, there are not only goods produced in the South and consumed in the North, but also goods produced in the North and consumed in the South, goods produced in the South and consumed in other countries of the South, goods produced in the North and consumed in other countries of the North, and goods produced in a country of the South which pass through another country of the South before being consumed in the North - it is all quite complicated, but the principle is clear: to take the correct measure of climate responsibilities and of the efforts of all parties to limit the damage, we must take into account all these movements of world trade, in order to determine the "net emissions" of each country.

Net transfer of emissions

Researchers have studied the problem to quantify it [1]. Their work confirms that a share of emissions attributed to the developing countries is due in fact to the developed countries. In other words: there is a "net transfer" of emissions from the North to the South.

This transfer is very significant and it is accelerating over time. Overall, the developed countries subject to commitments in the framework of the Kyoto protocol have reduced their emissions by around 2% between 1990 and 2008 (significantly less than their promise of 5.2%). During the same period, the "grey emissions" imported by these countries have increased fourfold (0.4 Gt to 1.6 Gt CO₂). Cumulatively, international trade has thus meant that over eighteen years, 16Gt CO₂ have been transferred from the developed countries to the "developing" countries. For 2008 alone, we arrive at this astounding result: the net transfer of emis-

sions from the North to the South is at least five times higher than the reductions made by the North in the name of its responsibility to the South.

I reduce but I increase

Like others, Europe has benefited from this sleight of hand. It boasts of having almost completed its commitment made in the framework of the Kyoto Protocol (an 8% reduction in its emissions). That is correct ... except that these reductions were significantly lower than the "grey emissions" imported in the form of products manufactured elsewhere. From this point of view, in reality, the EU has not reduced its emissions, it has increased them!

The new commitments post-Kyoto hardly change the picture. As the authors of the study cited note: "If the historical trend continues in a linear fashion, the net emission transfers from the group of developed countries to the group of developing countries will reach approximately 2.3 Gt of CO₂ per year in 2020, or 16% of developed country emissions in 1990". And the researchers note that this figure of 16% is "comparable to the most optimistic offers of reduction made by the developed countries in the framework of the Copenhagen agreement".

It's not us, it's the Chinese

In fact, after Kyoto, the European Union committed to a strategy called "3 x 20": by 2020, a 20% reduction in emissions, 20% renewables and 20% increase in energy efficiency. As a result of sluggish growth and the retraction of "grey emissions", this 20% reduction in emissions by 2020 can be achieved without great difficulty.

However, to follow a trajectory compatible with the limit of 2°C, it would be necessary to go further, to a reduction of at least 30% by 2020 (in fact, 40% would be more prudent). The former secretary-gen-

eral of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Ivo De Boer had pleaded for this before the European Parliament a few years ago, but in vain.

The new objectives for 2030 are of the same ilk as those for 2020: taking into account "grey emissions", the 40% reduction announced by the heads of state and government may turn out more like effective domestic reductions of around 15% and possibly less. The conclusion is clear: the leaders of the EU are trying to hoodwink us while they are in the process of leading us to an indescribable and irreversible disaster. At the same time, they know where to place the blame for it all: "It's not us, it's the Chinese".

Another policy

The fraudulent 40% reduction in reality serves only serve to lull us but also to ensure the EU the best possible position in the climate negotiations supposed to conclude in Paris in 2015. Depending on the interests of the big companies, more and more are saying out loud that their profits come before the salvaging of the climate that we know and under which humanity has developed.

The major environmental NGOS have condemned the decisions of the European Council. Very good. But their arguments are often breathtaking - rather than denounce the mode of accounting which attributes "grey emissions" to developing countries, they are trying to convince governments and employers that a more ambitious climate policy would be more advantageous for the competitiveness of enterprises. This track is doomed to failure. The governments, in this case as in others, act in the best interests of the employers. Rather than wanting to act as advisors, it is important to mobilize en masse for another policy which is both social and ecological.

FAR RIGHT

From Pim Fortuyn to Geert Wilders & the PVV – Pro-gay and anti-Islam: rise of the Dutch far-Right

ALEX DE JONG ·

The Dutch far-right has evolved into one of the most successful national movements in Europe. Its leader Geert Wilders is a major political figure with international support. In many ways Wilders is the heir of Pim Fortuyn, a politician who played a crucial role in shaping a new right-wing current, 'national-populism', in Dutch politics, and who was murdered in 2002.

Populism here means the idea that society is separated in two camps; the 'good people' versus a 'corrupt elite'. The 'people' are not the whole of society, but the part of the society that is considered pure and whose political will is considered legitimate: it is a partial object that stands in for the whole. Who is part of the 'people' is not given, the borders of this category are contested. The selection of those considered part of it and who are not is a political act.

Different kinds of populism use different criteria to select and shape 'the people' into political actors. In national-populism, the 'people' and the nation tend to overlap: the nation is not equal to the citizenry but to the 'people', a term with an historical, ethnic connotation. The national-populism of Fortuyn and Wilders calls for the disappearance of an 'alien' minority culture to preserve a mythical, homogeneous 'Dutchness'.

A nationalist trailblazer

During the nineties Fortuyn became a public figure combining nationalism with populism and right-wing, anti-left liberalism. He argued for neoliberal economic policies and deep cuts in social services. His book *De Verweesde Samenleving* ('The

Orphaned Society'), published in 1995, showed him to be a conservative cultural pessimist, decrying the loss of community, the decline of patriarchal authority figures and the erosion of social norms and values.

Two years later, in his book *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur* ('Against the islamization of our culture'), he declared 'Islamic culture' in particular to be a threat to Dutch society. Fortuyn framed Islamic culture as uniform and a-historical. Supposedly, Islam was not only a religion, but also a world-view and political ideology. According to Fortuyn, under the influence of individualism and 'cultural relativism', Dutch people risked losing their identity to this 'backward' culture.

Fortuyn supposedly attacked Muslims for their culture, not for their ethnicity as such or for being immigrants. In this way, Fortuyn could distance himself from the pseudo-scientific biological racism of the extreme-right at the time. Cultural othering replaced racial othering; 'culture' replaced 'race' as the marker producing a hierarchical difference between an inferior out-group (the target being especially Muslims) and the superior in-group. Fortuyn's avoidance of the charge of 'racism' by claiming he wasn't targeting individuals or a 'race' but a 'culture' or 'religion' remains a standard argument of the Dutch Right.

In practice, the categories constantly overlap and the distinction often becomes meaningless; in his book *The Orphaned Society*, Fortuyn wrote that he considered it impossible for people to 'leave their culture behind'. And in a famous interview with the daily *De Volkskrant* Fortuyn's discussion of Islam segued into linking crime to ethnicity: "Moroccan youth never steal from a Moroccan. Did you ever

notice that? But we can be robbed." [1] Culture functions here in a manner analogous to how race functions in biological racism; heredity is taken as determining the characteristics of human beings.

Fortuyn did not invent these ideas. An important step in introducing such views into the Dutch political mainstream was a 1991 speech by future European Commissioner for Internal Market and Services, Frits Bolkestein [2]. Back then, Bolkestein was leader of the right-wing liberal VVD, one of the major parties in the Netherlands. In a speech for a meeting of the Liberal International, Bolkestein posited a contradiction between European and Christian civilization and the culture of the Middle-East and Islam. In this discourse, democracy and human rights became products of a singular European culture, instead of results of political conflicts inside different cultures.

Likewise, Fortuyn assimilated political concepts as the separation of church and state or equal rights for women and homosexuals into 'Dutch culture'. Fortuyn's national-populism was a mix of moral conservatism and economic liberalism that integrated elements of the Dutch progressive liberal hegemony that had come into being after '68. By linking his attacks on the Muslim minority to Muslims' supposed reactionary views on democracy, women's rights and equal rights for homosexuals, he also appealed to people who considered themselves to be progressive. For Fortuyn, Dutch culture — including the democratic gains he claimed were part of it — was in danger because the 'elites' of the Netherlands refused to recognize the 'threat' of Islamic culture. In populist fashion, Fortuyn appealed to 'the Dutch people' to defend their culture.

But on 6 May, 2002, Pim Fortuyn was killed by environmental activist Volkert van der Graaf.

Despite its electoral success, Fortuyn's party quickly tore itself apart after his death in fights between feuding individuals. But the potential for an anti-immigrant party to the right of the VVD hadn't disappeared and different political forces would try to

appeal to Fortuyn's followers. Of several would-be heirs, Geert Wilders has been the most successful. He has also moved much more to the right than Fortuyn ever did.

In Fortuyn's footsteps

In the late nineties and early 2000s, Wilders was a parliamentarian on the right wing of the VVD and was closely associated with Bolkestein. Another strong political influence on him was fellow VVD-parliamentarian Ayaan Hirsi Ali [3]. Together, Wilders and Hirsi Ali developed a so-called 'critique of the Islamic religion' that saw the behaviour of Muslims as determined by their religion and that blamed the social-economic misery and lack of democracy in many Islamic countries as well as sexism and racism inside Muslim communities on their 'backward' culture. In 2004, Wilders left the VVD and two years later he organized his own party, the Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV, Freedom Party).

In the meantime, the Netherlands was shocked by another murder. In 2004, film-maker and columnist Theo van Gogh was murdered by an Islamic fundamentalist [4]. Van Gogh, a supporter of Pim Fortuyn was a reactionary who often insulted gays, women, Jews and most of all Muslims to whom he referred in terms like 'goatfuckers' or 'pimps of the prophet'. After this murder, dozens of mosques and scores of people were attacked. The Monitor Racisme en Extremisme, a publication by the anti-racist Anne Frank foundation and the University of Leiden, recorded 106 cases of anti-Muslim violence between 2 and 30 November. In this climate, Wilders' popularity soared. In 2006, in its first elections, the PVV won 9 out of 150 seats in the parliament.

After the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008, the major parties tried to make the parliamentary elections of 2010 about social-economic issues and Wilders' popularity declined somewhat. In response, the PVV tried to connect its anti-Islam and anti-migration positions to economic issues. Earlier statements about attacking trade-unions, or a flat

tax rate, abolishing the minimum wage and liberalisation of the law on dismissals flew out of the window. Instead, the 2010 program of the PVV is an example of 'welfare-chauvinism'.

The PVV now promised to defend the welfare state; rejected liberalization of the law on dismissals; demanded keeping the retirement age at 65 et cetera. Such proposals to preserve social rights were combined with proposals to exclude minorities from those rights, by making social security dependent on length of citizenship and language skills, and denying social security to people wearing a burqa or niqab.

The program claimed that 'only the PVV defends the welfare-state and that is why we plead for a stop on immigration from Islamic countries. It's one or the other; either a welfare-state or an immigration-country'. This link between 'Islam' and social rights is indicative of the ideological evolution of the PVV; a few years before, 'Islamization' was supposedly one of several problems facing Dutch society. By 2010 it had become the root cause of social problems, of crime, of the national deficit, of deteriorating social services....

The new government of VVD Prime-Minister Mark Rutte needed the support of the PVV to have a majority in parliament. Its coalition agreement reflected a number of priorities of the PVV. A 'very substantial' lowering of non-western immigration into the country was one of its top goals. The government proposed doing that through further restricting asylum-rights and restrictive immigration policies.

Other typical PVV positions the government adopted were criminalizing undocumented migrants and revoking the Dutch nationality of criminals with double nationalities. In return for policies like these, the PVV gave up many of its 'left-wing' social-economic demands, instead supporting 18 billion Euros in austerity measures. However, the government collapsed in 2012 when the PVV withdrew from talks on even more austerity measures. At the following elections, the PVV took a heavy blow, los-

ing ten seats. Even so, with 15 seats it is the third party in parliament.

The right-wing drift

In late 2013, Geert Wilders began cooperating with parties like the French National Front (FN), the Belgium Vlaams Belang (VB) and the Austrian Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ), parties who for decades have been the core of the European far-right. This step surprised many, since Wilders had always been careful to keep his distance from such parties. However, in recent years, the core of the European far-right has been converging with the trajectory of Wilders. The FN has been evolving towards positions that are close to those of Wilders. The FN today denies its antisemitic past. The FN and PVV pose as the defenders of certain gains of modernity against a supposed Islamic threat.

The FN, like the VB and FPÖ, still has in it remnants of an older European far-right which is anti-modernist, antisemitic and references historical fascism, but this side has been marginalized enough for Wilders to feel he can now ally himself with such parties. At the same time, the PVV is drifting further to the right. For the PVV, Muslims should be subjected to other, more oppressive laws and regulations than people in the 'in-group'; their holy book should be banned, there should be a special tax for wearing head-scarves, unlike other religious groups they should not be allowed to organize their own schools, and recently the party called for closing all mosques in the Netherlands.

Since 2013, the PVV has slowly extended its field of activity. In 2010, when Wilders was tried for inciting hatred, the PVV organized a small support rally but for a long time this was the only extra-parliamentary activity of the party. However, in early 2013 the PVV opened a website to give juridical advice to people objecting to the construction of mosques in their neighbourhood and in February that year Wilders declared a 'resistance tour' throughout the country to collect signatures against the government's austerity policies.

On September 21, on the same day that left-wing organizations organized an anti-austerity protest, the PVV organized its first large demonstration, with a couple of thousand of participants. Wilders' speech at the rally was a mix of nationalist rhetoric, attacks on austerity policies and against his usual targets like Islamization. New about this rally was the presence of activists from a range of fascist and nazi groups. Wilders doesn't feel the need anymore to distance himself from such groups.

The potential of the PVV to mobilize supporters was remarkable considering its weak organizational structure. The PVV doesn't have members, branches or other publications than a website. This way, Wilders is not accountable to anybody. He determines who will be candidate in elections for the PVV and who of its representatives are allowed to talk to the media. Wilders is a prominent figure in the media, regularly drawing attention with statements intended to provoke, but often refuses to participate in news-programs and talk shows, saying he distrusts the 'left-wing' media. However, the PVV and Wilders reach a large audience through right-wing blogs and social media.

Riding the wave of institutionalized racism

One distinctive characteristic of Wilders' current, and of the new right-wing in the Netherlands in general, is its ambiguous attitude to the heritage of the post-'68 social movements. They are vehemently opposed to the ecological movement, and of course to anti-racism. But (verbal) support for women's rights and those of LGBT's as well as opposition to antisemitism have been made into markers of 'Dutchness' and modernity. In Dutch national-populism, the left and progressive background of these emancipatory ideas and how they were part of social conflict is ignored.

Emancipation in Dutch society is supposedly completed: emancipation movements are 'out-dated', except among 'backward' minorities. The fight against sexism, homophobia and antisemitism is redefined as one against 'non-integrated minorities', especially Muslims who are considered

to be inherently misogynist, homophobic and anti-semitic. In the words of PVV parliamentarian Fleur Agema; "antisemitism and homophobia are not Dutch phenomena. They have been imported, for a deplorable part from Morocco."

Racism in the Netherlands is not limited to the PVV, but Wilders, and Fortuyn before him, do more than just reflecting existing sentiments: they mobilize and shape a social base for their politics. A 2010 report showed job applicants with non-western names had less chance to be invited for a meeting with potential employers: on average 9% less chance for men. More than a third of Dutch job-seekers of Turkish and Moroccan origin experience discrimination when looking for work.

Unemployment among people with a non-western background is 14.2%, among 'indigenous' Dutch it is 4.3% [5]. Amnesty International has criticized the Dutch police's ethnic profiling, and the dominant nature of prejudices and stereotypes among them [6]. One 2010 study showed that over a quarter of the 1020 respondents had a negative view of foreigners, with 10 % stating they were racists [7]. Almost three-quarters of Dutch Muslims feel that since the rise of Geert Wilders Muslims are viewed more negatively and almost a quarter of Muslims experience discrimination on a regular basis.

At the same time, the development of Dutch nation-populism shows racism doesn't grow spontaneously into a political force. Bolkstein and Wilders were members of the mainstream 'center-right' VVD, Fortuyn was a well-known publicist for established right-wing media. Together with a range of publicists that are also often linked to the center-parties, they shaped and popularized the culturalist and nationalist ideas that come together in the ideology of the PVV.

With the parliamentary left either largely ignoring racism or even taking over parts of the national-populist discourse, opposition to this deeply rooted Dutch racism needs to come from somewhere else. There's a strong taboo on the existence of everyday and institutionalized racism in Dutch society since

it so strongly contradicts the Dutch self-image as 'open and tolerant'. Many anti-racist organizations and organizations of minorities have become institutionalized, dependent on government funding and are hesitant to rock the boat. The liveliest anti-

racist activities have come from outside the established left organizations and structures, often organized by young people of color.

8 February 2015

Roarmag

ECONOMY

EU follows the German example

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

The paper *En finir avec la compétitivité* (Putting an end to competition), published jointly by ATTAC and the Copernic Foundation, sets out the measures taken and the attacks on social and economic rights: "The Hartz Acts (named after Volkswagen's Human Resources Director who was also Schröder's advisor) were passed between 2003-2005. Hartz I obliges the unemployed to accept any job that is proposed to them, even if the pay is less than unemployment benefits. Hartz II created the mini-job at less than €400 a month (exonerated from social contributions). Hartz III limits the right to unemployment benefits for ageing workers to one year and makes access more difficult. Hartz IV merged long-term unemployment benefits with other social aid, and installed an aggregate maximum amount of €345 a month. To this were added successive retirement and healthcare reforms—the capitalization of pension schemes (Riester-Pensions), increased contributions and later retirement ages (reaching 67 by 2017)". The authors of the paper mention in particular that: "together these reforms have contributed to an impressive rise in social inequalities. This point is often forgotten in the 'German model', as may be demonstrated by some precise figures. Germany has become a divided country: a parliamentary draft report on wealth and poverty [1] has recently established that the poorest half of the population possess only 1% of the assets, compared to 53% for the richest. Between 2003 and 2010, the purchasing power of

the average salary decreased by 5.6%, but the effect was very unequally spread, with the lowest-paid 40% seeing a fall of 12% while the highest-paid 40% lost only 4%. [2] Official statistics show that the proportion of low salaries increased from 18.6% in 2006 to 21% in 2010. It should be emphasized that West Germany was worst hit."

"According to the same study, the number of employees rose by 1.2 million between 1999 and 2008, reflecting an increase of 1.9 million casual jobs corresponding to a loss of half a million full-time permanent jobs. A quarter of today's wage-earners occupy unstable jobs and this proportion is 40% for women, as it is in the US. "The majority of precarious jobs (70%) are considered women's jobs. [3] The proportion of unemployment benefit claimants dropped from 80% in 1995 to 35% in 2008 and all those unemployed for over a year have been transferred to welfare".

As noted by Arnaud Lechevalier, this trend lies within the general framework of a context of erosion of the collective bargaining agreements protecting employees: the percentage of employees covered decreased from 76% to 62% in ten years, and by 2008 these agreements only applied in 40% of German firms. In addition, the unions have had to make many exemptions to sector-based and/or company-wide collective bargaining agreements. [4]

A possible explanation of German leaders' current attitude towards the Eurozone crisis might lie in the lessons they learned from the absorption of East Germany at the beginning of the 1990s—in particular that significant wage disparities between employees can be exploited to the advantage of em-

employers. The massive East German privatizations, the attacks on the job security of ex-GDR workers, along with the increase of German public debt due to the costs of this absorption (used as the pretext for austerity programmes), have enabled the employers to erode the situation of East as well as West German workers. German workers have been strictly divided between those in the big industrial sectors where many advantages have been maintained and other, more precarious, sectors including small to medium-size businesses.

The German example for the EU

German corporations have chosen to increase their production in the EU countries where wages are lowest [5]. Partly finished goods are then reintroduced into Germany, without paying import/export taxes, for assembly and re-exportation, mainly to other European countries. This reduces production costs, puts the German workers into competition with their foreign comrades and increases company profits. In addition, these assembled and re-exported goods appear, of course, in Germany's export figures, whereas they are to a great extent produced from imported goods.

Corporations in the other strong European countries are doing the same, but proportionally speaking the German economy profits most from the low wages and precarious working conditions of the Eurozone workforce (including within Germany's national boundaries) and the EU. In 2007, 83% of German exports went to other EU countries: €145 billion to Eurozone countries, €79 billion to non-Eurozone EU countries, and €45 billion to the rest of the world. [6]

IG Metall, one of the big German industrial trade unions, has published a text in defence of the Eurozone which helps explain why unitary action against the employers has been abandoned. It provides an interesting advocacy of German economic interests and the single currency. In this document, entitled *Ten Reasons for the Euro and the Currency Union*, published on 19 August 2011, we read: « *The German economy depends more than*

any other on its exports. Our foreign clients are the source of millions of jobs in Germany. The biggest market for German products is Europe. [...]. The single currency has played a huge role in the competitiveness of German products. If indebted countries are excluded from the single currency, they will devalue their own currencies to improve their competitiveness. This would then place considerable pressure on the remaining Eurozone, which would be composed exclusively of those countries of the European Union with the strongest economies, to revalue the euro. A return to the Deutsche Mark would entail a revaluation of at least 40%. [7] What a pitiful admission for a trade union to make! Where is international solidarity between workers against Capital? The solidarity is now between German bosses and German workers to make German goods more competitive in order to win market shares.

For today's German leaders and employers, the Eurozone crisis and the brutal attacks against the Greek people and the other peripheral populations are opportunities to push the offensive further and to reproduce, on a European scale, the success of the German offensive.

Not to be outdone, the leaders of the other strong European countries and the CEOs of their major corporations are making the most of the common European political, commercial and economic zone. The northern European economies and transnational companies are exploiting the strife in the Eurozone's southern economies to improve their profitability and to gain competitive advantage over their North American and Chinese competitors. Their objective at this point, as mentioned above, is not to revive growth and reduce differences between the EU's stronger and weaker economies. Southern capital-holders and the governments themselves approve of these policies, looking to seize long-coveted privatized sectors at give-away prices, with the help of the Troika.

In Germany today, following the long period of wage reduction and erosion of labour laws, the bosses and the Christian-Democrat (CDU-CSU) – Social-liberal (SPD) coalition government, who have undoubtedly made their mark as much in the EU as in Germany itself, have had to make one slight concession: the creation of a minimum wage. As from 1 January 2015, Germany will introduce a minimum hourly wage of €8.5/h before deductions, or just over €1 400/month for a full time job. There will be exceptions to the measure. [8]

This minimum wage will benefit 4 million workers who prior to the application date had been receiving lower pay, thus highlighting how large sectors of workers have suffered worsening conditions over the last twenty years. Officially, 1.4 million workers are paid less than €5 per hour and about 2.5 million earn between €5 and €8.5. [9] This minimum rate is about the same as that practised in Belgium, France and the Netherlands. By the time the minimum wage is fully applied, on 1 January 2017, it is estimated that about 6 million workers will benefit.

Europe is the new battleground for wage cuts

According to Michel Husson, real labour costs per unit were compressed by 10% in Germany between 2004 and 2008. [10] In the rest of Europe these costs also decreased, but to a lesser extent. Since the 2008-2009 crisis, the Eurozone has been severely affected by a clear drop in real wages in the most exposed countries. As Patrick Artus, a researcher for the bank Natixis, points out, "[W]e notice a significant reduction in real income in the Eurozone countries having the most difficulties (Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain)". [11] Artus claims that European leaders are imposing a deliberate pay-reduction policy and adds that this has neither boosted investment in the countries just mentioned nor helped their exportations to become more competitive. The favourable effects of pay reductions, "are not showing in competitiveness, foreign trade, or business investments", he writes. He adds that lower wages have two clear effects: on the one hand they have raised profits; on the other

hand, they have reduced consumer demand, which in turn has contracted the economy. [12]

Artus's report confirms that the goal of the European leaders is neither to revive economic activity, nor to improve the situation of the peripheral countries as compared with the countries of the Centre. The pay reductions aim to weaken workers' resistance in the countries concerned, while increasing profits and progressively destroying what is left of the welfare states built up over the three and a half decades following the Second World War and before the neoliberal turn-around of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

In the *Global Wage Report 2012-2013* published by the International Labour Organization in December 2012, the authors revealed that "in developed economies, the crisis led to a 'double dip' in wages: real average wages fell in 2008 and again in 2011, and the current outlook suggests that in many of these countries wages are growing marginally, if at all, in 2012". [13] This is the only part of the world, along with the Middle East, where wages have fallen since 2008. In China, the rest of Asia, and Latin America, wages have increased. In Eastern Europe they have recovered to a certain extent after plummeting in the 1990s. This report confirms that Capital's offensive against Labour has been displaced towards the developed countries.

The *Global Wage Report 2014-2015* [14] points out that between 1999 and 2013, German industrial productivity grew more than real wage increases. Capital has progressed and the German employers have made the most of it. The same report confirms the nefarious effects in several European Union countries of the crisis that began in 2007-2008: in 2013, real average wages were lower than in 2007 in Greece, Ireland, Spain and the UK.

François Hollande and Matteo Renzi, shameful disciples of the German example

The mainstream media claim that the "socialists" François Hollande and Matteo Renzi want to change the direction of the European Commission and the European Union, but are prevented by the

German leaders who stand steadfast on ultra-liberal orthodoxy. The reality is that they are looking to apply the same measures seen in Germany in their own countries. Since Autumn 2014, Mario Renzi is challenging Italian workers with easier sackings and ever looser work contracts. François Hollande is giving the rich more tax breaks. He has appointed Emmanuel Macron, ex-banker at Rothschild, as Minister of the Economy and behind the scenes seeks advice from Peter Hartz, former human resources executive at Volkswagen who, in complicity with the "socialist" Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, directed the big attacks of 2003-2005, against German labour laws. François Hollande promised, in his presidential election campaign, to oppose the TAFTA and he could do so if he really wanted to. Once elected, he immediately broke his promise and lined up alongside Angela Merkel and the European Commission. Pierre Moscovici, European commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs and previous French Finance Minister under President Hollande, joined the German leaders, in December 2014, in their support for the right wing candidate to the Greek Presidency.

Other socialist leaders, such as José Luis Zapatero in Spain [15], José Sócrates [16] in Portugal, Elio Di Rupo [17] in Belgium, George Papandreu in Greece or Gordon Brown in the UK, when they were at the head of their governments, all applied neoliberal policies. Although European rules give governments a veto, none attempted to put spokes into the wheels of the European Commission's austerity measures and antisocial policies that they so much decried to their electors. There really is a fundamental unity between so-called socialist governments and conservative forces in waging the offensive against the social victories gained after WWII. German policies of the 1990s and 2000s have become, for many other European leaders, the example to copy and follow, as far as possible, in their own countries.

It is urgent to change this situation, through popular movements and through the polls. The injunctions of the European Commission must be disobeyed and the social measures that have been mismanaged or abolished, reinstated. The banks must be socialised, repayments of illegal or illegitimate debt must be stopped, socially useful jobs have to be created to permit local transitions.

CADTM

GREECE

Syriza: "A grain of sand in the machinery"

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

Eric Toussaint is visibly exhausted at the end of a difficult week. But his mind is clear and his enthusiasm is intact: Syriza's victory in the Greek legislative election has opened one of those parentheses within which History accelerates and is written as we watch. A political scientist who is experienced in economic matters, founder and spokesman of the Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt (CADTM), Toussaint is a key observer of the battle now going on between Greece and its creditors—mainly the governments of Northern Europe. That is evident from the interest that was shown in his presentations Saturday, in Geneva, during a day of discussions on the economy organized by *Le Courrier*. A former adviser to the government of Ecuador and the president of Paraguay (Fernando Lugo), the Belgian native has also been approached by Syriza. Pending his possible involvement, Eric Toussaint is speaking out freely and observing the Greek experiment with a benevolent but critical eye.

What is your assessment of the first steps taken by the Syriza government in the economic area?

Eric Toussaint: The first measures they've taken have been to end a series of policies that were unjust, unpopular and damaging for the country. Very concretely, the government has granted free electricity to the 300,000 households that were without power; returned the legal minimum wage to its former level (751 euros), re-hired 3,500 employees who had been fired; dissolved the entity created by the Troika to manage privatisations; cancelled the

sale of the ports of Piraeus and Thessaloniki, etc. In short, the government has shown that it will fulfil the mandate entrusted to it by Greece's people. We can only be pleased with that.

Is the make-up of the government, with the appointment of Yanis Varoufakis to the key post of Finance Minister, in line with that attitude?

Personally, I'm disappointed that all ten of the "super-ministers" are men, even if several women do hold important vice-ministerial positions. On the economic level, while Varoufakis is in the spotlight, the key man is [vice- Prime Minister] Yannis Dragasakis, who belongs to the more moderate wing of Syriza. The government is the result of a very delicate balancing act. For my part, I would like to point to the very important inclusion of Giorgos Katrougalos, who is in charge of administrative reform; he's the one who just announced the re-hiring of the employees who had been fired. He is a jurist and is one of the originators in 2011, along with ourselves, of the Initiative for a citizen audit of Greece's debt!

The appointment of Panos Kammenos to Defense and Syriza's alliance with his right-wing AN.EL party, however, will make it more difficult to keep other campaign promises, including making the Church pay its share and reducing the size of the army, which is a sacred cow...

Yes. Those two concessions are cause for concern. For a year and a half, Alexis Tsipras has made a series of positive statements about the Church, on its role in binding up the social wounds caused by austerity. To the point where he's forgotten to point out that the Church, which owns large amounts of

real estate, needs to contribute more to the public finances.

As for the presence of Kammenos at Defense, that is of course a message to the army that Syriza won't touch it. However Greece's military budget, proportionally, is one of the largest in the European Union. And in fact Germany and France, who are the main suppliers to the Greek army, have made certain that the successive governments in Greece have limited their austerity efforts in that area. Having said that, Kammenos has been surrounded by a "safety rail" in the form of the vice-minister, Costas Ysichos, a Greek-Argentine and a former member of the Montoneros guerillas, who is on the left within Syriza.

I would also point out that despite the presence of a party with racist tendencies in its coalition, the government immediately announced that he will grant Greek citizenship to children of migrants who were born or grew up in the country. Of course, it should be voted by the Parliament. That's important in the context of Greece, since the preceding government had played on xenophobia. That's Syriza's way of showing that the alliance with AN.EL is limited to economic issues and that it won't make migrants pay the price.

On the central issue of the debt, some Syriza members argue for a moratorium on repayments, which would be indexed to growth.

If that's the case, it means that the Greek position has already evolved, probably due the very strong and very negative reactions of various key personalities in the Eurozone, since the farthest any of them have gone is to suggest the possibility of rescheduling repayments... Suspension of payment and an audit of the debt are among the weapons Syriza has publicly discussed using, but only as a secondary strategy. The Syriza government's primary strategy is to call for a negotiation and an international conference to discuss all the debts. It also includes putting the debate at the heart of the European institutions, rejecting the Troika (the Central Bank, the IMF, and the EU) as illegitimate.

So the battle lines seem to be drawn. Is that simply posturing in order to raise the stakes, or is any dialogue really impossible?

I tend to lean towards the latter. Syriza proposes two fundamental things: First, maintain budgetary balance—something few European governments can boast of doing—but redistribute the costs differently, lightening the burden on victims of the crisis while increasing it for those who have benefited from it. Second: Negotiate a reduction of the debt. However, for the European leaders, the debt is the instrument used to impose the very neoliberal structural adjustment measures that Syriza has decided to end. Therefore no compromise seems possible. Possibly, if Syriza had said, "We'll continue following neoliberal model, but you lighten the debt," the EU might have accepted. But in fact, Europe cannot allow Tsipras to keep his word. He's probably been told, "Look at Hollande; that's what he did in your position. So do like he and everyone else have done and get with the program."...

The important thing that's happened this week is that Syriza has already dropped a grain of sand into the machinery, and that's decisive.

Syriza's weapon: suspend repayments

What weapons do each camp have to use in this inevitable standoff?

The figures illustrate the challenge we face in 2015. Greece must repay 21 billion euros in several payments, with the main deadlines in March and July-August. The agreement between the former government and the Troika was that the Troika would lend Greece the money necessary for meeting the repayments provided that it continue the privatisations and the rest of the austerity plan.

In such a situation, Syriza's weapon is simple: suspend payment. Then, as I see it, the Greek government should create an audit commission to determine which debts are legitimate and must be repaid. The audit can provide legal arguments to support a suspension of repayment, or possibly a repudiation of illegal debts—that is, debts that were

contracted without respecting the internal order of the country or international treaties.

I found an EU regulatory provision adopted in 2013 that requires all countries under structural adjustment to audit their debt in order to explain why it has risen so high and to reveal any possible irregularities. [2]

How can a debt that was contracted voluntarily by a democratic government be illegitimate?

Mainly due to the fact that these loans were granted under unjust terms. Greece was forced to conduct policies that amounted to social counter-reform and which violated certain rights, along with a policy of austerity that has destroyed the economy and made repayment impossible. It can also be demonstrated that the government acted illegally for the benefit of private interests, which would make the transaction null and void. An audit of Greece's debt is easy to conduct—80% of it is in the hands of the Troika and goes back no farther than 2010.

As you say, the majority of Greece's debts have been in European public hands since then. Isn't it unjust to make European taxpayers pay?

The legislatures of these countries agreed to the loans under deceitful pretexts. We were told, "Greece must be saved"; "Help the poor Greek retired people" when in reality the French, German, and Belgian governments had been appealed to by their banks, who were worried that Greece would no longer be able to repay their high-risk, very high-rate loans. Merkel's and Sarkozy's goal was to allow their banks to wriggle out without taking any damages, while taking the opportunity to impose anti-labour measures and privatisations. In reality, the goal was not to save the Greek retirees' pensions, but to reduce them! Consequently, since the operation served to save the creditor banks, the governments should pay the cost of cancelling the debts via a tax on those institutions.

In reality, the amounts at stake are not that significant for the EU. The absence of reaction by the international stock exchanges proves that there is no systemic risk. The current impasse is more an ideological question. For the EU, the risk is of creating the precedent of a country remaining within the Union without applying the neoliberal policies. Scuttling Syriza would be a message sent to the Cypriot, Portuguese, Irish and Spanish voters—in particular the latter, who might be tempted to vote Podemos in a few months.

Concretely, suspending repayment of the debt would mean a halt to the European payments and the explosion of interest rates on the capital markets for Greece. Would the Greek government lack funds?

No. Nothing indicates that the budget would no longer be balanced, and that means that Greece does not need to borrow funds—which in any case would only be used for debt repayments. As for the share of financing Greece has obtained on the financial markets, it's minimal. And anyway, the rates have already exploded in the past week, even though the suspension hasn't take place.

What weapons can the EU use to strangle Greece?

The Greek banks are in very bad shape. These banks receive loans from the European Central Bank (ECB) to provide them with cash. I feel that the ECB could block these loans at the risk of seeing the Greek banking system collapse. Faced with that possibility, Greece will have to act quickly, expropriate the owners of the institutions, and turn them into public services. But that would require a radicalisation of Syriza's program.

Can the Greek government hope for any real international support?

From social movements, yes! Over the past weeks, we've seen many movements get involved that had never before called for a vote for a political party! That support, in particular in the major EU countries, can be very significant. If major German trade

unions like DGB and Verdi openly support Syriza and tell the SPD-CDU government "Keep your hands off Greece," that could weigh in the balance. As for the governments, outside the EU, it's also possible that certain ones would support Greece for opportunistic reasons—I'm thinking of Russia, for example. If Russia were to lend Greece a few billion at very low rates without attaching conditions, that could help. Of course, I would prefer that other governments do it. Ten years ago, Hugo Chávez would have surely taken the initiative. But today Venezuela doesn't have the financial capacity.

"All that just to regulate capitalism a little?!"

Economists are intensely discussing one question: Is the break being recommended by Syriza possible or not without Greece's exiting the euro? What is your opinion on that?

Well, we'll see! Syriza has a very good saying: "No sacrifices for the euro," because it just isn't worth it. Syriza will only take the initiative of leaving the Eurozone if it is forced to, because a majority of Greeks are still attached to the single currency. And also, leaving the euro would only be advantageous if nationalisation of the banks and strict oversight of movements of capital were put in place, which explains why the less radical wing of Syriza is reticent. More generally, such a decision would exacerbate the conflict with Europe.

For the government, the advantage would be being able to contract debt with its national bank in a new national currency. Provided, of course, that the population would maintain its trust in this "new drachma." We could also imagine a redistributive monetary reform, with differentiated exchange rates depending on the size of transactions, in order to provide an advantage to the poorer citizens. That has already been done—for example in Belgium, just after the Second World War—and is also a way of fighting inflation (see text box "Redistributive Monetary Reform").

On the other hand, devaluating in order to make Greek exports more attractive would put the purchasing power of the Greek people at risk. And it would remain within the same mindset of competitiveness.

The Eurozone countries have no interest in expelling Greece.

No, except perhaps as a kind of political punishment. To teach them what it costs to revolt... But no legal mechanism exists for doing it!

In the current context, the measures the Syriza government is taking are courageous, but they still mostly amount to a return to an earlier situation that was not really very progressive. There has also been a call for a European New Deal. Ultimately, what is Syriza's political project?

Frankly, I'm asking myself the same question. But given the calendar, we'll know in the next few months. Up to now, the option was to move back a bit towards a social state. We're still far from having gone back to the earlier situation! Beyond Syriza, my concern is that the radical Left in Europe no longer seems to see an alternative form of power outside the framework of regulated capitalism. Admittedly, the balance of power is not good, and restoring social rights is already progress. But look at the sacrifices that have been made! Capitalism has shown so clearly where it's leading us that there is the possibility of a real chance of an emancipatory or socialist project—call it whatever you want—if it puts an end to social injustice, and provided that the population participates directly in the political and economic choices made by the society. I would find it regrettable if all the suffering, all these efforts that have been made, lead to nothing more than a slightly regulated capitalism. Obviously, these transformations need to be brought about with the assent of the population, at a pace that is acceptable to the people. Syriza was elected to restore a degree of social justice, and not to conduct a program of emancipation. But for the population to follow along, you have to be able to

present them with a project, an outlook. And that's where there's a real lack of reflection and concrete action.

Text box [3] : Redistributive monetary reform

A redistribution of wealth can also be accomplished via an appropriate monetary reform. Without going into detail here, this could be modelled on the monetary reform carried out after the Second World War by the Belgian government, or, in another part of the world and at another point in time, by the Nicaraguan authorities in 1985. It is aimed at taxing the revenues of those who have enriched themselves at the expense of others. The principle is simple: At the time of a currency change, automatic parity between the old and new currency (one former euro in exchange for one new drachma, for example) would be guaranteed only up to a certain ceiling.

Above that ceiling, the excess amounts must be placed in an escrow account and their origin justified and authenticated. In principle, any amount above the ceiling is exchanged at a less favourable rate (for example: two former euros in exchange for one new drachma); should the funds prove to be of criminal origin, they can be seized. Such a monetary reform would allow a share of the wealth to be distributed in a way that is more socially equitable. Another goal of such a reform is to reduce the supply of money in circulation so as to fight inflationary tendencies. In order for it to be effective, strict oversight over movements of capital and foreign exchange operations must be put in place.

Here is an example (of course the rate scales given here can be modified a great deal following a serious study of the distribution of cash savings among households and the adoption of strict criteria):

1€ would be exchanged for 1 new drachma up to 200,000 €

1€ = 0.7 new drachma between 200,000 and 250,000 €

1€ = 0.6 new drachma between 250,000 and 350,000 €

1€ = 0.5 new drachma between 350,000 and 500,000 €

1€ = 0.4 new drachma between 500,000 and 600,000 €

1€ = 0.2 new drachma above 600,000 €

1€ = 0.1 new drachma above one million euros

If a household has 200,000 € in cash, it receives 200,000 new drachmas

If it has 250,000 €, it receives 200,000 + 35,000 = 235,000 new drachmas (n.d.)

If it has 350,000 €, it receives 200,000 + 35,000 + 60,000 = 295,000 n.d.

If it has 500,000 €, it receives 200,000 + 35,000 + 60,000 + 75,000 = 370,000 n.d.

If it has 600,000 €, it receives 200,000 + 35,000 + 60,000 + 75,000 + 40,000 = 370,000 n.d.

If it has one million €, it receives 415,000 + 80,000 = 495,000 new drachmas

If it has two million €, it receives 415,000 + 80,000 + 100,000 = 595,000 n.d.

Translated by Snake Arbusto

CADTM

ECONOMY

Swissleaks - HSBC, the bank with a shameful past and scandalous present

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

The British bank HSBC (Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation) employs 260, 000 people, has offices in 75 countries, and 54 million customers. [2]

From its earliest days, it has been involved in the international narcotics trade. It was founded in the wake of the British victories in the Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860) against China. These two wars were very important to the strengthening of the British Empire and the century and a half waning of China. Through the Opium Wars, the British Empire forced China to accept opium importations coming from British India. China tried to oppose this commerce, but British arms, backed by Washington, proved stronger. London established a colony in Hong Kong in 1865, where HSBC was created by a Scottish merchant specializing in the opium trade—the basis of 70% of Hong Kong trade with the Indies.

As of this time, the history of the bank has been closely related to the interests of British foreign policy and ruling classes in Asia. After 1949 and the victory of Mao's revolution in China, HSBC retreated to Hong Kong, which remained a British colony. Between 1980 and 1997, it developed its US and European activities, and moved its headquarters to London in 1993 in anticipation of the transfer of Hong Kong sovereignty back to China in 1997. HSBC remains indispensable to Hong Kong finance, still issuing 70% of Hong Kong dollars. Hong Kong is now one of the key links in the money laundering operations set up by the new Chinese ruling classes.

HSBC involved in other financial crimes

In addition to laundering money from drugs and terrorism, [3] HSBC has been incriminated in other affairs. It manipulated exchange markets (revealed in 2013, concerning a market of \$5.3 trillion per day), [4] and rigged the LIBOR interbank interest rate. [5]

It was also involved in the abusive and fraudulent sale of interest rate derivatives, and the abusive and fraudulent sale of insurance products to the British public and small companies (the Financial Services Authority prosecuted HSBC for having sold policies that were of little or no value). [6] Finally, it sold Mortgage Backed Securities abusively in the US, rigged gold and silver prices (revealed in Jan. Feb. 2014) [7], and assisted major tax evaders (see below).

Hervé Falciani: the Edward Snowden of HSBC?

Hervé Falciani is a Franco-Italian, who worked at HSBC as a systems engineer between 2006 and 2008 in Geneva. Before leaving, and moving to France, he copied 127, 000 documents that actively linked HSBC to massive fraud and tax evasion operations. Switzerland issued, through Interpol, an International Arrest Warrant for data theft, banking and commercial secrecy violations, and industrial espionage. Switzerland has not prosecuted HSBC.

In early 2009, French police searched his home in Nice, where they seized explosive documents naming thousands of tax evaders, 8231 French, 800 Belgians, more than 600 Spaniards, about 2000 Greeks were on the famous "Lagarde list" that the IMF director gave to Greek authorities in 2010, as well as many Germans, Italians, and Americans.

Hervé Falciani then worked with authorities from Paris, Washington, and other countries to which he gave information that helped advance the investigations concerning HSBC's laundering of money from Mexican and Columbian drug cartels. During a visit to Spain in 2012, to assist Spanish authorities, he was arrested under the Interpol warrant and Switzerland requested his extradition. Spain rejected this request, because he was a principal witness in several big affairs of fraud and tax evasion. [8] The information provided by Falciani permitted Spanish authorities to discover about €2 billion deposited in Swiss accounts by the family of Emilio Botin, President of Santander Bank, who paid a €200 million fine. The scandal of the fraudulent financing of Mariano Rajoy's Popular Party was also brought to light. [9] Belgian and French authorities met Falciani and used the information obtained to conduct investigations on tax evasion. It is not at all certain they will result in condemnations, it is more likely that out of court settlements will let the fraudsters off the hook.

Not only Switzerland wants to have whistle-blowers arrested, Greece has also prosecuted the editor of the magazine *Hot Doc*, Kostas Vaxevanis, for having dared to publish, in October 2012 the Lagarde-HSBC-Falciani list that the Greek authorities had somehow misplaced. He was finally acquitted due to public and international pressure. It is not easy to accuse a bank and the rich fraudsters it protects,

nor to denounce the rich fraudsters who protect their sacred banks and banking secrecy.

There is true symbiosis between big banks and the ruling classes, just as there are permanent links between politicians and big business, particularly in finance.

HSBC finds a loophole in a European Union Directive

In 2013, the EU announced that it was capping bank bonuses for directors and traders at twice their fixed salary. A salary of €1.5 million would limit the bonus to €3 million, which amounts to total annual income of €4.5 million. To get around this measure, HSBC simply increased the fixed salary to maintain the level of bonuses. [10]

Conclusion

The HSBC group should be shut down, its directors dismissed without indemnities, and along with the major shareholders, they should answer for their crimes before the courts and be severely condemned to periods of loss of liberty and of community service. HSBC should be split into smaller units under public control with a strictly defined public service objective.

Translation : Mike Krolkowski and Charles La Via

CADTM

GREECE

Towards a head-on collision - Tsipras rejects the blackmail of the ECB and the aggressive acts of the European leaders

STATHIS KOUVELAKIS ·

Most of them were expecting a significant inflection, foreshadowing a retreat, which would facilitate a "compromise" at the European summits this week -which would actually be a submission by Greece to their diktats. They have certainly been disappointed. Because Alexis Tsipras did not actually make any substantive concession. Certainly, he avoided using the term "cancellation of the debt ". But he strongly emphasized its non-viable character and demanded its "reduction" and "restructuring". Another point: he did not announce the immediate restoration of the minimum wage to its 2009 level (751 euros), but committed himself to do so in the course of 2015. For the rest, he ticked off all the points of the Thessaloniki programme : emergency measures to address the humanitarian disaster (food, reconnection of electricity, transport and medical coverage for everyone), restoration of the labour legislation, abolition of unfair taxes on land, a tax reform to make the rich pay, raising the tax threshold to 12,000 euros, reinstatement of civil servants who had been sacked, an end to the privileges granted to private media, reconstitution of the ERT (public radio and television), activation of the bank shares owned by the state, an end to the selling-off of the public patrimony (ports, infrastructure, energy), an end to police repression of popular mobilizations.

A strategic point: Alexis Tsipras reiterated that he refuses to request the extension of the present "bailout programme" and the supervision of the Troika and has requested an extension of the liquidity granted to Greek banks, based on the reimbursement of the profits made by the central banks of the eurozone on Greek debt and the extension of the debt capacity of the Greek government. Finally, he insisted on the necessity of a balanced budget, while refusing the exorbitant primary surpluses destined to reimburse the debt *ad vitam eternam* and to recycle austerity. But even this commitment to a balanced budget hardly seems compatible with the social measures announced, in a context of anemic tax revenues.

A highly symbolic reform was that of the nationality code, granting citizenship to all children of immigrants born in Greece, of which he made an impassioned eulogy. He also dwelt at length on the role of the newly created Ministry of Immigration, emphasizing its role in the protection of human rights and people's dignity, while asking for a change of EU policy in this domain. Proof, if any were needed, that the participation of the Independent Greeks (ANEL) in the government has in no way altered the position of Syriza on these issues.

In fact, the hard core of the Memorandums has been swept away. The break is definitely there. And Alexis Tsipras hammered it home in many ways. First of all he specifically referred to the role of mobilization in Greece and to international solidarity, which he emphatically saluted, in the battle that the government is waging. And he was very firm on the fact that the restoration of national and democratic

sovereignty and of the dignity of the Greek people are not negotiable. In the present context, this amounts to a call to take to the streets, and I do not doubt that it is being heard, in Greece and in Europe.

In addition, at the end of his speech, after a long tribute to the long history of struggle of the Greek people, he put back on the table the issue of war reparations from Germany and put Manolis Glezos at the head of the campaign which will be conducted by the government. Now we know that this is a real "red rag" for the German leaders.

Overall, we can say that Alexis Tsipras has sent out a message of firmness and combativeness, both inside and outside his country. He disappointed the expectations of those who were already betting on a downward slope of concessions leading to a capitulation. It seems quite out of the question that the European leaders can tolerate in any way the poli-

cies that were presented today before the Greek Parliament.

So we are well and truly before a scenario of confrontation, which will take a decisive turn in the course of this week, with the combination of European summits and street mobilizations. We are probably on the eve of major events that can upset the present course of events in Greece and in Europe.

It is in the combination of the determination of the Greek leadership, the mobilization of the people and international solidarity that the "magic formula" of a possible victory can be found!

8 February 2015

*Postscript: Kouvelakis recently gave a long interview to the online magazine **Jacobin**, Greece: Phase One covering the history and current state of Syriza.*

RUSSIA

From the short "Soviet century" to Putin's Russia:

CATHERINE SAMARY ·

Evoking Internal and external actors - in that order - means rejecting any theory of an international conspiracy, opposing the fatalism of a forced submission to the imperialist powers or the "world market"; but that does not imply any underestimation of the formidable international constraints and actors. Similarly, rejecting the thesis of "democratic revolutions" implies no complacency towards the one-party dictatorships ruling in the name of the workers, "organic" causes of the failure of "really existing socialism". It means, on the contrary, not reducing it to the Gulag and the Wall, and measuring the reality of the impact of the short "Soviet century" on the international relationships of forces, as witnessed, in a contrary sense, after the "Soviet century" by the return of the "Capital of the twenty-first century" to inequality and mechanisms worthy of the nineteenth century, as Thomas Piketty has pointed out.

"Really existing socialism": an anti-capitalist world-system with its own contradictions

The revolutions of the twentieth century experienced specific scenarios and developments that cannot be treated here. But all were breaks with the capitalist "world -system" and the relationships of domination and dependency imposed by its imperialist "centres" in the (semi) peripheries [1]. The logic of "building socialism in one country", by which the Kremlin sought to discipline the entire communist movement and revolutions, failed – as the resistance of the leaders of Titoist Yugoslav and Maoist China, in particular, bore witness - without

an end being put to bureaucratism, including in the new revolutions.

These revolutions were based on the broad mass of the poorest populations of the societies concerned, mobilized in social and national anti-imperialist wars, each victory in fact encouraging the others. Challenging the domination of capitalist private property and its logic of market profit as the motor force of investment, they made possible the subordination of economic choices to political choices; but these choices were "appropriated" by one-party states defending both their privileges and social and developmentist logics. The ruling parties in the countries of the "Soviet bloc" sought to reproduce the same socio-economic institutions and mechanisms, giving priority to a logic of national industrialization.

There were everywhere considerable differences between the regimes of "really existing socialism" and the ideals with which they identified, in particular during phases of great totalitarian violence, of which the Stalinization of the Soviet Union was the first example, with international consequences. Over and above the direct repression, these regimes established relations of bureaucratic exploitation and domination (of gender, nations, culture) in accordance with specific content and forms, combined with real social and cultural gains. The new regimes sought to base themselves on the workers of the industrial core of their system, by ensuring them forms of socialization and protection, particularly in large-scale enterprises, where there was distributed, via the official unions, a "social income" in kind (housing, day care centres, leisure centres and holidays, medical clinics, consumer goods). A strong "extensive" growth, highly protected from market mechanisms, ensured (bad) full employment of human and natural resources, as

well as social gains presented as fundamental rights. All of this provided these regimes with popular bases, despite their repressive dimensions.

1989: internal/external factors of the turning point

On the internal level of "really existing Socialism" the fundamental contradiction was between the socialist aspirations nourished by the system and its bureaucratic reality. In the USSR and Eastern Europe [2], the attempts at partial reforms of the 1960s failed because they tried to improve the quality and the productivity of labour by market mechanisms: in so doing they entered into contradiction with the recognized rights to full employment and with an "egalitarianism" that challenged bureaucratic privileges, but also the widening of differentials by the market. The reforms were blocked, after the repression of protest movements; the 1970s was a decade of growth through an indebtedness that made possible a new openness to imports.

This gave birth to the first external factor of crisis: the debt in convertible currency, breaking with the autarchy that had dominated these systems up until then. At the beginning of the 1980s, this debt was increased by the rise in interest rates introduced by the Federal Reserve in the United States, putting for the first time some of these countries under pressure from creditors and from the IMF. Parallel to this, the USSR, after its intervention in Afghanistan in 1979, suffered the impact of the ultimate arms race launched by Ronald Reagan.

But these external pressures were not in themselves sufficient to make these countries capitalist societies. The "knots" articulated factors - and actors - that were both internal and external.

The choices made by Gorbachev had a major international expression: "disengagement" of the USSR with the aim of obtaining Western credits and the reduction of the weight of military spending, in order to promote internal reforms ("glasnost"/transparency and "perestroika"/economic reconstruction). The credits and technologies of West Germany, the possibility of withdraw-

ing Soviet troops, counted much more for Moscow than did the unpopular Honecker regime. Gorbachev aimed at the dismantling of the two military blocs of the Cold War (NATO and the Warsaw Pact) and the "peaceful coexistence" of systems in the framework of a European "common home". Having come to negotiate with Kohl, he accepted the fall of the Wall. The United States pushed for the incorporation of united Germany in NATO. Gorbachev had to accept this established fact, against the promise that NATO would not extend beyond Germany.

None of this would be respected - whereas the Warsaw Pact was dissolved in 1991. But for the moment, it was the end of the USSR and its property system that was the obsession of the United States. The internal relay for these goals was Yeltsin. He organized the dismantling of the USSR by a negotiated agreement with the leaders of the Communist parties of Ukraine and Belarus in December 1991 - provoking the resignation of Gorbachev. Then he accelerated the process of generalized juridical privatization of enterprises (transformed into joint stock companies), which after the 1993 coup against a recalcitrant Duma took the form of "mass privatizations": the free distribution of coupons to workers so that they could "buy" shares in enterprises was presented to them as a restitution of property resulting from their work, which had been usurped by the apparatuses of the Communist Party. This shows to what an extent the social counter-revolution did not announce its "capitalist" character. Although the "mass privatizations" (without input of capital) slowed down, in the immediate term, restructuring according to capitalist criteria, they avoided a dangerous confrontation with the workers concentrated in large enterprises: these enterprises, losing their productive substance, remained for a few years more and more formal places of employment, where wages were often not paid, but where products in kind associated with the job were still distributed. In parallel, the key sectors were appropriated, principally by the state and the oligarchs.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the introduction of pluralism in the USSR itself produced a domino effect throughout Eastern Europe. Following Yeltsin's example, much of the Communist "nomenklatura" chose the consolidation of its privileges and power through privatizations and a radical "anti-communism" calling itself "democratic" - that is to say, supporting the market, privatizations and political pluralism. This was all the less subversive since between the "Soviet normalization" against "socialism with a human face" in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the coup of General Jaruzelski in Poland in 1980 against the Solidarity trade union and its project of a "self-managed republic", any anti-bureaucratic dynamic based on socialist ideals had been suppressed.

The equation of the new liberal discourses seemed simple - "market + privatization = economic efficiency and freedom" - without the population knowing either what the "market" and the "privatizations" in question were, or what criteria of efficiency were going to be applied. Far from there being a "democratic" revolution, they had a social counter-revolution inflicted on them in the greatest opacity, marking a major and unexpected inflexion of the "European project", which would in return exert a powerful influence on the transformations of the systems in Eastern Europe.

Impact of capitalist restoration in the east on European integration - and vice versa

The absorption of the GDR into the FRG was the first "enlargement" towards the East of the European Economic Community (EEC). For East Germans, it was a major social shock in terms of destruction of employment. But it was also expressed by the widening of the German budget deficit. The Bundesbank decided in 1991 to fund this deficit by attracting foreign capital through higher interest rates, which destabilized the official parities in écus of the various currencies of the European Monetary System (EMS). Speculative capital taking advantage of the lifting of exchange controls (decided by the Single Act of 1986) provid-

ed the catalyst for the crisis of the EMS and the recession.

Faced with this crisis, Germany agreed to give up the deutschmark and to move towards a single currency that would eliminate speculation on the exchange rates. But it demanded rigid criteria to regulate the creation of money in the future currency, expressing its obsession with inflation and its distrust of the countries of the so-called "Club Med". The Maastricht Treaty, establishing in 1992 the new European Union (EU), therefore incorporated these criteria: in particular the limitation of government deficits and the public debt of member states and the ban on central banks financing public deficits.

But the transition to the euro which was to take place at the beginning of the 2000s coincided with the choice of integrating "New Member States" (NMS) from Eastern Europe who were entitled to the "structural funds" of the European budget. The leaders of the united Germany, like those of France and other European countries, did not want to have to "pay" for other enlargements what had been spent on integrating the GDR and the southern European countries and Ireland. Whereas the gap in GDP per capita between the poorest and the richest state was from 1 to 4.9 when Spain and Portugal joined in 1986, it went from 1 to more than 20 with the arrival of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007. However, although the "cohesion" and structural funds were considerably increased in the first case, the EU budget for 2000-2007 was on the contrary limited to approximately one per cent of the GDP of the Union when it was "generously" decided to enlarge the Union to ten new member states in Eastern Europe during this phase.

It was therefore fundamentally private finance (through credit and foreign direct investment - FDI) in the context of free circulation of capital, that was supposed to ensure growth and "catching up". Capitalist restoration was coming up against the extreme weakness of "national" capital. The liberalization of financial services from the late 1990s and the promises of accession to the EU created the

conditions for absolute domination (of the order of 70 to 100 per cent) of the bank assets of all the candidate countries (except Slovenia) by the banks of Western Europe. Their massive credits in the 2003-2008 phase sustained growth rates ranging from 7 per cent to 12 per cent in the Baltic republics: after a massive drop in living standards, the credits came in response to the thirst to consume and to buy housing property by financial arrangements (not without housing bubbles) [3]

Overall, Eastern and Southeastern Europe (including the Yugoslavia of the 1990s and its wars) served as a vehicle for a transformation of "European construction" in a direction desired by the United States: the consolidation of NATO and its eastward expansion, through a Euro-Atlantic "organization" of the Balkans [4]. It was primarily the autonomisation of a European "power" that the United States wanted to counter. The accentuation of the "free trade" traits of the EU was going in the same direction. Against any "European social model", it implied a radical process of putting workers in competition with each other.

Between semi-peripheralization and imperialist poles?

The process of negotiation for accession to the EU, long before the countries became new members, played a role similar to that of the negotiations with which the IMF imposed its "structural adjustment policies".

Except that the EU is not the IMF. As happened in the countries of Southern Europe emerging from dictatorships, but as we have seen also in Ukraine, integration into the EU can (still) be seen as the way to escape from peripheralization and to join the "Europe of the rich" and of the rule of law - even though this power of attraction is declining with the crisis and the discovery of the reality of the Union.

It is however necessary to distinguish different "spheres" between the Russian Federation and the EU, depending on geographical and historical proximity with these dominant poles and the projects

they are concretely offering. Mistrust of the great power attitudes and behaviour of Russia were undeniable factors pushing some of the new bourgeoisies of Eastern Europe to adopt a zealous attitude of "comprador" bourgeoisies, subject to the policies and norms of the EU and NATO. This was the case of the Baltic republics, which had been forcibly incorporated into the USSR. They were, with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the Balkans, the ones most directly in the commercial and financial orbit of the EU, especially when it confirmed for them the possibility of becoming members [5]

Excluded from such a horizon, the Asian republics have a specific place, marked by international energy issues and proximity to China. But they are the most directly solicited by the Eurasian Union projects of the Russian Federation (on the horizon of 2015), which aims to consolidate itself on two fronts, on the Chinese side and the EU side. Such a project aimed to draw in the six countries now bordering the EU and which are former Soviet republics [6]. These same six countries have been solicited by the EU since 2009 to join with it in an "Eastern Partnership" based on free trade (proposed especially by Poland), failing accession. These countries were placed (by both Russia and the EU) before an exclusive choice - which is an aberration when we know, for example, that the foreign trade of Ukraine is divided roughly between one third to the EU, another third to Russia/CIS, and the final third to the rest of the world. This is also a wrenching choice if it instrumentalises and revives internal conflicts in those countries: it is difficult to predict towards what "hybrid" or open wars they will degenerate.

What kind of integration of Russia into the capitalist world-system?

The 1990s were the decade of the dismantling of Russian power - despite the dirty war in Chechnya. The rent appropriated by the oligarchs was massively exported to tax havens in an economy that was in free fall in all sectors: its GDP in 1998 was

still below the level of 1989, more than half of domestic trade was conducted through relations of barter: wages and taxes were not paid; the old forms of distribution in kind through large enterprises subsisted, while the oligarchs who dominated the oil industry were negotiating with the state for the exchange of their debts (in taxes) against shares held by the state and the maintenance of cheap rates for the distribution of energy to households.

Russia, weakened but integrated into the G8, was perceived by the US as a key vector for its own expansion and as an ally. The opening up of the oil sector and of part of industry to foreign capital was supported by a liberal and comprador wing in Russia. But the payments crisis in 1998 favoured the rise of a more "protectionist" orientation and the return to growth that coincided with the Putin years [7].

A second factor pushed towards a strong Russian state: the "colour revolutions" of 2003-2004, particularly in Georgia and Ukraine: electoral fraud and the massive corruption of the existing "pro-Russian" regimes acted as a catalyst for mass protest movements in favour of "liberal" and pro-Western parties; Moscow stigmatized them globally as having been "bought" by the United States. The thesis of a Western conspiracy and of the encirclement of Russia took shape, supported by the writings of Zbigniew Brzezinski, the external financing directed towards the opposition movements, the demand of the new regimes in Georgia and Ukraine to join NATO and the EU, adding to the long list of their new members in Eastern Europe.

The new Russian strong state brought the oligarchs and the circulation of money under its control, while criminalizing and repressing social movements and protesters, branded as potential instruments of the external enemy. Despite strong growth, the Russian economy remained nonetheless marked by elements of fragility: firstly, the difficulty in structuring an economic space around itself, consisting of the former Soviet republics – a

problem which the Eurasian Union seeks to alleviate. But also a risk of "Dutch disease" (the "comparative" advantages acquired through exporting raw materials preventing the diversification of the economy and giving it a "rentier" profile). Lastly, political conflicts raise the question of dependency towards the EU – not without opacity of financial flows; in 2012, of all capital recorded as FDI (foreign direct investment) in Russia, almost 60 per cent came from tax havens (being probably massively of Russian origin), about 30 per cent from Western Europe, 1.6 per cent from Asia and 0.6 per cent from the USA. Exports (including energy) to the EU accounted in 2012 for approximately 50 per cent of total exports, as against 18 per cent to the CIS, less than 10 per cent to the BRICS (with 40 per cent of imports coming from the EU, about 13 per cent from the CIS and 20 per cent from the BRICS).

The return of Russia to the international scene with a high-power profile took place in 2008, by exploiting the discredit and the blunder of Georgian President Saakashvili (overestimating the support of the US in his offensive against South Ossetia): Moscow consolidated its military presence and decided to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as other powers had recognized that of Kosovo [8]. Meanwhile, Putin played on "gas wars" (using the weapon of the price but also of the quantities delivered), in particular to the Ukraine of the "Orange Revolution" after 2005 – which was not without having an impact on the EU, which was extremely dependent on Ukrainian pipelines to receive Russian gas.

Since then there has been (everywhere) a frenzied search for new sources of supply and alternative "strategic" corridors: opposed to a proposed "Nabucco" oil pipeline supported by the European Commission and the United States so as to bypass Russia, Moscow has negotiated other projects, avoiding Ukraine, with several EU members – including Germany, France and Italy. Nabucco had to be abandoned as too costly in 2013; but the increased tensions with Russia placed several EU member countries or candidates in major economic

and geopolitical dilemmas around the South Stream project, between advantages granted by Russia and EU constraints - until Russia decided in late 2014 to abandon the pipeline.

Multipolar world

But we are in a world of uncertain alliances between powers which are partly rivals but which also share class interests and indeed methods and discourses that are convergent - the "war against terrorism" provides a demonstration of this; but Russia also plays at being a mediator in Syria, while its oligarchs are popular in the City of London and Gazprom is expanding its networks in Europe. What Putin's Russia criticizes about the EU is that it is excluded from it. It is also its "decadence" – against which is mobilized the "conservative revolution" based on homophobic and sexist religious orthodoxy. But it is the EU model that the Putinist project of Eurasian Union wants to copy; a Union whose aim is to create a relationship of forces for a renegotiation of all European relations. It is partly inspired by ideologues of a "Eurasian civilization" that would correspond to the grandeur and diversity of the "Russian World", from Czarism to the Soviet Union – which has known variants, with or without Putin - against the United States [9]. Red-white or national-socialist fronts are formed on this basis, attracting far-right (and unfortunately sometimes far-left) currents throughout Europe.

The "advantages" of Russia to play in "the big league" are its military power - (it owns 24 per cent of the arms market, against 30 per cent for the United States in 2011, but also the abundance of raw materials. But it weighs less than Brazil or India in world GDP (2.5 per cent). An uneasy compromise was concluded, according to Jacques Sapir, in the mid-2000s, between liberal and Russian protectionist currents. The points of friction touch on the use of oil revenues to diversify the economy, the recourse to international financing and the delimitation of what is under the direct and indirect control of the state. The international and then European banking crisis of 2009 produced a

shift towards more trade internal to the BRICS and towards autonomous financing. But it is the escalation that has been underway in Ukraine since 2014 that is pushing towards major adjustments.

A Joint China (40 per cent)-Russia (60 per cent) Investment Fund was created in 2012, but is becoming more important with the sanctions against Moscow. It has invested \$4 billion, principally in oil and gas pipeline infrastructure, rail and air transport. But it is planned that exports of hydrocarbons to China via Rosneft (public) will amount to 365 million tons of oil between now and 2038. For the moment the quantities are derisory: 2 million tons in 2014, compared with... 208 million tons that were delivered to European countries outside the EU in 2013.

In other words, the effect of international sanctions is to push for the Russian economy to have greater autonomy (through import substitution and recomposition of its trade exchanges); but in the short term, the economy has become fragile. Capital flight is leading to the fall of the ruble, which increases the prices of imported products; reserves are massively mobilized to bail out banks affected by the sanctions and to fund new projects. But at the same time, as Jacques Sapir points out, the central bank has chosen to raise interest rates to limit the fall of the ruble, at the expense of what would be a policy of massive domestic credit to the economy.

Finally, it is not clear that the headlong rush to "hybrid" war in Ukraine favours Putin's objectives. NATO is "legitimized" in Ukraine; and tensions are appearing with Russia's partners (for the Eurasian project), who are jealous of their own independence. Finally, although the main objective of Putin in the short term has been achieved - to consolidate a power that had been challenged by the movements of the years 2011-2012, which could have drawn fresh inspiration from Maidan - the first protests of mothers of Russian soldiers killed in Ukraine and anti-war mobilizations are opening substantial gaps in the patriotic consensus.

The peaceful and egalitarian recomposition of the European continent, including Ukraine and Russia,	will be the work of neither Putin nor the EU.
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AFRICA

What's Left in Africa?

FIROZE MANJI ·

Left and communist parties of various sizes and influence have arisen in a number of countries across the continent over many decades, despite the terror of colonial repression that they faced. In many cases, the political strategy of these parties was to merge with the nationalist parties in the struggle for independence. This was in line with the prevailing dogma at the time: the 'stagist' view of revolution according to which communists were required not only to support the emergence of a national bourgeoisie as part of the 'national democratic revolution', but to concede leadership to the nationalist movements – much as we have seen with the South African Communist Party yielding to the leadership of the ANC since 1994.

On coming to power, most of the nationalist governments, often supported by the left, believed that all that was required to satisfy the demands of the masses was to take control of the state. But what they ignored was that the state was itself a colonial state, and set up to serve, protect and advance the interests of imperial power and its entourage of corporations and banks. That state had a monopoly over the use of violence. It had police forces, armies and secret police and it used force and, where necessary, violence, to protect the interests of the way in which capitalism operated in the peripheries.

Having occupied the state, independence governments essentially sought to make modest reforms consisting primarily by deracialising the state and modernising it so that the economy could be more fully integrated with the new emerging international order that the US, Europe and Japan

set about creating after the Second World War. The structures of state control, the police, army, and special forces – even the structures and powers of native authority established by colonial powers – all these were left fundamentally intact, albeit dressed up in the colours of the national flag. The structures of the capitalist state were left intact, even where regimes proclaimed an adherence to 'MarxismLeninism', as in Mengistu's Ethiopia.

Few understood the dangers of occupying, rather than creating alternatives to the capitalist state. Amongst those must be counted Patrice Lumumba (Congo), Amilcar Cabral (Guinea-Bissau) and Tomas Sankara (Burkina Faso). They had in common their commitment to building alternatives to the colonial state. And tellingly, all three were assassinated by their own comrades, in collaboration with empire.

Cabral was emphatic: "It is our opinion that it is necessary to totally destroy, to break, to reduce to ash all aspects of the colonial state in our country in order to make everything possible for our people."

While the repressive arms of the state may have been dressed in new uniforms, their role – that of protecting the interests of capitalism in the (former) colonies – remained unchanged. And as the emerging middle class and party officials who now occupied the neo-colonial state realised the potential for private accumulation and looting that access to the state provided, so their interest in transforming the state waned. '

Africanisation' – or in South Africa's case 'Black Economic Empowerment' – was the battle-cry of the emerging national bourgeoisie that would legitimise their access to sources of private accumulation. The growing presence of transnational corporations and international financial institutions, and

the growing interest in 'investing' – principally in the extractive industries – provided too many lucrative opportunities for them to even consider making changes to economic power. The state became a honey-pot, and therefore frequently a terrain of conflict between different factions of the emerging class. In some cases, leading members of the left joined the ranks of the national bourgeoisie, just as we have seen in the case of Cyril Ramaphosa and others in South Africa.

As Fanon put it: The national bourgeoisie discovers its historical mission as intermediary. ... its vocation is not to transform the nation but prosaically serve as a conveyor belt for capitalism, forced to camouflage itself behind the mask of neocolonialism. The national bourgeoisie, with no misgivings and with great pride, revels in the role of agent in its dealings with the Western bourgeoisie. This lucrative role, this function as small-time racketeer, this narrow-mindedness and lack of ambition are symptomatic of the incapacity of the national bourgeoisie to fulfil its historical role as a bourgeoisie.

In fulfilling its function as an agent of the Western bourgeoisie and 'as a small-time racketeer', this class turns upon the left that aided its path to power, and slaughters it, imprisons it, exiles it or marginalises it. Slaughter was the case with one of the strongest communist parties in Sudan when, in 1971, Gaafar al-Nimriy launched a campaign that resulted in almost the total elimination of the party. Even where the organised left was not strong, the post-independence period witnessed assassinations of radicals: for example in Kenya with the assassination of Tom Mboya, Pio Gama Pinto and JM Kariuki, or in South Africa with the assassination of Chris Hani and, more recently, of members of NUMSA and Abahlali base Mjondolo. '

African Socialism' was fêted as the answer to the continent's underdevelopment in the early post-independence years, but in every case, this was combined with the requirement of that there be only one legitimate party. Whatever the actual political colour of the regimes, it was not uncommon for na-

tionalists to proclaim an allegiance to socialism, albeit to an 'African' version.

Kwame Nkrumah was perhaps the most radical of the nationalists, but even in Ghana, no attempt was made to dismantle the colonial state. As a result, radicalisation spread amongst the population. In 1961, railway workers organised a national strike, but the state became increasingly authoritarian and independent political organisation was repressed – until eventually a one-party state was declared. Nkrumah's political writings became much more radical after the coup d'état that overthrew him in 1966.

Similarly, Julius Nyerere established his own particular brand of socialism – Ujamaa – in the aftermath of the revolution in Zanzibar, in which he orchestrated the repression of Abdulrahman Babu's Umma Party. Nyerere's Arusha Declaration declared a one-party state, preventing the independent organisation of left, working class organisations. A once ardent trade unionist, Ahmed Sékou Touré led Guinea to independence in 1958, and in 1960, declared his party, Parti démocratique de Guinée, the only legitimate party.

The combination of repressive one-party states that proclaim themselves 'socialist', the establishment of Stalinism in the Soviet Union with its own form of repression and one-partyism, and its final demise in the collapse of the Berlin Wall – all these have contributed to the discrediting of the idea of 'socialism' as a progressive force. In many countries, the word 'socialism' is a dirty word that has been lost in every-day vocabulary.

Another factor that has inhibited the development of the left in Africa needs to be considered. The last thirty years of neoliberal policies have resulted not just in material dispossession, but also in the dispossession of memory. Many people born or raised in the aftermath of the implementation of structural adjustment programmes have lost connection with their own histories in an environment of CNN and MacDonalds culture.

As Milan Kundera put it: The first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history, Then have somebody write new books, manufacture a new culture, invent a new history. Before long the nation will begin to forget what it is and what it was. The world around it will forget even faster. ... The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting. There remains today the challenge of building strong left, working class movements. Whatever the constraints that we may have inherited from our history, the reality is that after independence our national bourgeoisies have failed to deliver on their promises.

Thirty years (or some twenty years in the case of South Africa) of neoliberal policies willingly imposed by this class have resulted in conditions for the majority that are in many ways worse than they were at independence. Today discontent is growing, especially among the youth. But there is also a more widespread disenchantment with postcolo-

nial governments that derives from their loss of credibility and legitimacy. Serious questions are increasingly being raised concerning the ability of this class to lead the way to emancipation.

The objective conditions offer, at least potentially, good conditions for building a left movement. But that cannot be done on the basis of the forty-year-old analysis of the nature of capitalism and imperialism to which much of the left has become accustomed. There is work to be done in deepening our understanding of the changes that have occurred in both the nature of today's financialised capital and its operation in the 'peripheries'. Such an analysis is necessary if we are to appreciate the fact that the workplace is not the only site where accumulation by dispossession occurs – it also occurs through the extraction of income and wealth through rents, the privatisation of health and social welfare, education, land, water, power, etc. All of these are subject to speculation.

SYRIA

Revolution, Reaction, ?and Intervention in Syria

JOSEPH DAHER ·

New Politics. Your writings give voice to those persons and groups who are often ignored in the international media's portrayal of the crisis in Syria. I would like to ask you some questions regarding the United States' recent entry into the battlefield and how you believe this will affect the various actors in the region.

The crisis in Syria is often painted as a conflict involving the Assad regime and the Islamic State (ISIS), with barely any mention of other players within the country. How do you understand the current state of Syria, taking into account all of the groups vying for power?

Joseph Daher. The dominant narrative, especially since 2012, has been to portray the Syrian revolutionary process as not a part of the other revolutionary processes in the region, for democracy, social justice, and equality. Instead the ongoing events in Syria have been seen as either a sectarian conflict between religious minorities against a religious majority, or through a geopolitical perspective where different imperialist and sub-imperialist states of the region oppose each other. This is especially the case with the so called "axis of resistance" argument, based on Syria, Iran, and Hezbollah, with the support of Russia, opposing Western imperialism led by the United States and allied with the reactionary monarchies of the region: Saudi Arabia and Qatar. This ignores the dynamics from below of the Syrian revolutionary process.

Both of these analyses are problematic because they ignore the deep and objective conditions of the Syrian revolutionary process, which are similar for all of the countries that went through—and are still going through—revolutionary processes. In short, the driving forces have been the desire for democ-

racy, the socio-economic crisis, and a will for emancipation and liberation towards more equality.

Firstly, remember that Syria was also an authoritarian regime, ruled for the past 40 years by one family, and it is also a bourgeois regime that went through a process of neoliberalization and privatization, accelerated considerably with Bashar al-Assad's arrival to power. Sixty percent of the population was living under or just above the poverty line in 2011. Syria was subjected to the same form of crony capitalism that is prevalent in the region. For example, in Egypt it was the Mubarak family that benefitted mostly from the privatization and neoliberalization; in Tunisia it was the Trabelsi family, of the wife of the dictator Ben Ali; and in Syria it is Makhlof, the cousin of Assad, who owns 60 percent of the country's wealth. In the end what we have are neoliberal and authoritarian systems, and Syria is no different in this regard.

Secondly, by saying it is all simply a conflict between ISIS and Assad, one ignores the popular movement that has been ongoing for the past three years despite the fact that the movement was undermined first by the regime and then by Islamic reactionary forces. However, this popular movement is not only still alive but it is still playing an important role. Members of this movement were the original actors of the revolution and are still upholding the objectives of the revolution.

Thirdly, the Assad/Islamic State dichotomy ignores the fact that the Assad regime helped the development of ISIS and all the Islamic reactionary forces, by releasing from the prisons of the regime the different individuals who would become the heads of these reactionary forces. In various amnesty decisions during the start of the revolutionary process, leaders of various Islamic reactionary forces were freed, while democratic activists were imprisoned,

tortured, and oppressed. We should realize that the Assad regime targeted and still targets mostly the democratic and progressive activists as well as the Free Syrian Army, while it allowed ISIS to grow.

The best example is the city of Raqqa, which was under the domination of ISIS since October 2013, and was only targeted for the first time by the regime at the end of August 2014. This is when ISIS gained a lot of territory in Iraq and when the U.S.-led coalition for bombing Iraq and Syria was organizing. And one must also not forget that the first to oppose ISIS and other Islamic reactionary forces was the popular movement. Since the beginning of 2013 in various areas there have been popular mobilizations and demonstrations to condemn the authoritarian practices of Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic Front.

A popular uprising occurred in the beginning of 2014 in some neighborhoods of Aleppo and in northern areas of Syria against ISIS. ISIS was expelled militarily from several areas due to the pressure of the masses. Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic Front also participated in these military fights against ISIS because of the opposition of the masses and the increasing defiance and violence of ISIS against them. We can see that the popular masses in Syria oppose those who don't uphold the objectives of the revolution and practice authoritarian policies.

Of course this does not mean in any way that Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic Front, or other Salafist forces, should be considered allies of the revolution for democracy, social justice, and equality; they are part of the counter-revolution. We have seen just recently that Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State cooperated in expelling the Syrian Revolutionaries Front from Rif Idlib and that Ahrar Sham (a Salafist group) has just attacked Free Syrian Army forces in a neighborhood of Aleppo called Bustan Qasr.

Finally, seeing the conflict as solely between Assad and ISIS actually serves no one but the regime and ISIS, and both alternatives are reactionary. In some

ways it also serves Western imperialism, which wants to portray the conflict as choosing between the lesser of two evils. The Assad regime welcomed the U.S.-led coalition's bombardment, and supported "all international counterterrorism efforts." Assad wants to appear to the various international imperialist actors in the West as the person that can help them in their fight against "terrorism." This last perspective has unfortunately pushed many—from conservative right-wingers to ill-informed anti-imperialists—to take the view that Assad is a lesser evil than the Jihadists. In fact we should oppose both, because they nurture each other and are each seeking to establish an authoritarian system.

So definitely this view of seeing only a conflict between ISIS and Assad is negating the popular revolutionary process in Syria, and the strength of the popular movement. Even though it has been undermined, it is still present, still fighting, and still upholding the objectives of the revolution.

NP. What do you believe are the objectives of the U.S.-led airstrikes and arms supplies in Syria and Iraq?

JD. First, in Iraq, they serve to protect American allies. The U.S. military intervention, despite its "humanitarian" propaganda, is nevertheless part of established political objectives that are: to protect American diplomatic personnel stationed in Erbil (which is also home of a CIA base); to protect the large multinational companies in the hydrocarbon/oil sector such as Mobil, Chevron, Exxon, and Total who are exploiting the oil production in the region and have already invested more than \$10 billion; and, perhaps most importantly, to keep the alliance with the Iraqi regime, inherited from the American invasion. The United States did not intervene when Mosul fell and more than 200,000 refugees were on the road to Iraqi Kurdistan, but only got involved militarily when ISIS was threatening to conquer the Kurdish areas of the north and the capital Baghdad in the south.

That is why the United States only wanted cosmetic and superficial changes in the Iraqi regime, replacing only the prime minister, Maliki, who was also let down by his Iranian ally because of his catastrophic mismanagement of the country. The new prime minister, Haidar al-Abadi, is far from representing any radical change. He is a close partner of Maliki and a member of the same party, Dawa. He was Minister of Communication in the interim government set up after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003. This new Prime Minister, al-Abadi, has received international support including from Iran. Ex-prime minister Maliki has nevertheless tried to remain in power, but finally gave up. Following this announcement, American officials said that they could accelerate the economic and military aid to Iraq if the new government of al-Abadi were more inclusive, particularly towards the Sunni population of Iraq. But this forgets that it is the current political system of the Iraqi regime and the same political forces that have led Iraq into this situation today as I have explained in different articles on my website.

It is worth mentioning American assistance to the Iraqi army for those who doubt that this regime is an ally of the United States: the Pentagon has provided Iraq with \$650 million worth of ammunition and small arms this year alone. Before 2011, the United States had spent \$24 billion on arming and training the Iraqi army. Finally, on October 22, the United States declared that it was negotiating to sell \$600 million worth of armor-piercing tank rounds to Iraq.

The airstrikes in Syria are definitely not in favor of the Syrian revolution. Washington from the beginning claimed it would be targeting ISIS, but it has targeted other reactionary forces as well, such as Jabhat al-Nusra or forces linked to it. While we as members of the revolutionary-left current in Syria have opposed these reactionary forces, we also oppose this intervention in Syria because the objectives of the U.S.-led coalition are not to assist and help the Syrian revolutionaries or to protect them from ISIS or the regime. The objective is to reim-

pose their hegemony over the region and guarantee a form of stability, especially to the reactionary regimes of the Gulf, including Saudi Arabia, by putting an end to the revolutionary processes.

These strikes are also in the framework of reaching a "Yemeni" solution, as was the goal since the beginning. In other words, reaching an agreement between the Assad regime (or a section of it) and the opposition linked to Western and Gulf regimes. The approval by the U.S. Congress of \$500 million to support President Obama's plan to arm and equip 5,000-10,000 Syrian rebels, whom Washington describes as "moderate" in their fight against ISIS and Syrian regime forces, goes in the same direction, as we can see in the text of the resolution:

"The Secretary of Defense is authorized, in coordination with the Secretary of State, to provide assistance, including training, equipment, supplies, and sustainment, to appropriately vetted elements of the Syrian opposition and other appropriately vetted Syrian groups and individuals for the following purposes:

1. Defending the Syrian people from attacks by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL [another term for ISIS]), and securing territory controlled by the Syrian opposition.
2. Protecting the United States, its friends and allies, and the Syrian people from the threats posed by terrorists in Syria.
3. Promoting the conditions for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict in Syria."

The desire of the United States to constitute armed groups in Syria loyal to their interests is nevertheless thwarted by the reality on the ground. This is because of the decision of a large majority of opposition groups to cooperate with Washington only if they are able to maintain their independence and autonomous decision making, and if the collaboration includes a clear plan for the overthrow of the Assad regime. Colonel Riad al-Asaad, the leader of the Free Syrian Army, for example said he would not join the alliance against ISIS without a commit-

ment to oust the Syrian regime. He added, "If they want to see the Free Syrian Army on their side, they should give assurances on toppling the Assad regime and on a plan including revolutionary principles." Other armed groups present in the Supreme Military Council of Syria, close to Washington, also expressed their resentment of the United States and other Western forces for their lack of support. They said that coalition airstrikes against ISIS targets were not enough; the strikes must also hit Assad's forces. One of the commanders said that "we need to deal with this problem at its root cause: Assad, the gangs that support him, and Daech [an Arabic acronym for the Islamic State]. Those are the three problems every Syrian deals with." Many armed groups were also critical of the way the strikes were being carried out and many inside the country on the side of the revolution reject these bombings.

The jihadi and Islamic reactionary forces are used by the Western imperialist and regional forces as the entry point for this new military intervention. At the same time, the expansion of the jihadi groups, which has ignored state borders and created instability, has reached the point where it is threatening Western and regional imperialist interests. We should remember that ISIS, which was established in 2006, was of no interest to these powers when they were confined to specific geographic locations in Iraq and later Syria. They were even financially supported by some Gulf private networks in the beginning. Although ISIS and other sister organizations are a factor of instability for the global imperialist system, we should be clear they are in no ways actors for the emancipation and liberation of the people of the region; they are very much the opposite. At the same time, the bombings from the U.S.-led coalition have killed civilians and destroyed much-needed civilian infrastructure.

These are the reasons we should oppose these bombings. Airstrikes by U.S.-led forces have killed more than 32 civilians during the first month of bombing in Syria, according to official data. At the same time the Assad regime has continued its war

against the population and combatants of the Free Syrian Army in the "liberated" areas. Thus, Assad's siege of Aleppo is almost complete. He has made significant progress in the countryside of Damascus (Al Ghouta) and has bombed on a daily basis the Al Wa'ar neighborhood in Homs for the last two weeks. This has elicited the complete silence of the media.

In addition, to believe that ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra, and other similar organizations can be defeated with the same tools that created them is completely insane. These reactionary forces are indeed the consequences of the criminal authoritarian regimes (for example Assad in Syria and Saddam Hussein in Iraq) and foreign interventions (mainly Western countries led by the United States and regional states such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and Iran). This new military intervention has indeed no objective of overthrowing the Assad regime. As a banner held by a Syrian protester in Aleppo last week said, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results, Albert Einstein," and below, "Afghanistan 2001, Iraq 2003, Syria 2014." The only political groups that will benefit from these bombings are the two sides of the counter-revolution: the Assad regime on one side, and on the other the reactionary Islamic and jihadi political forces.

The Assad regime will most probably benefit in the short term militarily, with the weakening of strong military actors. Assad's forces have actually continued their attacks on various areas of the country, but in addition the regime sees a chance to regain "legitimacy" with the West as part of an alliance in the War against Terrorism.

The bombing will likely militarily weaken in the short term ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra, and other reactionary forces, but will most likely prove counter-productive for the Syrian revolutionaries by increasing the popular support for the jihadi fighters, driving even more recruits to their ranks. These forces are already painting themselves as the only serious anti-imperialist movement, rather than the reactionary and sectarian outfit they are. Several

reports have already noted that these bombings have boosted the appeal of these organizations, with new recruits arriving every day. There is also competition between the organizations; for example, Jabhat al-Nusra must further radicalize its discourse to prevent the departure of its members, especially foreigners, to ISIS. Following the bombing of their positions in Idlib, some members have claimed their willingness and readiness to fight alongside ISIS.

Further, when we look at the example of Kobanê, this intervention can really be questioned by studying its consequences on the ground; in particular it has been unable to stop the offensive of ISIS. Let's remember that when the U.S.-led coalition intervened in Syria in mid-September, ISIS was 60 kilometres away from Kobanê. Today ISIS—even though the U.S. started bombarding—is occupying half of the city. This tells us that this new intervention is not at all helping the revolution, and is more propaganda than anything. Lastly, we can see who supports this U.S.-led coalition: Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the centers of counter-revolution in the region.

This intervention is in the interests of Western imperialism and also those of the different sub- and international-imperialist forces. You can see that Russia is not really opposing this kind of bombardment, although there's criticism of the way it is led. The same with Iran; it criticizes the way it is led but does not directly oppose these bombings. All of these actors want some form of stability, which was challenged by the revolutionary processes that began in 2010.

When the United States says it is targeting ISIS, we have to remember that ISIS grew out of al-Qaeda, which was present since 2005 in Iraq. When ISIS expanded, especially by intervening in the Syrian revolutionary process, it was not a problem for Western imperialism and other sub-imperialist forces. But when the expansion of ISIS became too powerful for them to ignore, they chose to intervene at this moment. So it is the level of expansion of ISIS that was a problem for the United States,

not the fact that ISIS is a reactionary force. When ISIS was not directly challenging Western political interests, and the forces of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the latter nations even supported it financially before 2011, and even after.

NP. Journalist Jeremy Scahill has recently said in an interview that the idea that ISIS is made up of strictly ultra-orthodox Islamists is false. He claims that figures such as Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, a prominent Ba'athist, are also a part of it. Do you agree?

JD. One must understand that the fall of Mosul was due to two factors. First of all it was due to the corruption and the complete unpopularity of the Iraqi state, because of its sectarianism and authoritarianism, which is why the army and police forces left so rapidly. Second, it was a coalition that took over Mosul, led first of all by ISIS, but composed also of Sunni tribes and former Ba'athists. However, directly after the takeover and occupation of Mosul, ISIS became the dominant force and eliminated the other forces, including tribes and the Ba'athists, and al-Douri as well. So it's not right to say that al-Douri is part of ISIS; he's not.

At the same time, you have former Ba'athist military commanders that became jihadists and Salafists after the American invasion, and only after joined forces with al-Qaeda and later ISIS. So, yes, the military leadership of ISIS is composed mainly of former Iraqi military commanders from the Iraqi army.

NP. What is the state of the Free Syrian Army militarily? After losing territory to Assad's forces, and the rapid growth of ISIS, do they still have a chance?

JD. First we need to understand that the Free Syrian Army is not a single and united institution, but rather a network of independent military groups fighting under its umbrella. The various forces of the Free Syrian Army have been increasingly and considerably weakened over the past two years, because unlike its opponents it has not been supported significantly by any international forces

either by direct military intervention or by supplies of advanced weaponry. It has lost a lot of ground to the Assad regime, which concentrated its offensive against them, and also to the growth of Islamic reactionary forces, not only ISIS but Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic front as well, which attacked and killed commanders of the Free Syrian Army.

Nevertheless, before the U.S.-led coalition intervened, there was a new form, a new growth of some factions of the Free Syrian Army, of people coming back to the idea and appeal of a Free Syrian Army defending the objectives of the revolution. These people were disappointed with the Islamic reactionary forces. The reason people had joined those forces was not based on ideology most of the time, but due to the fact that the jihadi groups were well funded and received arms from the reactionary monarchies of the region, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and with Turkey closing its eyes to the passage of jihadi forces into northern Syria. But people are coming back. More and more, we have seen in the past weeks demonstrations with slogans saying, "We need to go back to the spirit and objectives of the revolution," and various forces of the Free Syrian Army were building on this kind of popular mobilization. On a military basis the democratic components of the Free Syrian Army represent the will of the people, the popular movement. You still have a lot of slogans and songs for the Free Syrian Army, so it's still a power, but it lacks any kind of unity. There are still a lot of problems. There are still regional differences in the Free Syrian Army. By unity I mean, not a unity in objectives, but rather in military strategy to defeat the regime and the Islamic reactionary forces. They have been fighting on both fronts: against the regime for the past three years, and against Islamic reactionary forces increasingly for more than one year. But nevertheless, they still have a chance because for many people on the ground, for the popular classes, the Free Syrian Army really represents the armed hand of the revolution.

The democratic components of the Free Syrian Army still protect the objectives of the revolution.

This is why we can increasingly see people going back to the Free Syrian Army with a discourse that is more democratic, some even acknowledging that they were wrong to collaborate with the Islamic reactionary forces. However in some regions you still have collaboration between Islamic reactionary forces and the Free Syrian Army, depending on the situation. But this is tactical cooperation; they do not share the same political objectives. This is important to clarify.

NP. Does the group still have political legitimacy? Are there any prospects for governing the country?

JD. Definitely, among the popular masses in support of the revolutionary process in Syria.

NP. What is the role of the revolutionary left in the Middle East and North Africa today in combating both the reactionary religious orthodoxy of jihadists and authoritarian dictatorships?

JD. The duty of the revolutionary left is to understand first of all that the solution is regional and cannot be based on only one country. We have to clearly oppose any form of counter-revolution, whether it is branded as Assad or el-Sisi. Or in Tunis as modernism, unity of the nation. All this kind of propaganda, "fighting against terrorism," we have to oppose very strongly. But we have to oppose as well the Islamic reactionary forces whose rhetoric speaks of the unity of the Umma, authenticity, and moralism, when in fact they share the counter-revolutionary goal of implementing neoliberalism, authoritarianism, patriarchy, sectarianism, and forms of nationalist-chauvinism. This is why we oppose both of them, and both of them are linked to different imperialist and sub-imperialist forces.

We need to build an alternative that is from below, a radical alternative that is democratic, in favor of social justice, and opposed to sectarianism, patriarchy, and nationalism. This means first that we need to build mass revolutionary socialist organizations, with clear principles, building collectives.

And also at the same time we need to build a large democratic front that opposes counter-revolutionary forces, which is not only based on socialist revolutionaries but all the forces that share our objectives of democracy, social justice, and equality. This is the duty of the left. We must oppose using sectarianism to divide the people, especially now when we see the different authoritarian regimes or Islamic reactionary forces. We must understand that sectarianism is not a heritage from a medieval past but rather a modern phenomenon, which is used by dominant forces to divide the people.

NP. How do you envision an end to the conflict?

JD. I would prefer the term "solution to the revolutionary process," which is not going to come tomorrow. We need to think in terms of a long-term revolutionary process, because right now the situation in Syria is catastrophic, where you have half of the population displaced, 80 percent of the people now living close to the poverty line, total destruction of urban infrastructure, and two counter-revolutionary forces that are still strong: the Assad regime and the jihadi groups. A solution is only possible with crushing both of these forces and building an alternative that is democratic, in favor of social justice, against sectarianism and chauvinism, and for equality. This means building revolutionary organizations and re-empowering the popular movement that is still battling, with both material and intangible weapons.

We should support the sending of arms without any political conditions to the democratic forces of the Free Syrian Army, and the Kurdish popular forces as well, to defeat both sides of the counter-revolution. I would like to urge those who don't think arms should be provided to read Trotsky's text *Learn to Think*. Arms without any kind of political condition! If the West were really in favor of the revolutionary process in the region, it would provide arms. Its failure to do so shows the contradictions of Western imperialism. It does not want to strengthen a large popular movement that is demo-

cratic and in favor of social justice and against sectarianism. This is the way to build a new Syria.

But also without forgetting that the solution is not only in Syria, the solution is regional. If you don't overthrow the centers of the counter-revolution, which are Saudi Arabia and Qatar, a decent future for the region will be very difficult. Likewise, the Syrian revolutionary process will also need to challenge the Israeli state and help the Palestinian resistance. Israel is not only a threat to the Palestinians, but as we've seen throughout the decades, it is also a threat to the region as a whole. On many occasions since its establishment, Israel has intervened in the region to serve imperialist political interests, not only in Palestine. Lastly, any kind of people who are serious about helping Kurdish self-determination should help the Syrian revolutionary process, because they are directly linked.

NP. Do you believe that the growth of ISIS represents a failure of the left?

JD. I think that the growth of ISIS is not directly linked to the defeat of the left, because the defeat of the left is much older. It goes back to the 1970s, with the crushing of the left by authoritarian regimes. We should also remind ourselves of the position of the Stalinist left that allied itself with authoritarian regimes, which was destructive for the left. For example in Egypt, where the Communist Party supported Mubarak until the last day, even before the crushing of the Muslim Brotherhood, and supported el-Sisi.

This is terrible because then people ask, "Is this the left?" Or in Syria where we see a section of the left supporting the regime, and participating in the government. Or in Iraq, a section of the left was with Saddam. So it is the crushing of the left in the 1960s and 1970s in addition to the opportunism of sections of the Stalinist left allied with authoritarian regimes that caused the defeat of the left.

At the same time, following the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, oil prices increased considerably, which allowed the Gulf monarchies to increase support to

the Islamic reactionary forces in various countries, especially the Muslim Brotherhood. In the 1970s, for example in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood was funded by the Gulf monarchies while being used by Sadat to crush the left. The Muslim Brotherhood was also successful because it presented itself to the people as an alternative. Nationalist forces were defeated in 1967, and became mostly corrupted and authoritarian. They also went back on their social policies, starting the "infatih" policies, increasing neoliberal policies, and creating a highly unequal society, while the left was crushed and repressed.

On top of that, there was the defeat of the Palestinian resistance in Jordan and Lebanon, in the former during Black September in the 1970s and in the latter during the Lebanese civil war at the hands of both the Syrian regime and Israel. This also crushed sections of the left that were allied with the Palestinian resistance. Finally, there have been the attempts by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states to co-opt the Palestinian movement. So the Palestinian resistance has been attacked on all fronts.

This is why we say the liberation of Palestine requires the overthrow of all the regimes in the region. Arafat, on the other hand, played a bad role, saying that Palestinians shouldn't intervene in Arab states. This was very appealing to Fatah, which was playing to the different reactionary regimes, and was funded by them. Unfortunately, most of the Palestinian organizations follow this policy today. This is true of Hamas, which for example opposed the Bahraini revolution on sectarian and political grounds, and of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which has not taken any radical position in favor of the Syrian revolutionary process.

ISIS is a direct consequence of the American invasion and destruction of the Iraqi state and society. Contrary to what has been suggested by some media and so-called "analysts," the current events in Iraq are not the result of an ancestral hatred between Sunnis and Shiites that goes back hundreds

of years, but truly are the result of contemporary policies.

In addition to the military invasion that came after more than a decade of inhumane sanctions, killing a million Iraqis and causing the forced displacement of four million people, the U.S. occupation policies are at the origin of the current debacle. These include fierce repression of any political opposition to the U.S. occupation, implementation of neoliberal policies and repression of the independent trade union movement, destruction of state institutions (military, public administration, university system, and so on), and the establishment of a political system based on political sectarianism as in Lebanon. The last-mentioned element was one of the main reasons for the terrible sectarian war between Shia extremist groups and Sunnis between 2005 and 2008, resulting in a monthly average of 3,000 dead.

As I said before, some former officers of the Iraqi military joined ISIS after the American invasion. ISIS also finds its roots in the sectarianism of the Iraqi state led by Hizb al-Dawa, Maliki's political party. Dawa was an ally of the Iranian regime, but also collaborated with the United States, and it became an ally of sorts, collaborating politically and, as we saw previously, militarily. This does not mean that the previous regime before 2003 was ever good; it must be remembered that the country was under the bloody dictatorship of Saddam Hussein's clan which caused the death, exile, and imprisonment of huge numbers of people, not to mention the gassing of Kurds in Halabja in 1988. This regime was built on a totalitarian repressive apparatus that accepted no political opposition or independent trade unions, and on a clientelist tribal and sectarian basis.

We should also not forget that the rise of ISIS is linked to the repression of the popular protests that shook Iraq in early 2011 in the wake of other popular uprisings in the region. They started on February 25, 2011 with a "Day of Wrath," which then launched a weekly cycle of protests on Fridays in most major cities. Demands were diverse, rang-

ing from the fight against unemployment, which is still very high, to condemnation of the lack or absence of services such as electricity, the release of political prisoners, and opposition to the whole sectarian political system established by the U.S. occupation. The movement was made up of members of civil society, women's groups, trade unionists, and so on.

Popular gatherings sometimes exceeded tens of thousands, while for example in the city of Mosul, protesters called for a general strike pushing the local governor, Atheel al-Nujaifi to support the popular protests and support the violation of the curfew imposed by the government. Popular demonstrations represented a serious challenge to Maliki's government, with many local politicians resigning, including two in the city of Basra. Above all, the public squares where protests took place became politicized poetry sites and areas of cultural performances drawing on Iraq's rich cultural heritage.

The government was quick to react with systematic repression, using tear gas and live ammunition and the establishment of numerous checkpoints—forcing people to walk for hours in the scorching heat to reach public squares that were usually easily accessible. Security forces also forbade all pens, markers, poster board, and bottles of water to people going to public squares to protest. Political consolidation within the ruling elite of Iraq nevertheless allowed Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to co-opt local dissident politicians, as in Basra, while continuing the repression of the popular movement.

This Iraqi sectarian regime oppressed Sunnis and fired many of them from government positions, including the high command of the army. Maliki refused to integrate the "Sunni awakening" councils, which had fought al-Qaeda, into the army. He maintained the anti-Ba'athist law, established after the U.S. invasion against former leaders close to Saddam Hussein but which was mainly used by the Iraqi prime minister to suppress all Sunni political forces, while accusing leading Sunni politicians of supporting terrorism. This is a typical tool of re-

pressive regimes in the region to suppress any opposition, as is seen in Egypt and Syria today.

In 2013, a popular movement in the Sunni-majority areas led a mass campaign of non-violent resistance against Maliki's government, and particularly its sectarian and authoritarian policies. Popular mass demonstrations and sit-ins were held in this period demanding the release of political prisoners, especially thousands of female prisoners, more jobs and better public services, and the replacement of the Iraqi constitution. The protesters especially opposed the "anti-terrorist laws" used by the Iraqi government to suppress opposition members with accusations of links with al-Qaeda or the Ba'ath Party. At that time, leaders of the Iraqi Shiite group of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq and of Moqtada al-Sadr's movement, who had their own grievances against the Maliki regime, expressed their solidarity with the protests organized almost entirely by Iraqi Sunnis, and threatened to organize their own demonstrations. Unfortunately, no trans-confessional solidarity materialized, nor inter-ethnic, despite Kurdish criticism of and opposition to the Maliki government.

The Maliki regime bloodily suppressed the popular protests, as it did the movement of February 25, 2011, when Iraq had earlier witnessed countrywide protests. The government also used tactics taken directly from the U.S. occupation: districts wholly or partially destroyed, mass arrests, and torture. Iraq has also been the battleground for the different sub-imperialist states in the region: Iran supporting the Iraqi sectarian regime under Maliki and other reactionary Shia militias and groups, and Saudi Arabia and Qatar supporting Islamic reactionary Sunni forces, including ISIS.

Finally, what allowed ISIS to grow considerably was the beginning of the Syrian revolutionary process, and the intervention of ISIS in this process, where it gained military experience. It also was able, through the occupation of different oil facilities in Iraq and Syria, to build an independent military economy. (ISIS is no longer dependent on foreign funding, which has been mostly stopped by

Saudi Arabia and Qatar.) So all these elements enabled ISIS to grow considerably.

The solution is of course to oppose the jihadi reactionary forces of ISIS, but also to oppose the Maliki government with its sectarian and authoritarian policies and reactionary forces that support it.

These two actors feed each other and have to be overthrown and defeated in order to have any hope of building a progressive popular movement opposing sectarianism, enabling Iraq to end a nightmare that has lasted too long.

New Politics

ECONOMY

The lessons that can be drawn from the failure of the Greek 2012 restructuring

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

In 2012, the Troika did a restructuring of the Greek debt: what went wrong?

The context was as follows: from early 2010 Greece was subjected to speculative attacks by the financial markets that demanded excessively high interest rates for roll-over loans. Greece was close to defaulting because it could not refinance its debt at reasonable rates. The Troika interfered with a structural adjustment Memorandum'. It would grant new loans for Greece to repay its creditors, i.e. essentially European private banks. [1] Those new loans were accompanied by austerity measures that had a brutal, even disastrous, impact on the people's living conditions and on economic activity.

In 2012 the Troika restructured the Greek debt owed to private creditors only, namely the private banks, of EU member states, that had already largely withdrawn though they still held some Greek debts, and other private creditors such as Greek worker's pension funds. This restructuring involved cutting Greek debts to private creditors by 50 to 60%. The Troika, which has been lending money to Greece since 2010, restructured the Greek debt but refused to be involved in any reduction of the debt. It means that the debt owed by Greece to the Troika has not been reduced.

The operation was presented as a success by mainstream media, Western governments, the Greek government as well as the IMF and the European Commission. They attempted to fool international public opinion and the Greek population into believing that private creditors had gone to considerable lengths to ease Greece's dramatic situation. Actually the operation was not at all beneficial for the country in general, and even less for its population. After a temporary slackening in 2012 and ear-

ly 2013, the Greek debt has been steadily rising again and is now beyond the highest point attained in 2010-2011. The conditions enforced by the Troika have resulted in a dramatic fall in the country's economic activity: the GDP went down by over 25% between 2010 and early 2014. The living conditions of the population have dramatically deteriorated: violation of economic and social rights and of collective rights, regression of the retirement system, sharp reduction of public health and public education services, massive layoffs, drop in purchasing power... Moreover, one of the conditions for any debt relief was a change in the applicable law and the relevant jurisdiction in case of dispute with creditors. All in all this debt restructuring goes against the interest of the Greek population and of Greece as a country.

How does this restructuring of the Greek debt compare with the Brady Plan that was implemented in countries of the South as a consequence of the 1982 debt crisis?

The Brady Plan [2] was implemented in some twenty indebted countries towards the end of the 1980s. It was a way of restructuring debts through an exchange with US-guaranteed securities on condition that creditor banks reduce the amount of what is owed to them and that they use the money in the economy. In some cases the debt was reduced by 30%, and the Brady bonds guaranteed a fixed interest rate of about 6%, which is most favourable for bankers. The problem was thus solved for the banks and merely postponed for indebted countries.

We find the same components in the debt restructuring imposed on Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Cyprus as in the Brady Plan.

1°: In the Brady Plan, just as in the Memoranda imposed on the countries on the 'periphery' of the EU, governments of the major powers and international institutions step in instead of private banks as main creditors. All those plans thus aim to make it possible for private banks to withdraw as main creditors of the countries concerned without significant loss since they are replaced by governments and multilateral institutions such as the IMF. This was what happened with the Brady Plan. In Europe, the European Commission, the European Stability Mechanism [ESM], the ECB and the IMF have gradually replaced private banks and private financial institutions as creditors.

2°: All those operations are obviously accompanied by conditionalities that enforce the implementation of austerity measures and neoliberal policies.

3°: The other common point lies in the ultimate failure of such restructuring for indebted countries. Even neoliberal economists such as Kenneth Rogoff and Carmen Reinhart [3] acknowledge that the Brady plan was not beneficial for the countries concerned: debt reduction was much more limited than had been announced and in the long term the amount of debt actually increased and the amounts paid are very high. We can now say the same about Greece, Cyprus, Portugal and Ireland.

If restructuring the debt is not a solution, what should be done to help those countries solve the debt issue?

Those countries ought to unilaterally: 1) set up an integral debt audit – with citizens' active participation; 2) suspend debt repayment; 3) refuse to pay the illegal or illegitimate part of it; and 4) demand a reduction of the remainder. The reduction of what is left after cancellation of the illegitimate and/or illegal part can be seen as a form of restructuring but it cannot be isolated as a sufficient response.

What happens if a government starts negotiating with creditors without suspending

repayment?

If there is no suspension of repayment or public auditing, creditors are in a dominant position. We mustn't underestimate their manipulative skills that can lead governments to unacceptable compromises. Suspending debt repayment as a unilateral sovereign decision creates a new power relationship with creditors. Besides, with a suspension, creditors have to crawl out of the woodwork. Indeed if you deal with securities holders without suspension of payments they remain anonymous since securities are not nominal. Only if they topple this power relationship can governments create the necessary conditions for them to enforce measures that legitimize their action in domestic and international law. In the cases of Greece, Portugal, Ireland and Cyprus the troika is the major creditor and would be obliged to go to the negotiation table.

In this case could governments initiate negotiations to show public opinion that creditors have an unacceptable position and that they have no choice but to turn to unilateral actions?

Yes, but such an approach has its pitfalls. Creditors may create confusion in the people's minds claiming that the governments are unyielding and delay negotiations. Whereas the countries need urgent solutions and cannot afford to use their tax revenues to repay their debts.

The adequate moment to suspend debt repayment must be defined according to each country's specific conditions: the people's degree of consciousness, urgency, creditors' blackmail, the general economic situation of the country... In some circumstances auditing can occur before; in others, the two must occur simultaneously.

[CADTM-<http://cadtm.org/The-lessons-that-can-be-drawn-from>]

FRANCE

What caused the killings?

AHMED SHAWKI ·

What has been the reaction to the attack on Charlie Hebdo by French society in general, and the French state and ruling class in particular?

The reaction has been what anybody would expect. The initial reaction was one of massive shock—which is not that different from the initial reaction to 9/11 in the United States, though it's obviously a big exaggeration to place both attacks on an equal footing as many did, particularly in France.

And, of course, the shock was immediately exploited by the French government in the same way that 9/11 was exploited by the Bush administration—in order to silence critics and get wide support in the name of "national unity." Suddenly, François Hollande's popularity went up sharply, from a very low point. The same happened with George W. Bush, whose popularity was very low before 9/11 and got boosted beyond anything he could have dreamed of.

These were quite similar reactions from appalled and frightened societies—and, of course, the crimes were appalling indeed. In both cases, the ruling class took advantage of the shock in order to whip up nationalist sentiment and support for the state: The police forces have been hailed as great heroes in France for mobilizing several tens of thousands in hunting down three lunatic assassins. To be sure, the New York firefighters were much more deserving of the praise for their bravery.

There is nothing much original about all this. Instead, what is rather original is the way the discussion evolved later on.

As you know, the Charlie Hebdo attack and the anti-Semitic attack on a kosher supermarket in Paris were perpetrated by two young men of Algerian background and one from Malian back-

ground, the three of them French-born. Over the last few days, there has been a significant shift in the discussion about the attacks: it has become more mitigated, with increasing acknowledgement of the fact that there is something wrong in French society—in the way it treats people of immigrant origin.

This shift went to the point French Prime Minister Manuel Valls stating publicly two weeks after the attack that there is a "territorial, social, ethnic apartheid" in France with regard to people of immigrant origin. That's an extremely strong characterization indeed—and as you might expect, it was massively criticized, even from within the cabinet over which Valls presides.

But it did represent a vindication of some sort for those who said from the start that those terrible attacks should lead people to think in the first place about the conditions that bring young people to such a level of resentment that they become willing to engage in suicidal attacks in order to kill. Not that any reason whatsoever could constitute an excuse for the murders that were perpetrated, but because it is indispensable to investigate the origin of such hatred and resentment instead of indulging in the inept explanation that "they hate us for our freedoms," as George W. Bush put it after 9/11.

This gets us to the core issue, which is what the French prime minister was referring to. The core issue is the condition of populations of immigrant origin inside France. One obvious and very telling indication of this is the fact that a majority of inmates in French prisons are people of Muslim background, although they constitute less than 10 percent of the population. And there is the related fact that the French society and state have never really settled accounts with their colonial legacy.

On this last issue, it's striking that self-examination in the U.S. society about the Vietnam War has been much more radical and widespread—reflecting the huge mobilization that built up within the U.S. itself against that war—than whatever there has been in France about the war in Algeria, although the latter was no less brutal, if not more so, and came after well over one century of barbaric colonial occupation of that country.

France is a country where, believe it or not, the parliament voted in 2005—that is, only 10 years ago, not half a century ago!—for a law about the colonial legacy that saluted the men and women, especially the military, who took part in the colonial enterprise. And it required, among other things, that schools should teach "the positive role of the French presence overseas, especially in North Africa." That particular part of the law was repealed by presidential decree a year later after a huge outcry from migrant organizations, the left, historians and schoolteachers. But the very fact that such a law could be adopted by a parliamentary majority is just outrageous.

Can you tell us more about the reaction to the prime minister's statement about France's "apartheid"? Because that's a striking statement.

It is—very striking. Mind you, Valls is definitely not a radical or even a progressive. He's from the right wing of the Socialist Party. He was minister of the interior before becoming prime minister, and was criticized on the left for entering into a competition with the far right—with Marine Le Pen—of trying to outdo each other on the issue of immigration. And now, suddenly, here he is with this strong statement.

Unsurprisingly, he was widely criticized, not only from the right-wing opposition, but also from within his own party, and even from some people on the left, all of them saying that he went over the top and should not have used the A-word.

His most sober critics pointed to the fact that there is no legal apartheid in France, unlike what you had

until a few decades ago in South Africa or in the U.S. South half a century ago. But no one could seriously deny the reality of a "territorial, social and ethnic" segregation in France that is similar to what still prevails in the United States.

The condition of the populations of migrant origin in France is indeed closer to that of the Black people in the U.S. than to apartheid in the strict sense. These populations are concentrated in separate areas, on the periphery of cities, and live in extremely frustrating conditions. On top of that comes racism that is pervasive in various forms in French society, including discrimination in employment, in housing and so on.

On this last point, France is even worse than the United States—it won't be any time soon that we shall see a person of African background elected president of France, other than in the wild fantasy of an infamous French Islamophobic novelist. It is actually—and unfortunately—much more likely that a far-right candidate would be elected to the French presidency. After all, in 2002, Jean-Marie Le Pen managed to get to the second round of the presidential election, beating the Socialist Party candidate in the first round.

This brings up a related question about the French far right, which is quite powerful electorally, with Le Pen's daughter Marine leading a "reformed" National Front. My understanding is that the National Front, which historically draws its inspiration from the far right—up to and including the fascist right—is now inviting representation among its leadership of gays, of other minorities, of Jews. But it is singling out the immigrant population, and in particular Muslims, as the "new enemy." Is that roughly the trajectory?

Generally speaking, the far right in Europe nowadays, except for a lunatic fringe, does not focus on anti-Semitism or even anti-gay bigotry. Actually, one of the major figures of the far right in Holland was an openly gay man, who used to justify his

Islamophobia by referring to the alleged homophobia of migrants of Muslim background.

So this is no longer the platform of the European far right nowadays. The preferred target of their hate speech is Islam. Muslims are their scapegoats, much more so than Jews or any of the other victims of fascism and Nazism in the 1930s and 1940s—save the Roma, who are still the object of much racist hatred. Nowadays, it is Islam that is by far the main target of far-right hatred.

This Islamophobia is actually presented most often with the pretense that it isn't about racism—that it's a rejection of the religion alone, and not of Muslims themselves, so long as they aren't practicing Muslims.

In other words, there are "bad Muslims" and "good Muslims," the latter being those who "drink alcohol and eat pork," i.e. those who are irreligious and adapt fully to Western Christian culture. The most welcome Muslims—here in the ethnic sense, of course—are the small minority who join the Islamophobic choir, seeking reward for their collaboration, like the colonial natives who worked for their colonial masters.

It is this anti-Islam approach that is at work in the demonstrations that have been organized in Germany by a movement that claims to be fighting against "the Islamization of the West." This kind of ideology is common to the far right all over Europe—though maybe less so for the UK Independence Party in Britain, which targets all immigrants, including those from European Union countries.

It's been suggested that the French left is quite poor on the question of institutional racism within French society. Do you think that's true?

Definitely, the French left—and I mean what is usually called the "radical left," to the left of the Socialist Party, which I would not really call "left"—has a poor record on relating to people of immigrant origin. This is a major failure—though, of

course, you can find similar situations in most imperialist countries.

The absence of a strong connection with these populations, and particularly with their youth, means that there is little challenge when the resentment that builds up for legitimate reasons among them goes in the wrong direction, leading in extreme cases to the murderous fanaticism that we have seen at play.

The historical record of the French Communist Party on anti-colonialism, especially in the case of Algeria, is far from clean overall. Within France, the fight against ethnic discrimination and the colonial legacy has not been central enough in the actions of the left, and this has led many young people who have been attracted to the left at some point to reject it and develop quite bitter feelings toward it.

This is usually connected to a tradition within the French left that one may call "radical secularism," or "secular fundamentalism."

You mean "laïcité"?

"Laïcité" means secularism. There is something beyond that, though—let's call it an "anti-clerical" tradition, which has been very strong on the left historically in France. It can take the form of secularist arrogance toward religion and the believers overall.

As long as the targeted religion is the dominant one, this isn't a major problem, although even then it can be politically counterproductive. As the young Marx aptly put it, the same religion that is the dominant classes' ideological tool can also be the "sigh of the oppressed."

But this is much truer when the religion in question is the particular faith of an oppressed and exploited part of society, the religion of the downtrodden, such as—in the West—Judaism yesterday and Islam today. You cannot have the same attitude to Judaism in 1930s' Europe as in today's Israel, for instance—or the same attitude to Islam in Europe today as in Muslim-majority countries. Likewise, you cannot have the same attitude to Christianity

in, say, today's Egypt where Christians are an oppressed minority as in Christian-majority countries.

This is the problem with Charlie Hebdo. Some of the people involved in Charlie Hebdo were very much on the left. Stéphane Charbonnier, known as Charb, the editor of the magazine, who was the principal target of the assassins, was, by any standard, someone on the left. He had close ties with the Communist Party and the general milieu of the left. His funerals were held to the tune of the "Internationale," and his eulogy by Luz, a surviving member of the Charlie Hebdo editorial staff, included a bitter criticism of the French right and far right, and of the Pope as well as of Benjamin Netanyahu.

In this respect, the comparison that some have made of Charlie Hebdo to a Nazi publication publishing anti-Semitic cartoons in Nazi Germany is completely absurd. Charlie Hebdo is definitely not a far-right publication—and present-day France definitely not a Nazi-like state.

Rather, Charlie Hebdo is a blatant illustration of the left-wing arrogant secularism that I mentioned, which is an attitude widely held on the left in good conscience—that is, in the firm belief that secularism and anti-clericalism are basic tenets of the left-wing tradition. They are seen as part of a left-wing identity, along with feminism and other emancipatory causes.

I know that one of the major debates on the French left in the last decade or so was about the question of the veil and the rights of Muslim women to wear the hijab in public. Can you discuss what the issues were in that debate?

This is another illustration of the same problem. It arose in 1989 over the issue of young girls coming to school wearing the headscarf, and being expelled for insisting on doing so, with the support of their families. This led to a 2004 law banning "ostentatious" religious symbols from being worn in public schools.

Part of the left—in fact, I would say the vast majority of the French left, including the Communist Party—supported this ban, in the name of "helping" young girls to fight an oppressive imposition of the headscarf on them by their families, and in the conviction that since the headscarf is a symbol of women's oppression, banning it is a way of challenging this oppression, as well as of upholding the secular character of public schools.

The core problem with this arrogant secularism—this very Orientalist arrogance, one could say—is the belief that liberation can be "imposed" on the oppressed. The rationale is that in forcing you to remove your headscarf, I am "liberating" you, whether you approve of it or not. Needless to say, this happens to be an exact reproduction of the colonial mindset.

I think that for some people, this criticism of the French left for its arrogant secularism gets mixed up with a hesitation to make a left-wing analysis of political Islamism, particularly the reactionary variety behind the attack on Charlie Hebdo or the September 11 attacks in the U.S. You touched on that issue with your book *The Clash of Barbarisms*, didn't you?

I wrote that book after 9/11 indeed. When you're faced with an attack like 9/11, of course, the term "barbaric" will inevitably be used to describe it.

Now how should anti-imperialists react? There are two possible ways. One is to say, "No, it's not barbaric." That's ridiculous, because it obviously is. Why should one regard as barbaric the Islamophobic rampage perpetrated by Anders Breivik, the Norwegian far-right fanatic, in 2012, but not the massacres of 9/11, or the Paris killings, for that matter? This would be an extreme case of "Orientalism in reverse," substituting the contempt of Islam with a very naive and uncritical stance toward everything that is done in Islam's name.

What is politically wrong and dangerous is not the use of terms like "barbaric," "appalling" and the like, but that of the misplaced political category of

"fascism." Many on the French left—the Communist Party, but also members of the far left, and most recently, the post-Maoist philosopher Alain Badiou—have labeled the Paris attacks as "fascistic" and described those perpetrating them as "fascists."

This is completely pointless in socio-political terms since fascism is an ultra-nationalistic mass movement whose main vocation is to salvage capitalism by crushing whatever threatens it, starting with the workers' movement, and to promote aggressive imperialism. Applying this category to terrorist currents inspired by religious fundamentalism in countries that are dominated by imperialism is nonsense.

Such a use of the label "fascism" blurs everything that makes it a distinctive sociopolitical category. If one wishes to dilute a socio-political category this way, then phenomena such as Stalinism or, even more so, the Baathist dictatorships in pre-2003 Iraq or present-day Syria bear much more resemblance to historical fascism than al-Qaeda or the purported "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria."

The misuse of the label was started by the neocons in the Bush administration and others who called al-Qaeda "Islamofascism," and it is quite unfortunate that people on the left fall into this trap. The obvious political goal of this misuse of the label—since "fascism" is seen as the ultimate evil, and Nazism itself being an avatar of fascism—is to justify every action against it, including imperialist wars.

I remember well a discussion in which I was invited to take part in Paris in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, which was organized by the Communist Party. One of the speakers, a prominent member of that party, explained that al-Qaeda and Islamic fundamentalism constitute the new fascism, against which it is legitimate to support war by Western states, in the same way as it was legitimate for the USSR to ally with the U.S. and the UK against fascist powers in the Second World War. You can find a direct echo of the same rationale in the neocon

description of the "war on terror" as being a "Third World War" against "Islamofascism."

To come back to the "barbaric" label, the other way of reacting to it, of course, is to say: Yes, these massacres are barbaric indeed, but they are in the first place a reaction to capitalist-imperialist barbarism, which is much worse. That's the reaction many on the left had after 9/11. Noam Chomsky was probably the most prominent of those who explained that, as appalling as the 9/11 attacks were, they were dwarfed by the massacres committed by U.S. imperialism.

In my book on "the clash of barbarisms," I emphasized that the barbarism of the strong is the major culprit, and that it is the primary cause that leads to the emergence of a counter-barbarism on the opposite side. This "clash of barbarisms" is the true face of what has been, and still is, misleadingly described as a "clash of civilizations." As Rosa Luxemburg put it a century ago, the dynamics of the crisis of capitalism and imperialism leaves no option in the long run but "socialism or barbarism."

The attacks of September 11, 2001, those of Madrid 2004, London 2005 and Paris recently, were all claimed by al-Qaeda—an extremely reactionary organization. Along with likeminded organizations, they are the sworn enemies of anyone on the left in the countries where they are based. For example, a prominent member of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria boasts of having organized the assassination of two key leaders of the Tunisian left in 2013.

The young men who carried out the killings in Paris were wrapped up in terroristic organizations that stand on the extreme far right in Muslim-majority countries. Al-Qaeda is an outgrowth of Wahhabism, the most reactionary interpretation of Islam and the official ideology of the Saudi kingdom—and as everybody knows, the Saudi kingdom is the best friend of the United States in the Middle East, outside of Israel.

People on the left should not appear to be excusing or supporting in any way organizations like these.

We must denounce them for what they are—but we must also stress, at the same time, that the main responsibility in their emergence lies with those who started the "clash of barbarisms" in the first place, and whose barbarism is murderous on an incomparably larger scale: the imperialist powers, and above all, the United States.

There's actually a direct and obvious connection between the two. The United States, along with the Saudi kingdom, has been fostering for decades these militant Islamic fundamentalist currents in the fight against the left in Muslim-majority countries. These currents were, for a long time, associated with the United States—a historical collaboration that culminated in the 1980s war in Afghanistan, when they were backed by Washington, the Saudis and the Pakistani dictatorship, against the Soviet occupation.

What happened eventually is that, like in the Frankenstein story, some sections of these forces turned against the Saudi monarchy and against the United States. This is the story of al-Qaeda: its founders were allied with the United States and the Saudi kingdom during the fight against the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan, but they turned against both of them because of the direct deployment of

U.S. troops in the Saudi kingdom in preparation for the first U.S. war against Iraq in 1991.

Thus, the Bush Sr. administration provoked al-Qaeda's about-face against the U.S. with the first war on Iraq, and Bush Jr. carried it on with the invasion of Iraq. The latter was carried out on the pretext of huge lies, one of which was that it was needed in order to destroy al-Qaeda—although there was no connection whatsoever between al-Qaeda and Iraq. The result of the U.S. occupation of that country was actually a huge boost to al-Qaeda, allowing it to acquire a crucial territorial base in the Middle East, after having previously been restricted to Afghanistan.

What is today called the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria is but a further development of what used to be al-Qaeda's branch in Iraq—an organization that didn't exist before the 2003 invasion, but came into being thanks to the occupation. It was defeated and marginalized from 2007 onward, but it then managed to re-emerge in Syria, taking advantage of the conditions created by the civil war in that country and the utmost brutality of the Syrian regime. And here it is, now striking again in the heart of the West. As ever: "They sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind."

Socialist Worker

USA

Rebuilding the Left – "building movements, bringing them together"

DAVID FINKEL ·

Income and wealth inequality, widening since the 1970s, have reached levels not seen since the Great Depression. Real wages remain stagnant or declining while massive debts are crushing "underwater" homeowners and college students. Job creation since the 2008 crisis has been disproportionately concentrated in low wage positions with unpredictable schedules that cause stress and anxiety, especially for workers attempting to care for their families. On top of the unstable employment situation, around 20 percent of us are providing unpaid care to an aging adult, and many of us are struggling with physical or mental health issues without adequate health insurance.

As we face daunting economic and personal challenges, we also find our support network shrinking and our communities fractured. Mass incarceration and deportation have destabilized many poor and working-class communities. The approximately 2.4 million people currently behind bars represents a massive disruption of families and communities, especially African-American communities which are disproportionately impacted by mass incarceration. Similarly, the more than two million deportations carried out under the Obama administration has devastated immigrant communities. Tens of thousands of children of those deported now face an uncertain future and the possibility of long-term separation from their parent(s). At the same time, the churn of neoliberal "development" in the form of privatization and gentrification deprives communities of public neighborhood schools and safe affordable housing.

Bourgeois politics have taken increasingly ugly forms, fuelled by a toxic ideological brew of greed, racism, bad religion—and mountains of unregulated political cash—manifested in state voter-suppression laws and the drives to close abortion clinics; the spread of "right to work" laws to northern states (Michigan and Indiana); and the rest of the poison spread by the Koch brothers and the American Legislative Exchange Council. The municipal bankruptcy of the city of Detroit with all its vicious consequences may be the largest so far, but certainly not the last.

All this takes place against the backdrop of a growing cascade of environmental disasters, local, national, and global. The logic and necessity of capital accumulation, and what's considered "growth" under the regime of capitalist production, mean that this system cannot and will not halt the destruction of the environment. If this system itself isn't challenged and overthrown in time, the environmental crisis (actually, multiple crises) will accelerate until it becomes an actual obstacle to "growth"—at which point the measures likely to be imposed on the population, the means of enforcing them, and the prospects for human civilization are not pleasant to contemplate.

The left has the analytical tools to understand the deep roots of the capitalist crisis, and on the whole uses them reasonably well. In principle, furthermore, the conditions of social decline should provide openings for the left and for the growth of socialist politics—indeed, in the wake of the 2008-09 financial meltdown, "socialism" famously received favorable polling results among young people. It's fair to say that millions of people in the United States perceive that there's a general crisis—more

than just separate and discrete issues—and feel it sharply impacting their own lives, their families, and their futures.

The Occupy movement, mass protests and actions against the Keystone XL pipeline and fracking, the outpouring of hundreds of thousands for the September 21 Peoples Climate March, the October 10-13 weekend mobilization in St. Louis demanding justice for Michael Brown, and numerous local struggles large and small, show that people are not silent or passive in the face of the system's serial atrocities. And the deep hostility in the U.S. population toward another military adventure, thankfully, limits the options of the current president and the next one to put "boots on the ground" back into Iraq or elsewhere.

This potential must be viewed, however, against the stark reality that the left itself has nothing like the capacity to beat back the continual assault on working people, on African Americans, on immigrant communities, on public education, and on essential social services. Our existing organizations, taken individually or even all combined, have nothing like the social or political weight or leadership capacity to act as an authentic "vanguard"—not to be confused with the posturing of ideological currents aspiring to play that role. And this problem, of course, is self-reinforcing as the vast layers of working-class and oppressed peoples are less likely to be attracted to a left that can't win big gains for their communities and themselves.

How can the left rebuild itself to become the force it needs to be? In Solidarity, we are engaged in two mutually supportive tasks: building movements and bringing them together, along with uniting the remnants of the left.

Solidarity from our inception has emphasized the importance of left unity in action wherever that's feasible, and of socialist regroupment when agreement on basic principles make it possible, without demanding unanimity of opinion or artificially enforced "discipline" on every political question. We have attempted to act accordingly both in left unity

initiatives and inside our own organization. But breaking down sectarian intra-left barriers, however important and necessary, is in no way sufficient for reconstructing a socialist left that matters.

That's why we need to build social movements, taking them seriously and on their own terms. As mass movements progress, the leadership and consciousness that develop can form a firm foundation for a relevant left.

It may sound old-fashioned, but we believe that the labor movement especially remains key. If the general state of unions in the United States is shockingly weak by historic standards, that only reinforces a hard fact: the weakness of working class politics and organization imposes a low ceiling on the possibilities of significant reforms, to say nothing of fundamental change.

That does not mean now, nor has it ever meant at any time, that struggles like Black liberation, the women's movement, indigenous people's struggles, or any other democratic fight, should "wait for the working class" or hold back on their demands for fear of disrupting a mythical "class unity." Quite the contrary, those struggles are inevitable, progressive, and democratic in their own right, and may also have a catalytic impact on sectors of the working class. And no one ever won their rights by waiting for someone else to do it for them.

There's one example at least of a movement that's made significant gains in a politically reactionary period: the LGBTQ struggle, particularly in the arena of equality within mainstream institutions, notably the right to marry; to some degree in housing and job discrimination; and in winning the evolution of a much less hostile culture toward queer people and issues, although much more remains to be fought for and won.

Nonetheless, reviving the nearly moribund labor movement is essential to any overall strategy for serious reform let alone socialist left reconstruction. Our views on "A renewed strategic perspective on socialist work in the labor movement" are outlined in a document posted here.

Without going into details here, it's important to say that the union movement must be rebuilt, but cannot be expected (nor would we want it) to look like the organized labor movement and apparatus of the 1940s, 1950s, or 1960s. The enormous changes in the structure of the U.S. working class and of work itself, and the demands imposed by the social crisis itself, demand that a reconstructed labor movement be radically more democratic, inclusive, and armed with a far more inclusive social justice agenda than that of decades past. That agenda will need to cover the gamut from universal single-payer health care, to defending immigrant rights, to a conversion to renewable energy and environmentally sustainable economy—taking on the system that forces millions of workers to choose between having a job or a habitable planet.

The socialist left needs to project that kind of labor movement vision, and engage in the hard work of helping make it happen. A picture of what kind of movement is possible—and how those movements relate to left refoundation—can be seen in the Chicago Teachers Union strike two years ago, spearheaded by an energetic rank-and-file union leadership in which socialist activists play a meaningful role.

To achieve the strike's limited victory, CTU built a powerful alliance with parents and especially with Black and Latino communities far in advance of what most union leaderships have even contemplated. This entailed not just a positive program for quality education, but more—it demanded and achieved a level of sustained teacher membership involvement on a scale that most traditional union leaderships have considered to be impossible, unnecessary, inconvenient, and indeed threatening.

Even in the case of this magnificent struggle, "all proportions guarded" is a necessary caution. This was a defensive strike, which succeeded only partially in the struggle to stop the plague of school closings and "turnarounds" in the destructive drive of "Mayor One Percent" Rahm Emanuel and President Obama's education czar Arne Duncan. CTU's Caucus of Rank-and-file Educators (CORE)

had raised the union above that ceiling imposed by the general weakness of working-class organization in the United States, only to encounter another ceiling: the undemocratic Chicago political system. Among other things, this meant that CTU found itself isolated from other public sector unions or the rest of the Chicago labor leadership that's tied itself to the Emanuel machine. Nevertheless, the alliances built in Black and Latino communities and the local left catalyzed by the strike continued to gather momentum, sweeping CTU President Karen Lewis into position as a strong challenger to Rahm. A left was building around her campaign, which hoped to turn that ceiling into the floor for further political organization.

But as the situation unfolded, it presented new barriers and challenges resulting from fragmentation within the labor movement, social movements, and the left generally. How does a union, isolated and defensive in the wake of the mayor's post-strike counter-offensive, prepare itself to expand offensively into political activity? How does it maintain the democracy, inclusivity, and social justice agenda CORE built within the union as it enters the undemocratic, exclusive arena of bourgeois politics? How does it avoid splitting the left side of the ticket, coordinating with other movements entering that same bottleneck at the ballot box? Movements we work with can often end up in competition with each other for resources, media attention, or capacity, especially in times like the current crisis where working class people are asked to "make more with less." And any victories riding on the efforts of one organization or social movement working in isolation cannot last in the long run. This indicates the necessity of a left refoundation perspective that seeks to break down barriers—both material and ideological—between movements and socialist organizations. The continued future success of any one movement requires it.

Even as Karen Lewis has withdrawn from the race due to a serious illness, the questions brought up by her campaign and the continued pull into local political action by CTU's post-strike setbacks commit

us to this perspective. We can safely estimate that, in times of state-administered austerity, future successes from rank-and-file-led unions will come up against the same ceiling of political action against that state.

There are other examples that give us glimpses of possibilities still to be realized: the potential for alliances between Occupy forces and West Coast longshore workers, the unions that came out in support of the Peoples Climate March (a revival, perhaps, of the "Teamsters and Turtles Together" of Seattle in 1999?), the continual growth in turnout for the biennial conference and "Troublemakers Schools" held by Labor Notes for activist layers in labor and allied movements, and the two straight months of mobilization-turned-organization in Ferguson, Missouri, that have pulled in unions and garnered recognition of a new generation of black activists in public attention.

Solidarity looks for ways to engage with comrades, whether from other socialist organizations or independents, in projects to help move such possibilities forward. For example, our Ecosocialism Working Group participates in the exciting, relatively new System Change Not Climate Change (SC-NCC) initiative that's building a left presence in the environmental movement.

We're exploring how the left that's engaged in independent political action can build on the successes of Kshama Sawant/Socialist Alternative campaign in Seattle, the Howie Hawkins campaign for New York governor and other Green Party campaigns around the country, and the powerful example in Jackson, Mississippi, that was so tragically cut short by the untimely death of Chokwe Lumumba. We're certainly hopeful that a national progressive campaign might emerge in 2016 posing an alternative to the dreadful reactionary candidates sure to be the Republican and Democratic nominees, but it's far too early to assess those prospects.

Our own efforts and those of others, to be sure, are barely a start of what will be required to take on the ruling class offensive in both its neoliberal and far-right forms. The crisis is way bigger than we are, and in one way or another it is leading toward some form of social explosion. Whether that may ultimately take the positive form of mass strikes and new movements, or any number of destructive and reactionary forms resulting from hopelessness, cannot be predicted, but may in some measure depend on what we do now.

New Politics

Violence against women in West Bengal and Police-party Axis and the police-party axis

RADICAL SOCIALIST ·

The incidence is a straightforward case of politically motivated violence targetting women. A man named Sheikh Mithun, of the Parui region, is reported to have switched from the TMC to the BJP. As part of the threat to wipe out the BJP from the Parui area, he was injured due to bomb throwing on the part of alleged TMC goondas. Treated in a hospital in Bardhaman, he was released on the 17th of January, 2015. Thereafter, police, accompanied by TMC people, turned up at the paternal home of Mithun's aunt, which is in the Budbud area of Bardhaman. She was asked about his whereabouts, and dragged to a forest area, tied to a tree, beaten, with a blade used on her body, stripped and otherwise tortured.

The TMC has jumped to the defence of the police, claiming that nothing wrong was done. The police has accepted that some wrong was done, but the role of senior police officer, SDPO Amlan Kusum Ghosh, has been ignored. In a typical move, the internal police report has been trying to pick holes or inconsistencies in the torture victim's claims, questioning whether a blade was indeed used and so on. The Calcutta High court had asked the police to provide protection to the woman, yet in subsequent developments the father and brothers of the woman were attacked by TMC leaders with journalists being chased away. The survivor claimed that they are under constant threat to withdraw the case and even the threat of rape dangles on her which

the police think will compel Sheikh Mithun to surrender.

Without diluting in any way our condemnation of the police and the ruling party, and while fully supporting the woman concerned, we would however also point out that the media hype today is because this is a conflict between two rightwing bourgeois parties. When it is a case of women being accused of belonging to left forces, or of being relatives of male left wing activists, in particular the radical left, the media often plays a far less vocal role. We therefore urge all women's rights activists to relate the Budbud case to all cases of police and party led violence on women, instead of treating it in isolation.

Radical Socialist:

- condemns the police violence
- condemns the use of woman's body as a pressure tactic to arrest the target of the police
- demands an end to police protection of political parties whenever they are in power
- demands a speedy independent enquiry and punishment of the guilty
- demands an interim suspension of the OC and the SDPO during the inquiry
- demands that the government should take the responsibility of the safety of the woman and her family and should also bear the responsibility for the medical expenses

Radical Socialist 28 January 2015

PAKISTAN

After the Peshawar massacre of 141 children, Imran Khan's retreat

FAROOQ TARIQ ·

And this was not accidental or a change of tactics. The protest by a handful of the Peshawar victims' parents has made a huge impact on the PTI's changing position. The KP ministers' initial policy of rebuttal in an offensive manner backfired. All this is a natural outcome of Imran Khan's political blunder of launching an untimely agitation to overthrow the PML-N government.

Imran's changed calmer tone was a reflection of the present political scenario. Most of his strategies for dealing with growing extremism have been rejected by the circumstances he has had to face in recent weeks. Arguments like 'this is not our war, it is America's war', 'why should we fight another country's war?', 'we must differentiate between the good and the bad Taliban', 'tribal people are different' – are not repeated any more.

The speeches at the dharna convention were an explicit manifestation of the PTI leadership at a loose end. They had to listen to the people's verdict – 'do a good job in KP and then come back to us'. The PTI felt the pain of the parents in protest. Imran Khan's 'no protocol letter and back to KP' was an exercise to control the damage.

The Peshawar incident changed the consciousness of many Pakistanis in a decisive manner. Even the military establishment had to change its decade-long security paradigm strategies. The PTI is no exception. It had to abandon its dharna politics and political tone.

The rising extremism resulting in terrorist activities cannot be challenged by softening your views towards them or offering concessions. You offer them

an inch, they will take a mile. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto tried this and not only failed but lost his life as well. In 1977, to cool down a right-wing challenge on the issue of rigging elections, Bhutto offered Fridays off instead of Sundays, a ban on alcohol etc. That accelerated the agitation rather than taming it. The ultimate result was a military coup led by Ziaul Haq on July 5, 1977.

Imran Khan's strategy towards the Taliban was more like Bhutto's 1977 tactics. It failed then, and it failed now. The extremists took full advantage of Imran Khan's softer tone and went on the offensive; the net result was the most barbaric incident in the history of Pakistan. The killing of 141 children by militants shattered many myths.

After every terrorist activity the most popular argument by religious groups has been that it is the work of RAW and Mossad. They would easily blame foreign hands. Another argument to favour this was that those who were killed had not been circumcised. All these false arguments have not been used this time.

Chaudhry Nisar's first press conference after the Peshawar incident emphasised that those involved in the Peshawar barbaric murders were Pakistanis. His own PML-N had to change its position on the 'good and bad' Taliban by accepting that they are all the same.

Seldom have we seen in such a short space of time the failure of strategies as those of the PTI towards the Taliban. A rising political tide without an ideology cannot last long. The charisma of personality to popularise politics without a proper ideology is a short-term phenomenon.

Imran Khan's present popularity is because of the recent unpopularity of Mian Nawaz Sharif's neo-liberal policies, particularly in the energy sector. Imran's retreat was the only reasonable option left. Much is lost but not all. The PTI can regain some lost constituency if it is able to do what it says about KP.

However, all efforts to bring 'change and revolution' mainly through the media failed miserably. Dharna politics were not a genuine mass mobilisation but an organised effort through the growing

popularity of Imran Khan to change the name of the game. It could not go very far.

Right-wing politics has its own limitations. It has to be within the circle of a certain ideology. Organising a mass public meeting is different in character than calling a general strike – the most effective tool of political damage to opponents. The lonely call of a 'Pakistan band' was not successful. A revolution in a counter-revolutionary period was just not possible.

Thursday, January 22, 2015

News International

FEATURES

In-depth analysis from International Viewpoint's Features section



FOURTH INTERNATIONAL IN SRI LANKA

Bala Tampoe (1922-2014) and the history of the Sri Lankan labour movement

JAN MALEWSKI · 3 February 2015

As one of Sri Lanka's main trade-union leaders over the past 60 years, Bala Tampoe negotiated on behalf of workers and made all governments tremble. During 1970 negotiations that Bala had secured through public protest, government minister and former party comrade Colvin R. de Silva (Bala had broken with him in 1964 when de Silva chose to take his party into a bourgeois government) said of him that he was "one of the finest minds not only in trade-union circles but in the whole country." [2] I personally had occasion to meet Bala in the 1980s and 1990s. During his visits to Europe, he came to me with questions about the re-birth of the workers movement in Poland. I remember him as a very respectful leader who listened closely to the young activist that I was at the time.

Outrage at colonial rule

Balendra Tampoe-Philips was born in Negombo on May 23, 1922 to a landed Tamil family from Jaffna. His father had been a coconut planter before becoming a civil servant for the British Empire. Bala was eight years old when his father was made a high-ranking civil servant for the Madras Presidency in India. At the time, the colonial government had a quota system for Anglo-Indian (mixed race) students and Bala had to wait a number of years before being admitted into a school. In later years, he recalled, "Actually I was admitted to a school before, but that was because my mother had put down my name as B. T. Phillips. I was very excited at finally being able to go to school, but

when the headmaster saw me he said 'there has been some mistake,' and pointed out that the quota system had already been filled. This is why my mother asked me to change my name when I returned to Sri Lanka and joined Royal College [...] My great great grandfather was the first Hindu to convert to Christianity in Jaffna. 'Phillips' was the name of the man who sponsored the evangelical mission and that's how I ended up with that name." [3] A brilliant student, in 1939 Bala Tampoe gained admission both to the University of Ceylon and also won a Cambridge Studentship for having come third in the island at the exam. He was nonetheless treated as sub-human by the colonizers. He recalled how British soldiers treated him when he was out walking with a British woman friend. "One day we were walking outside the Queen's Hotel and we saw two naval officers coming in the opposite direction. She asked me not to say anything if any remarks were passed. True enough, as they passed us, one of them said 'Where are you going with THAT?' 'That' was me!" [4]

Had it not been for this omnipresent colonial racism, Bala could well have followed in his father's footsteps and become an excellent servant of the Empire. In 1935, while still in middle school, Bala joined the anti-imperialist Suriya-Mal Movement, the country's first pro-independence organization, which became known for launching "The Battle of the Flowers" to commemorate Sri Lankan casualties of the First World War and not just the "British soldiers" to whom the Empire paid tribute in its official ceremonies. [5] "Students become Leftists without any grasp of the working class movement, I was no different," he later recalled in an interview. [6]

In 1941, he joined the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), an underground Marxist organization of which a number of leaders had just been thrown in jail.

LSSP, new vanguard party

On 18 December 1935, some 20 young intellectuals, students and workers who had played a de facto leadership role in the Suriya-Mal Movement, took the decision to create the LSSP. As a way of highlighting the new party's pro-independence stance, these "founding fathers" opted to reject English-language names for their organization. They also avoided the term "socialist", which they felt was too closely associated with the reformist political tradition within the British Empire. In the Sinhala language – the language used by a large majority of people on the island of Ceylon – the term *samasamaja* relayed the notions of socialism and equality. It had been coined by D. Jayawardana in the issue of the anti-colonial Sinhala-language magazine *Swadesa Mitraya* that came out on the day the party was founded, and so was itself an innovation.

In March 1936, the brand new party ran four candidates in elections to the second Ceylon State Council. Two of them – Philip Gunawardena et N.M. Perera – were elected, and as such represented a real opposition to the island's colonial status within the body. They did so until their arrest in 1940, and in 1939 became the only Trotskyist members of parliament anywhere in the world to come out against the Second World War. The LSSP's prestige grew throughout 1937 and its offices became the place workers in struggle turned to for support. When washermen went on strike in September that year, they went to the LSSP for assistance with negotiations. In the same period, semi-skilled coconut mill workers won a wildcat strike held at the beginning of September to protest the victimization of fellow workers who had organized an LSSP propaganda meeting. In short order, trade unions led by LSSP activists were winning victorious struggles and occupying centre stage.

The LSSP succeeded in building a united front of trade unions – which even involved the traditional reformist Ceylon Labour Union led by A.E. Goonesinha, who tried to divide workers with anti-Tamil speeches. The victorious strikes led by this united front were a blow to communalism.

A wave of strikes shook the plantation sector in late 1939 and early 1940, following the start of the Second World War. Initially led by trade unions tied to the Ceylon Indian Congress, the movement soon focused on the strike at the Mool Oya plantation led by Samasamajists from the All-Ceylon Estate Workers Union. LSSP State Council members were able to force the holding of a commission of inquiry into conditions on the estates and revealed how the police and employers combined forces to suppress workers within the white man's plantation empire. This was a deeply politicizing experience for the working classes.

While the LSSP was not "Trotskyist" at the time of its foundation, its main leaders were ill at ease with blind obedience to Stalin and critically assessed Comintern policies. In Leslie Goonewardene's words, Samasamajist leaders "could not believe that the confessions in the [Moscow] trials were genuine and felt compelled to come to the conclusion that they were gigantic frame-ups. The line of the Popular Front, especially in Spain, appeared to be dictated, not by the needs of the Spanish Revolution, but by the foreign policy needs of the Soviet Government. The line of the National Front, prescribed for colonial countries, seemed to subserve the same aim. In other words, the Third (Communist) International, founded by Lenin in 1919 to give help and guidance to the socialist revolution throughout the world, had apparently degenerated into an abject instrument of Stalin's changing foreign policies. A careful reading of Trotsky's *Revolution Betrayed* (first available in English in 1938) also had a profound effect on the leaders of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party." [7]

In December 1939, Stalin's policies – shifting from support to French and British imperialism to the August 1939 pact with Hitler – prompted the LSSP

Executive Committee to pass a historic resolution with 29 votes in favour and 5 against: "Since the Third International has not acted in the interests of the international revolutionary working class movement, while expressing its solidarity with the Soviet Union, the first workers' state, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party declares that it has no faith in the Third International." Soon after, this break between Trotskyists and Stalinists in the LSSP led to the expulsion of the Stalinists from the party. Simultaneously, the party adopted a new program and decided membership in the party entailed not only the payment of dues but also active involvement in the work of a party group or local organization. From a loose gathering of individuals, the LSSP was turned into a fighting organization of activists. Its opposition to the involvement of Ceylon's peoples in the imperialist war – which took the form of refusal to be conscripted into the "Ceylon Defense Force" – as well as its role in building workers' strikes, made the LSSP the colonial administration's public enemy number one. In June 1940 a detention order was issued for the party's five main leaders (one of whom, Leslie Goonawardene, evaded arrest and went underground), and party activities were obstructed and then outlawed. The LSSP was forced underground, had to print its press and leaflets at a secret printshop and was banned from organizing public meetings, with attempts at holding them regardless brutally put down by the police.

This was where things stood in the party that Bala Tampoe joined in 1941, recruited by his friend RCL 'Dicky' Attygalle. He became a member of the "special unit" set up by the party to organize its leaders' escape from jail. Under the assumed name of "Kuruppu", Bala was in charge of communication with the imprisoned leaders. Following their jail-break on the eve of Japan's April 1942 air raid against the British Indian Ocean fleet and airforce based in Ceylon, Bala and the "special unit" arranged for their underground stay in Anuradhapura and subsequent transfer to India. [8]

Upon their return to Colombo, 'Dicky' and Bala took charge of distributing anti-war propaganda among British troops, including one pamphlet that talked about "the rising sun of Japan and the setting sun of Churchill". As Bala later told the story, "We had won over three British soldiers, who undertook to distribute the pamphlet in the canteens of the army. I paid some street urchins 50 cents to distribute the document in the cinemas which were mainly patronised by British service personnel. It had a huge impact. The commanding officer had threatened action against anyone found with the pamphlet on his or her person. In fact, Tomlinson's book titled 'The Most Dangerous Moment' (i.e. the threatened invasion of Ceylon by the Japanese fleet for which the British was not prepared), carried a copy of that pamphlet." [9]

A number of the LSSP's leaders had been forced into exile on the Indian subcontinent. In April 1942, the LSSP joined with the Bolshevik Leninist Party of the United Provinces and Bihar and the Bolshevik Mazdoor [Workers] Party of India to found the Bolshevik Leninist Party of India, Ceylon and Burma (BLPI), pan-Indian section of the Fourth International. Bala was one of the founders of this new party, and was in charge of worker education within it.

The two historic LSSP leaders, N.M. Perera and P. Gunawardena, were arrested in India in 1943 and released from prison at the end of the war. When the two leaders relaunched the legal LSSP in 1945, Bala Tampoe remained in the BLPI (whose name soon changed to the Bolshevik Samasamaja Party – BSP), which was opposed to "independence" within the British Empire. The immediate post-war years saw a big upturn in labour and people's struggles in Ceylon, and both Trotskyist parties played an important leadership role.

In the 1947 elections, the LSSP won ten seats (to become the second strongest party in parliament) and the BSP five. The two parties joined forces during the 1946 and 1947 general strikes, ultimately leading to the reunification of the two parties in 1950, in spite of the physical attacks carried out

during the 1949 by-election in Gampaha that enabled the Right to take the seat. But the years of division had weakened the Samasamajists, diminishing their potential in the post-war period and enabling the Right to consolidate its forces. [10]

Militant trade-unionism and the Great Hartal

After the war, Trotskyist militants played a central role in the trade-union movement. They led two trade-union federations: the Ceylon Federation of Labour and the Ceylon Workers Congress. In 1944, Bala Tampoe began teaching botany and horticulture at the University of Peradeniya. By now very familiar with underground work, he started holding secret training courses for members of the public-sector workers union, the GCSU. In 1947, he was dismissed from his job following what he himself called a "scathing public speech". He found work with the Ceylon Mercantile Union (CMU), led with an iron fist by A.E. Goonasinha. Founded in 1928, the CMU was a small trade union with a few hundred white-collar workers as members. At the CMU convention on the 1st of February 1948, Bala Tampoe ran against Goonasinha for the position of general secretary and won. He held this position until his death, and transformed this small trade union into a major federation, with tens of thousands of members in every sector of the economy and from all ethnic, religious and political backgrounds.

From 1948 on, however, the mass movement went into decline. Though leading the parliamentary opposition, the LSSP was unable to emerge as a credible alternative. More than 200,000 workers of Indian origin were deprived of their civil rights. The May 1952 elections were once again won by the United National Party (UNP), the bourgeois party in power since independence. Worse, the LSSP was displaced as the main parliamentary opposition party by the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), which was supported by the CP and Philip Gunawardena's VLSSP. [11]

In such a context, the UNP government felt its hands were free to attack the population. It in-

creased the (subsidized) price of sugar and cut rice rations. The LSSP was quick to react, organizing an active campaign against these measures. A petition against price increases gathered 50,000 signatures, but the government was unmoved. In 1953, train fares and postal rates were increased and lunchtime bread distribution to schoolchildren was stopped. The price for rice rations shot up from 25 to 70 cents!

The LSSP called on all opposition parties to build a united front against the government. Only the CP, the VLSSP and the Federal Party heeded their call to action. But a trade-union front was established, though one weakened by the refusal of the Indian Congress, which led a number of plantation-worker unions, to organize the strike. The trade-union called for a *hartal* – or work stoppage and general shutdown of all activity – on August 12. The government warned public-sector workers that they would be fired if they went on strike, ordered co-op stores to remain open, and had the army march through the streets. State-run media unanimously denounced industrial action, with a major paper going so far as to run the headline "Work Goes On As Usual!".

Still, the *hartal* was a great success, "bigger than expected". The strike was massive, transportation was disrupted, and all economic activity ground to a halt in the cities. Even the plantations were partially shut down. In rural areas, people erected road blockades and disrupted telegraph service. Protestors occupied the Egoda Uyana railway station and literally "captured" a train there. In Waskaduwa, more than a kilometre of train track was uprooted overnight; and in the Southern province boulders so huge were used to block the road that after the *hartal* police had to use dynamite in order to remove them.

Police and soldiers opened fire on protestors, killing nine people and injuring many more. A state of emergency and curfew were declared at noon and remained in place for several weeks. The LSSP and CP printshops were shut down.

Planned to last for only one day, the *hartal* was officially called off the following morning by organizers. The effects of the mobilization would last much longer. It punctured the myth of invincibility surrounding the UNP, ultimately leading to its election defeat in 1956. Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake was forced to tender his resignation. The masses became aware of their strength and the hartal signalled a resurgence of the mass movement.

Bala Tampoe was at the helm of the CMU and played a major organizing role in this struggle, whose lessons he summed up in the following way: "The *Hartal* [...] taught the urban working class that their brothers and sisters of the village are indeed mighty allies in any direct struggle. It taught both the workers and the rural poor that, together, they are fully capable of challenging and even smashing the forces of the capitalist state. ... The masses will enter the next great struggle with the confidence they have gained from the *Hartal*. But the next struggle will be against a more experienced and better prepared enemy." [12]

1953 was also the year Bala Tampoe was sworn in as a lawyer, in which capacity he was able to defend many workers and activists.

Crisis and struggle in the LSSP

Despite the LSSP's involvement in struggle, the electoral setback of 1952 had left the party divided. In contrast to Bala Tampoe's views, almost one third of party members felt that the hartal proved it was impossible to change the socio-economic state of affairs through mass mobilization and that the party would be unable to win the upcoming elections on its own.

As early as the special party conference held in October 1952, the LSSP had decided to advocate a "united front with the CP and the Philip Gunawardena group". A minority resolution went even further, calling on the party to prioritize the establishment of a "democratic government" which, it said, would be "at least a Bandaranaike government" and at best "a Sama Samaja majority govern-

ment". The CP refused to join a united front unless the LSSP promised to stop criticizing the governments of the USSR, Eastern Europe and China, so no progress in this direction was possible beyond common work around the *hartal*. At the party's national convention in October 1953, the majority resolution received 259 votes to the minority's 125. Led by William Silva, the minority then left the convention and quit the party. The LSSP lost a third of its members – some of whom ended up in the CP, and others joined Philip Gunawardena's VLSSP, but the vast majority left politics altogether.

In 1954, LSSP leader N.M Perera was elected mayor of Colombo. But the LSSP was unable to secure a majority on the municipal council, and those elected as part of the "united front" around the CP rejected all forms of cooperation. Within a year, these "united front" councillors teamed up with the UNP and removed Perera from office.

From 1954 onward, and basing itself on the lessons of the hartal, the CMU organized a series of struggles among retail workers, forcing the employers federation to grant a number of concessions. These struggles helped rebuild workers' confidence in their strength and reached a peak in 1956, when the CMU led a general strike by workers in the retail sector. The CMU forced employers to accept collective bargaining, and became one of the most powerful trade unions in Sri Lanka. As Leslie Goonawardene would later write in his history of the LSSP, "the role of P.B. Tampoe deserves mention." [13]

Confronted with a new rise in social struggle, the Sri Lankan bourgeoisie elected to divide the working class. Taking advantage of the Sinhalese cultural renaissance and desire to jettison English as an official language, the bourgeoisie set Sinhalese against Tamils, who formed the majority in the plantation areas. The SLFP organized campaigns to have Sinhala recognized as the "only official language" – against the use of English, of course, but especially against Tamil! Promoting the Sinhala language went hand-in-hand with promoting Buddhism, portrayed as the country's only national

culture. The LSSP was the only Sinhalese-majority party in favour of recognizing two official languages, Sinhala and Tamil. Its public gatherings were attacked by roving gangs of thugs from the "Sinhala Only" movement. In the 1956 elections, the Philip Gunawardena group joined forces with the SLFP within the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP) or People's United Front, which defeated the ruling UNP. The LSSP won 14 seats and was once again the main opposition party.

The new Bandaranaike government made a number of concessions to workers. It nationalized the bus companies and Colombo harbour (while rejecting the LSSP demand to guarantee worker oversight of the management of nationalized companies), tabled legislation on paddy lands and cooperatives, began setting up a national social security fund, and ended the anti-union approach of previous governments – gradually reinstating civil servants who had been sacked following the 1947 general strike. He also shut down British military bases on the island.

In addition to these progressive measures, however, in 1956 the government also enacted the law making Sinhala the only official language, with UNP support. This in spite of the fact that almost 30 percent of the population (Tamils from India, Sri Lankan Tamils and Muslims) spoke Tamil. This sparked riots and a new State of Emergency lasting several months. Bala Tampoe, himself a Tamil but also recognized as one of the country's best orators in Sinhala, mobilized his entire union in favour of equal treatment for the country's different communities. It was not until 1958 that opponents managed to win a partial rollback of the legislation – a new law authorizing the use of Tamil in teaching, public-sector recruitment exams, and government correspondence regarding administrative matters in the northern and eastern provinces. (Unfortunately, the new law was never implemented fully and was the subject of political agitation by the Federal Party in the 1960s and early 1970s.)

During the initial years of the Bandaranaike government, LSSP-led unions led strikes, including

general strikes, and won wage increases. Strikers often ran up against the army, for example in December 1957.

Two lines

The March 1959 political general strike organized by a large number of trade unions, including the CMU, marked a qualitative turning point. On this occasion, the labour movement was opposing a legislative amendment authorizing the prime minister to call out the army and police when the prime minister felt there was a threat to public safety. For the first time ever, workers were demanding the right to express their opposition to legislative initiatives.

The majority of the LSSP leadership increasingly saw these mass movements as primarily a means to create a better relationship of forces in parliament. However, Bala Tampoe – at the time both a member of the LSSP Political Bureau and a trade-union leader – saw the self-organization of workers as the beginning of new social relations and seizure of power by the masses. He also felt that in Sri Lanka only common struggle would unite Sinhalese and Tamil workers and put an end to Sinhalese chauvinism and the rise of Buddhist extremists. He argued that the September 1959 assassination of Prime Minister Bandaranaike by a Buddhist monk was not only the answer from Buddhist extremists to the partial rollback of the Sinhala-only law the previous year, but also a bursting forth of the most reactionary forces in response to the politicization of workers strikes.

Government instability following the Bandaranaike assassination, and the difficulty the LSSP encountered trying to achieve electoral or parliamentary unity with the other working-class parties, enabled the revolutionary minority in the leadership to orient the party to labour struggles. Since the LSSP majority saw no difference between electoral unity between parties and the unity of trade unions in struggle – since the unions were (and are still today, with the exception of the CMU) led by parties – and indiscriminately called both types of unity a

"united front", Bala Tampoe was among those who succeeded in reorienting the party toward a "united front" of struggle.

In September 1963, on Bala Tampoe's initiative, a front of the three Left parties organized a meeting of 800 delegates, representing a million workers from cities, villages and plantations. The meeting adopted the "21 demands" – largely economic, but anti-capitalist in character.

Fresh from this meeting, the CMU called a strike at the Colombo harbour, which quickly turned into a 17-day island-wide general strike and political confrontation with the government. The action forced the SLFP government of Sirima Bandaranaike (widow of the assassinated prime minister) to retreat, to withdraw the army sent out to crush the dockers strike, and to lift the State of Emergency. Bala Tampoe was the main leader of this general strike.

Sirima Bandaranaike had to publicly acknowledge that the country had become ungovernable. But she soon turned things around by extending an olive branch to LSSP leaders and offering to bring them into the government, something she accomplished in June 1964. She announced to the press: "We have brought into the government a party which plays a dominant role among the urban working class [...] Without the working class lending their full support, I just cannot see how enterprises like the CTB [Ceylon Transport Board] or the Port Cargo Corporation can operate effectively." [14]

Against betrayal, the LSSP(R)

N.M. Perera, Cholmondeley Goonawardena and Anil Moonesinghe's entry into an SLFP-led coalition government triggered division between two orientations that had co-existed for years within the LSSP. At the LSSP convention, 159 delegates (representing 25 percent of mandated representatives) voted against entering government. Fourteen members of the Central Committee, including two members of parliament (Edmund Samarakkody and Meryl Fernando) and the best known trade-union-

ist, Bala Tampoe, formed the LSSP (Revolutionary). They issued the following statement: "This degeneration is the logical outcome of the parliamentary reformist line which the majority of the leadership of the party has followed for several years and the substitution of parliamentary and reformist struggle in place of class struggle and revolutionary perspectives, and the systematic recruitment of non-revolutionary elements into the party on that basis. The revolutionaries of the LSSP have, in this situation, decided to organize themselves on the basis of the party program. They therefore withdraw from the conference and will hereafter function as a separate organization under the name of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party [Revolutionary Section]."

The Fourth International expelled the LSSP and recognized the Emergency Conference of the LSSP(R) held on 17-18 July 1964 as "officially constituting the continuing body of the Trotskyite movement in Ceylon and to empower it to speak for and conduct any matters pertaining to the section of the Fourth International in Ceylon." Fifty-four delegates at the Emergency Conference voted in favour of a resolution accepting "the recognition granted, and will hereafter function as the Ceylon Unit of the Fourth International," with 9 against and 8 abstentions. [15] The revolutionary militants of the LSSP "were forced to form a new party although hesitantly on the part of some leaders/members. The situation also exposed a deep seated ailment within the left movement: sectarianism, splintering and personal egos of the leaders." [16]

Bala Tampoe and his comrades felt that entry into the coalition government would only demobilize the working class, and that the "21 demands" had been betrayed. As then LSSP activist Laksiri Fernando would later recall, "The trade union movement could not recover from this debacle for a long time or until today." [17] The trade-unions were not crushed in 1964, but they were demoralized.

The LSSP's entry into government and the split that followed brought about a long-term division and weakening of the Sri Lankan working class. Many activists left the LSSP but did not join the LSSP(R). In July 1964, the CMU led an exemplary strike at the Velona textile mill in Moratuwa, receiving broad support from the local population. Though 500 workers were on strike, some 4000 people joined the picket lines set up to prevent strike-breakers hired by management from getting into the plant. Bala Tampoe was on site every day and kept up the picketers' spirits. But the strike failed to spread as the Colombo harbour strike had done, and the pickets were forced to retreat in the face of the army. The strike was broken.

In December 1964, the two LSSP(R) members of parliament, Edmund Samarakkody and Meryl Fernando, refused to support a vote of confidence in the Bandaranaike government and the government fell. It was not just about a motion tabled by a right-wing member and supported by the UNP, as their former LSSP comrades alleged, nor a vote against the nationalization of the major press organs, contrary to the voting record of previously pro-government members. A majority of workers still had the hope – or rather the illusion – that the Bandaranaike government was going to at least partially meet the "21 demands", and they felt that the LSSP(R) had prevented this from happening. The outcome of early elections held in March 1965 reflected this mass-level misunderstanding; the LSSP(R) was shut out of parliament and the UNP won the elections. The party then experienced division and splits, growing weaker and weaker each day.

Only the trade union led by Bala Tampoe, the CMU, persisted as a real independent expression of working-class strength. Despite a period of downturn in trade-union struggles, the CMU organized dozens of strikes in the late 1960s, especially against the summary dismissal of workers, leading the UNP prime minister to negotiate directly with Bala to find ways of addressing the issue. Bala Tampoe proposed that the State should step in and examine

grounds for removal. Tampoe submitted a legal draft which laid the foundation for the Termination of Employment Act that was enacted in 1971. [18]

In defense of JVP insurgents

Maoist Ceylonese youth radicalized at the end of the 1960s. The two main historic parties of the Left – the LSSP and pro-Moscow CP – had betrayed by joining the government, thereby creating a void on the Left, especially in the Sinhalese countryside. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front – JVP) began to fill this void, recruiting among semi-proletarian rural youth, landless peasants, the unemployed and oppressed. This new movement had a Stalinist political culture, and its activists had a rudimentary understanding of Marxism and an ingrained anti-Trotskyism.

Bala Tampoe immediately grasped that this radicalization could be organized neither by the trade-union movement, including the CMU, nor the LSSP(R) (which in 1970 became the Revolutionary Marxist Party, or RMP), which had little influence among young people. He sought to build a relationship based on debate and cooperation with the JVP, something which began in earnest in the wake of the state repression that came down on the JVP in 1970.

One of the historic leaders of the JVP, Lionel Bopage, later recalled: "When the JVP was in its formation stages, in its original clandestine form, known as the 'movement', the Revolutionary Marxist Party (the RMP) led by comrade Bala was one of the first groups that expressed critical solidarity towards it. The JVP's first encounter with more radical Sama-Samajists was when the comrades of the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) Ananada Premasinghe and Marshal Perera appeared on behalf of comrade Rohana Wijeweera when he was incarcerated by the state in 1970. Though we had Stalinist and Maoist political affiliations and they had Trotskyite political affiliations, those differences did not matter when it came to opposing state repression. We had something in common, the real danger to our democratic rights

of freedom to political expression from the ruling elite." [19] Nearly 40 years on, Bopage also said: "I recollect comrade Bala teasingly calling us 'Little Lenins', implying that we knew only a little of Lenin." [20]

Sent to Sri Lanka by the Swedish section of the Fourth International in 1971, Göte Kilden later recalled: "The LSSP(R) arranged a "discreet" meeting where I got to meet Rohana Wijeweera and some other leaders of the JVP youth movement, which was under surveillance by Sri Lankan intelligence. Rohana and his comrades had built up a mass base among the country's poor rural proletariat in the central party of the island and had a political line that fluctuated somewhere between Maoism and Castroism. According to Bala Tampoe they were, unfortunately, also infected by both national chauvinism (little understanding of the Tamil proletariat) and militarism. They professed to embrace an optimal synthesis of Che Guevara's "foco" strategy and Lin Piao's "people's war" [...] The meeting lasted a long time and was mostly about Europe. Rohana and his friends wanted to know everything about May 68 and the long wave of strikes in Italy, but even about such things as the Swedish miners' strike of 1969-1970. They also wanted to hear how the old labour movement had behaved (an example for the LSSP). Of course, we also discussed economics, class and politics. The JVPers were very proud of their many years of "popular education" during which they had criss-crossed large parts of the island teaching young people about economics and politics. Later on during my visit, I attended a fascinating joint open-air meeting of the JVP, LSSP(R) and CMU where, among others, Bala Tampoe and Rohana Wijeweera entertained the audience for hours with educational speeches adapted for the many people in the audience with limited formal education. It was like a contest between a wise old activist and a young energetic challenger. That's the kind of thing you never forget!" [21]

A few months later, the JVP launched an armed insurrection against the government. Poorly armed and lacking military experience, they nonetheless

managed to take control of parts of the central and southern areas of the country. The revolt was only put down thanks to support from the air forces of India and Maoist China. Some 15,000 youth were murdered in cruel massacres. JVP leaders and about 50,000 people seen as JVP supporters were imprisoned; and Bala Tampoe acted as their lawyer.

"In fact his brilliant knowledge and understanding of Marxism brought another dimension to the whole CJC trial in that a holistic class perspective of the April 1971 insurrection could be presented. While the state represented in the unholy alliance of the SLFP, the LSSP and the CP were scurrilously trying to portray the JVP as a bunch of murderous terrorists. With the assistance of Bala and his team we could fight these allegations vigorously. The RMP, the CMU and comrade Bala continued to protest against the illegal and continued detention of cadres and leaders of the JVP. They defended the democratic rights of the JVP to publicize their political views by appearing in the courts on behalf of some of the JVP activists. The CMU protested against the arrest and detention of nearly four thousand JVP activists, many who had been tortured by the security forces. They also opposed the declaration of a state of emergency in March 1971 which empowered the security forces to dispose dead bodies without post mortem examinations. Comrades Prins Rajasooriya, Sylvester Jayakody and other members of the CMU were also held in detention for some time. They also published interviews with JVP leaders including comrade Rohana thus providing an international audience to the JVP point of view.

"At the main trial of the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) I had the occasion to meet with, talk to and familiarise myself with comrade Bala Tampoe and the fabulous work done by the CMU on behalf of the working class [...] Comrade Bala and his team [...] not only wanted to challenge the legality of the CJC Act and the trial but also to continue to stay behind and defend the suspects even if the legal challenge failed, thus exposing the politi-

cal farce of the trial. [...] The RMP, the CMU and comrade Bala did not have any doubt that the JVP in the seventies was a genuine youth movement seeking redress to the socio-economic issues that affected them [...] It was on a decision made by the CMU that Comrade Bala and the team appeared on behalf us of or advised us, the accused of the main trial. Thereafter, throughout the main trial, comrades Rohana Wijeweera, Jayadeva Uyangoda, Kelly Senanayake and myself regularly met with comrade Bala and his team. Most of the trial was full of political sparks with the state prosecutors and the judges on one side and us and our counsel on the other side of the fence. Comrade Bala and his team demonstrated not only their brilliant legal skills but also their astute political skills in uncompromisingly exposing the acts of class betrayal by the government of the day and their supporters. The trial also exposed fault lines in the JVP. It exposed us as being politically immature, romantic and adventurist in our methods of struggle [...]

"During the long political discussions we had in the seventies, comrade Bala often talked about the need of the deadwood in the left giving way to new shoots who from his perspective were not being nourished. I believe this analysis is still valid." [22]

The RMP and CMU continued their struggle to free political prisoners, including those from the JVP. When JVP leaders were released from prison in November 1977, they quite naturally went to the CMU and RMP office to hold their first press conference.

Initially, JVP activists maintained good political relations with the RMP and CMU. But this wasn't enough to clear away the "deadwood" on the Left or in general, and not in the political culture of the rebuilt JVP either. The attempted general strike in 1980 was a failure and the trade-union movement was not only demoralized but also largely destroyed. In the early 1980s, Bala Tampoe had persuaded JVP leaders of the need to build "a collective campaign based on a minimum set of demands relating to the working class, students and the working people carried out by a broad left platform

of the JVP, the CMU, the LSSP and the CP. While the campaign launch was successful, internal resistance within the JVP against this campaign was building up as the JVP cadres found it hard to collaborate with the LSSP and the CP who were at the other end of the political spectrum in the seventies [...] Though we continued to have a couple of meetings afterwards, the JVP rank and file was less than enthusiastic in making these meetings successful. Common sense and a proper class approach would have helped in ameliorating the situation but sadly that was not the nature of politics of the day." [23] The author of these words, Lionel Bopage, was JVP general secretary at the time, but disagreed with its evolution toward Sinhalese chauvinism and left the party in 1985. [24] Interviewed several years later, Bala Tampoe had the following to say about the JVP: "They were not terrorists back in 1971, and the court agreed with my arguments in this regard. The late eighties was a different story altogether. By that time they were engaging in unadulterated terrorist activity." [25]

Against the current of defeat

Following the defeat of the 1980 general strike, the Sri Lankan labour movement ceased to play a central political role in the country. This was a consequence of both the betrayal of the majority of the LSSP leadership and the new Sinhala-chauvinist direction taken by the anti-colonial tradition under the leadership of the SLFP in the 1950s and 60s. What's more, except for a six-month period in 1989, emergency legislation – the Prevention of Terrorism Act – has remained in force in the country from 1979 until the present day.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, Bala Tampoe was among those who educated and spurred on the working class for their self-emancipation based on taking power through self-organization and mobilization. Critical of the majority in the LSSP leadership, he had attempted to build a relationship of forces that would take the party beyond its electoralist orientation. The entry of LSSP leaders into

government brought an end to the potential of such attempts.

Though on many occasions a candidate in elections, Bala had no illusions in the role parliament could play in changing society. Near the end of his life, he explained: "Most political parties look upon workers as voters. And the best way to do it is enroll them if possible in trade unions, which are organised and controlled by them. My whole experience and knowledge of parliamentary politics is that the capitalist system has been able to maintain control of the system politically. There have been dictatorships, which arose in exceptional contexts and ultimately could not survive. And they were replaced by electoral parliamentary systems which trapped the majority of the people as voters. And then invariably the government-opposition bi-polar context serves the capitalist system like a switch. It goes on and off. When the pressure rises too much on one, it goes over to the other. It is a safety valve. The parliament has evolved as the complement to the capitalist economic system and capitalist rule." [26]

While continuing to work within the labour movement, Bala Tampoe tried to save the revolutionary Samasamajist tradition in the post-1964 period by building a new party, the LSSP(R), which later became the RMP. Drawing the lessons from the history of the global Trotskyist movement, he had no illusions that the LSSP(R) and RMP would become what the LSSP had been in the 1940-1964 period; and so didn't think that the new small party could one day become the revolutionary party that the Sri Lankan proletariat needs. Indeed, he hoped that new waves of radicalization – out of which the JVP emerged – would foster the "new shoots" required for a future revolutionary party. The failed experience with the JVP didn't alter his opinion regarding the impossibility of building a genuine mass party out of the RMP. The building of the RMP was a failure. Led by the main CMU leader, this small organization increasingly became the "political expression" of the trade union. One could say somewhat schematically that, in a reversal of the usual rela-

tionship when trade unions are tied to parties, it was the more powerful CMU that controlled "its" party. Bala realized the difficulty inherent to being both trade-union and party leader. He arranged talks with other organizations of the radical Left and participated in the discussions that led to the rapprochement of the Nava Sama Samaja Pakshaya (NSSP) [27] with the Fourth International, which he always saw as an indispensable international tool for collectivizing the experience of revolutionaries from around the world.

A revolutionary activist since his youth, Bala Tampoe understood that a revolutionary party had to work within the working-class movement; and that the trade unions – organizations of all workers gathered together to defend their daily living and working conditions – was the foundation for building the party. He claimed that fundamentally he was a humanist and that all his life he first considered people as human beings, then as workers and finally as members of the union. "That's the way we come and that's the way we ought to approach life. This is the fundamental teaching of the union and I believe this is why we have been successful and achieved what we have." [28] He argued that the role of the revolutionary party – or in its absence, groups of activists – was to lead humankind in this direction.

In the cruel inter-communal war that ravaged the country, Bala Tampoe always acted in defense of the Tamil people's dignity and right to self-determination. This didn't prevent him, though, from criticizing the main Tamil nationalist organization for its violent acts. He did everything in his power to galvanize the labour movement against the repression meted out against the Tamil people and its organizations. In a written tribute to Bala Tampoe, NSSP leader Vickrambahu Karunaratne wrote: "In 2010 when pro-government thugs tried to kill me when I was returning from London, after addressing a Tamil commemoration meeting, he embraced me and said "you are a true Sama Samajist living among us"." [29]

Bala's internationalism also applied to his trade-union work: "Like transnationals, we must have cross-border interaction and contacts with the international trade union movement. As a joint force, we are better equipped to face the challenges of the future." [30]

In a period of ebbing struggle, and even though he admitted with irony that "trade unionism inevitably leads to a negotiation of the terms of exploitation," he sought to defend and extend workers' rights, aware of the fact that these gains served as the underpinning for the future development of struggle. In 1983, he said: "I see history as waves. So far we have been in a receding wave. But even in the gloomy oppressive atmosphere of Jayewardene's rule, I can see an advancing wave that will soon shatter all tyrannical forces ahead of it." [31]

To this end, he drafted a Workers Charter of Rights, having negotiated the terms with Mahinda

Rajapaksa during the latter's time as minister of Labour (1994-1997). The Charter fell by the wayside in the absence of majority support in parliament. When Rajapaksa was elected president and had a two-thirds majority in parliament, Bala mobilized the unions to demand its adoption along with the ratification of International Labour Organization conventions 87 and 98 on trade-union freedoms and collective bargaining. On 1st May 2013, he declared: "Today [Rajapaksa] has a two-thirds majority. Is it even taken up today? No! That is because today they say it is irrelevant. I can see that there is lack of solidarity amongst workers. It is time to revive the power of the worker. We may not have the power of the ballot. But we certainly have the power of labour." [32] It was to this "power of labour" that Bala Tampoe dedicated his life.

Translation from French: Nathan Rao