

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV490 November 2015

TUNISIA

Nearly five years after the fall of Ben Ali

NO TO DAESH- NO TO IMPERIALISM

The 13 November attacks in Paris: the terror of the Islamic State, the state of emergency in France, our responsibilities

DOSSIER

Portugal France

No to Daesh- no to
imperialism

Belgium

Attcks in Paris

Tunisia

Japan

Catalonia

Puerto Rico

Turkey

Migration

Britain

Greece

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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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FRANCE

Against the state of emergency, for the right to demonstrate

NPA-L'ANTICAPITALISTE (NPA-A) ·

Free all anti-COP 21 demonstrators now! No more police State!

justice demonstration gathering 5,000 people is being brutally repressed by the police. Using tear gas and clubs, making tens of violent arrests, the government did not hesitate to go all out in order to stop the demonstrators from opposing the COP 21 Conference. The government allows remembrances of the November 13th victims, sports events, concerts, etc, to be held but represses demonstrations. The government is not concerned with protecting the demonstrators but with implementing its policies.

EDF (the formerly State-owned electricity company), BNP Paribas (one of the biggest banks), Air France (the formerly State-owned airline), GDF Suez (the formerly State-owned gas company), all of them sponsors of the COP 21, are among the biggest polluters worldwide. Dictators from around the globe are welcomed with honors by Fabius (Foreign Affairs minister) and Hollande, but the people who want to protest for a better world are being repressed. The November 13th attacks revealed a world in decay.

Change the system, not the climate!

Stop the polluters, not the demonstrators!

Hundreds of anti-COP 21 demonstrators are currently surrounded and being massively arrested by the police on République Square in Paris. Among them are NPA spokespersons Christine Poupin and Olivier Besancenot, and several dozens of other comrades from the NPA, Alternative Libertaire and

Ensemble. These arrests are proof that the special measures stemming from the state of emergency are effective not against ISIS's terrorism but against all those who exercise the most fundamental right of demonstration. While the heads of States will be meeting tomorrow in Paris at the COP 21 Conference, all those who do not want to let them decide of the fate of the planet and humankind are being repressed. After targeting environmental activists with house arrests and searches yesterday and the day before, today they are being arrested while demonstrating.

No more police State!

Free all demonstrators arrested in Paris.

NPA, November 29th at 6pm, Paris

Free all demonstrators now! Stop the repression!

The government has announced 289 people arrested and 174 put in custody. Regarding the NPA, we know that several dozens of our members were arrested, while they were attempting to demonstrate peacefully on République Square. It is also the case of members of Ensemble, Alternative Libertaire, Solidaires... Most of them are in the police precinct of Bobigny (near Paris), with about a hundred other demonstrators.

Several activists seem to be in custody, without our knowing where or why.

The gathering was literally attacked by the police, to the point where hundreds of demonstrators, beaten or teargassed, had to seek refuge in the adjoining streets. The government denounced "inacceptable violence" from the demonstrators. This lie is shameful.

The NPA commends the success of the demonstrations in many towns. The NPA denounces the special measures implemented, in particular in Paris, where the whole city will be locked down, supposedly to protect the leaders invited to the talks of the

COP 21, the leaders who bleed and pollute the world.

We demand the immediate release of the demonstrators and that no one be charged.

NPA, November 29th at 10.30pm, Paris

NO TO DAESH- NO TO IMPERIALISM

The 13 November attacks in Paris: the terror of the Islamic State, the state of emergency in France, our responsibilities

FRANÇOIS SABADO ·

There is no mystery about the objective pursued by the commandos of the Islamic State: to fracture society through terror. To create a situation where war against one another is imposed; where fear draws up impassable barriers between citizens according to their origins, religions, lifestyles, identities – to dig a ditch filled with blood within the Muslim religion itself, forcing believers to choose sides. Whoever is not with us in our inhuman acts is against us, and becomes a "legitimate" target.

The attacks in Paris were among the bloodiest acts in the world perpetrated by the Islamic State and other similar movements which serve the same destructive logic. Our solidarity is international, it is directed especially towards those who, in other countries are fighting them at the risk of their lives: in Syria and Iraq, in Lebanon and in Bamako, in Pakistan and in Turkey... We must first affirm our compassion, our identification, our brotherhood with the victims and with their families.

At such a time, we of course continue the class struggle, to support the struggle of all the oppressed; but beyond that, we defend humanity against barbarism. The humanist dimension of revolutionary commitment remains our guiding light. Any progressive politics begins with indignation, with emotion. It is not of course limited to that, but that is its starting point. Let us not counter-pose thinking and weeping! Let us not waffle in jargon, let us not write with a pen of ice! Here and now, let us help the victims and their families, take part in

mourning, respect minutes of silence, take part in solidarity events. We are part of this movement - and it is from here that we can explain our positions.

Whatever the role of imperialism, the Islamic State is responsible for its actions

Revolutionaries must clearly and definitely reject fundamentalist barbarism. It must be fought - by our methods, according to our orientation and not that of our leaders - but it must be actively defeated.

Under the impact of events, left organizations, associations and unions have caved in to the call for national unity; others, in a reaction against this, have so much emphasized the very real political and historical responsibilities of Western imperialism that the denunciation of the Islamic State has become inaudible. As the days have passed, the positions have often been clarified. So much the better. But we can still read plenty of articles which consider that although the attacks "had no excuse" it was necessary above all to take into account "the context" – since the analysis of that context is essentially reduced to the enumeration of imperialist misdeeds one could conclude that the fundamentalist movements are merely reacting to the actions of the great powers and we should somehow grant them extenuating circumstances. It is necessary to remove any ambiguity on this question.

Strangely enough, many writers on the left vigorously denounce the fundamentalist attacks, but refuse to condemn by name, explicitly, the movements that commit them. Stranger still, many orga-

nizations do not hesitate to do so (naming the guilty, explaining their reactionary character), but do not draw any practical consequence from that. When it comes down to tasks, the fight against terrorism and against these fundamentalisms is no longer mentioned; which, by the way, leaves our rulers with a monopoly of specific responses. We are generally in agreement to attack imperialism and its wars, destructive capitalist globalization, inequality and discrimination, the ideology of the clash of civilizations, racism - including Islamophobia - the legacies of the colonial past, security policies and states of emergency, appeals for national unity and social peace... To attack, therefore, some of the causes and the consequences of the dramatic events that we are living through.

But we must also combat the influence of Daesh (among others) in our own societies and concretely express our solidarity with popular resistance in developing countries torn by religious fanaticism - an internationalist duty if ever there was one! On this, there is a "blind spot" in much of the radical left, even the left that does not sink into a deleterious "campism". That is why we accord importance to this question in our contribution.

The Islamic State and other similar movements do not just react; they act according to their own agenda. They are political actors pursuing specific objectives. There is little doubt that Daesh is actually responsible for the attacks in Paris. This organization has built a proto-state on a territory equivalent to that of Britain. It runs an administration; it has accumulated immense wealth (estimated at nearly \$1.8 billion); it organizes the smuggling of oil and cotton. It conducts military operations on multiple fronts, it has recruited IT specialists of the highest level ... It is not a puppet! It is responsible for its acts - totally responsible for the attacks committed in so many places.

Its own responsibility does not disappear because of the responsibilities of imperialism, however enormous they may be - and have been for a long time: from the Sykes-Picot agreements of the early twentieth century to the current interventions of

the great powers. It is often said that without the US intervention in Iraq in 2003 (which destabilized the region and dislocated states), Daesh would not exist. This is only true with regard to a specific sequence that led to the founding of the Islamic State as we know it. Otherwise, it is false. The emergence of jihadist forces does not flow automatically from imperialist domination; it is the combined product of many factors ranging from the bankruptcy of Arab (and European) left forces to the determination of the bourgeoisie in the region to have new counter-revolutionary forces to support their regional ambitions and combat the revolutionary upsurge in the Arab world. This is also true concerning the rise of religious fundamentalisms in other parts of the world, including in countries that have experienced nothing comparable to the 2003 war, such as India (the Hindu far right), Burma (the Buddhist far right) or the United States (the Christian far right - powerful well before 2001 and very close to Bush).

Once again on the "clash of barbarisms"

There is a Western imperialist responsibility, as there was after the 1914-18 war (with the Treaty of Versailles) in the rise of Nazism in Germany. The antifascists of the time did not fail to recall it systematically. However, once it took off, the Nazi Party was denounced and combated as such. Daesh has taken off...

We must continue to explain the context, but the Islamic State must be seen for what it is, not as a mere shadow of the West. Contemporary imperialism, neo-liberal policies, capitalist globalization, enterprises of colonization, endless wars, are tearing the social fabric of a growing number of countries, releasing all sorts of barbarism. But religious fundamentalisms too are formidable agents of the disintegration of whole societies. There is not in fact a "major barbarism" (the West) that we should be fighting today and a "secondary barbarism" (Daesh and consorts) that we should be concerned about in the indefinite future. The reverse is also true: we should not condone imperialist barbarity

and that of "allied" dictatorships under the pretext of fighting fundamentalist barbarism. There is no hierarchy of horror. We must actively and without waiting defend all the victims of these twin barbarisms, which feed on each other, otherwise we will fail in our political and humanitarian duties.

Religious fundamentalisms were often initially supported by Washington in the name of the struggle against the Soviet Union (in Afghanistan, Pakistan...), before asserting their autonomy and even turning against their sponsors. These deeply reactionary movements have nothing progressive about them. There is no "reactionary anti-imperialism"! They want to impose a model of society that is both capitalist and backward-looking, totalitarian in the strong sense of the term. Of course, France is being hit because of its Middle East policy and its colonial and post-colonial history. But when Daesh slaughters Yezidis because they are Yezidis, reduces populations to slavery, sells women, destabilizes Lebanon, pushes sectarian violence to the extreme, (particularly against Shiites), what is the relationship to a supposed anti-imperialism?

All fundamentalist movements do not have the same bases, the same strategy. Are some of them, such as the Islamic State, fascists? They do not maintain the same (complex) relations with sectors of the imperialist bourgeoisies as in Europe in the 1930s, but they reproduce them with sectors of the bourgeoisie of "regional powers", such as, in the Middle East, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey ... They attract the "human dust" of decaying societies as well as elements of the "middle classes", of a "petty bourgeoisie", of educated workers. They use terror "from below" to impose their order. They dehumanize those who are different and make scapegoats of them, as yesterday the Nazis did with Jews, Gypsies or homosexuals. They eradicate all forms of democracy and of progressive people's organizations. Religious exaltation occupies the same function as national exaltation in the interwar period and enables them, in addition, to deploy internationally.

It would be strange if the convulsions caused by capitalist globalization did not give rise to new forms of fascism, just as it would be surprising if they resembled feature for feature those of the previous century. There is a difference with European fascism: it resides in the overlapping between this totalitarian fundamentalist reaction and the crisis of disintegration of states and of the imperialist economic and military relations of domination that enmesh the region.

The fight against terrorism must be waged by the peoples of the region, and not by a coalition of Western powers. A new military intervention of the imperialist powers and Russia, supported on each of its flanks by the Gulf States and the Syrian dictatorship, can weaken Daesh militarily, but it can only provoke a backlash from all the Sunni peoples of the region.

The crisis of society in France

The attacks of November 13 were primarily committed by French or Franco-Belgians - France and Belgium being two of the countries from which most of the departures for Syria take place. There is no single profile of people who align themselves with the Islamic State. They may be from families of believers, secular Muslims or not Muslims: recent converts, non-Arab, are quite numerous. Similarly, they can come from very precarious or stable backgrounds, have a criminal past or not. In some cases, the "radicalization" of an individual is the culmination of a long process; for others it is a brutal swing. As might be expected, most of the men who have committed attacks in France come from particularly disadvantaged backgrounds, have been in prison and were gang members - but not all.

Faced with this plurality of profiles, we cannot settle for simple explanations, only sociological (casualization, racialization of social relations ...) or only historical (the postcolonial dimension).

Unlike previous waves of radicalization of youth, this one is very minor and is not inspired by the

same humanist aspirations. The Islamic State presents itself in the crudest way possible: "Come with us and cut off heads." The French army practised torture on a massive scale, especially during the Battle of Algiers, but the government and the General Staff fiercely denied their crimes: there were no appeals proclaiming "Join your Grand Army, come and torture with us"! Daesh has an explicit discourse of hatred and exclusion of those who are different (as do the most extreme elements of the far right). There is no possible analogy between those who go to Syria today and the creation of the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War - or the radicalization of the 1960s.

There is nothing banal in all this, nor in the use of mass terror. To pretend that terrorism is the "natural" weapon of the oppressed in "asymmetrical" wars is to ignore the lessons of the great battles for liberation of the last century, of revolutionary wars. In the struggles for independence and against imperialism in Indochina and Latin America, terrorist attacks were rare at that time and the movements concerned generally realized rapidly that the political cost of such operations was too high - and posed many ethical problems. In Algeria, the FLN, which had ventured onto this terrain, quickly backtracked under pressure from some of its sectors or from movements in solidarity with Algerian independence.

We are suffering the ultimate consequences of the "crisis of politics", of the desocialisation that is inherent in our neoliberal societies and their growing injustice, of the defeat suffered by our generations (the radicals of the 1960s and 70s), of the inability of the left forces in our countries to offer any radical perspective and to act within the populations who lead a precarious existence. We are in fact touching on areas that most of us do not really understand: psycho-sociology, the relationship between fragile individual identities and the decay of the social fabric, adolescent searchings. The Islamic State provides an armour, with an identity and with power: the power of representation, the power of arms, power over women, the power of life and

death... Much more than a supposed anti-imperialism, that is what makes it attractive.

These are questions that we need to take on board more than we have done up until now; and we can already draw some implications. The anti-racist struggle, as important as it is, is not enough. Faced with neoliberal individualism and its anonymity (Who knows their neighbours?) we need to promote and rebuild places where people can socialize, mix, where they can "live together" - and reintroduce fundamental reflection on ethics, commitment and struggle.

In such a situation, all forms of racism constitute a mortal danger, including of course state racism, but not only that. Let us fight against anything that can fuel community tensions, oppose oppressed people to one another, whether we are dealing with anti-Arab racism or Negrophobia, anti-Semitism or Islamophobia, discrimination against Roma ... - and to do that, let us create a culture of living together, of respect for the rights of everyone.

Our internationalist tasks

Recent events (November 13, the blowing up of a Russian airliner over Sinai...), have precipitated a shift in alliances that could already be remarked before, with the formation of a grand coalition: the bringing in of Russia, the abandonment by France of its pretensions to independence, concerns raised even in Saudi Arabia about the deployment of the Islamic State... In counterpart, the Assad regime has been strengthened, whereas it is at the origin of the Syrian crisis and guilty of the crimes that we know about. Will this be enough to promote a temporary agreement among regional powers belonging to the so-called "blocs", Sunni and Shiite?

It is still early to assess the full implications of this turning point in the international situation. For the moment, let us stress the following points:

The compromises between the West and Turkey or the Assad regime will be made to the detriment of the forces on the ground that most deserve our support: the Kurds, the Yezidis, the progressive and

non-confessionalist components of the resistance to the regime. We must give them our political and material solidarity and demand that they receive adequate weapons, of which the progressive components of FSA have never benefited (and yet they resist!) and of which the Kurds could be deprived, particularly on the Syrian front. We must recognize that we have never done in France, in this field, what we should have done.

The intensification of bombing by the coalition, with the exorbitant price paid by civilians, is likely to reinforce the audience of Daesh among other Islamist elements operating in Syria. The net result of this policy would then be to strengthen both the Assad regime and the fundamentalist organizations (starting with the Islamic State)! To avoid this trap, we must break with the logic of the great powers: help the popular forces in Syria and Iraq to continue their fight instead of trying to substitute for them or marginalizing them even more.

So we must fight against the war policy of our rulers, but also understand the specific nature of this conflict, very different from the wars in Indochina or Algeria: the withdrawal of French or American troops then meant the end of the main foreign interference and created the conditions for a victory. This is not the case today in the Middle East: there would remain Turkey, Iran (and the Hezbollah), Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Algeria, Egypt... In such a complex geopolitical configuration we need to listen to the movements that we support in order to take into account what they need, materially and politically. It is the peoples who should decide, not the imperialist coalitions.

But, and this is a particular dimension of this war, the Kurds and the Syrian democrats have asked and continue to ask for medical and military aid, including from Western governments. They must be given it. There can be no substitute for the decision-making and self-determination of the Syrian and Kurdish democratic forces, but no hesitation in helping them and pressuring our governments to respond to the appeals they make.

On the international level, the hypocrisy of the Western forces must be denounced: on the one hand, they claim to be fighting terrorism and on the other they support regimes such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

The coalition that is being constituted is in no sense a "democratic" alliance against a totalitarian threat. In addition to our "classic" imperialisms, it includes Putin's Russia, Saudi Arabia, whose regime is very close to the model of society advocated by Daesh, Qatar, the Iranian theocracy, Erdogan's Turkey... Whatever the nature of the Islamic State, any analogy with an "anti-fascist democratic front" is invalid. We are neither with the coalition, nor with Daesh, nor with Assad. We are for the right to self-determination of peoples - including the Palestinian people - against all forms of barbarism.

A turning point in the national situation

As in January after the massacre of the journalists of *Charlie Hebdo*, the deaths of police personnel, the attack on the Hypercacher supermarket, emotion has overwhelmed the country - which of course is perfectly normal. [1] Islamophobic acts have multiplied, but they are actually committed by only a fringe of the population. Acts of solidarity and friendship have also multiplied: a big smile when you pass a North African in the subway, conspicuous (even if outdated) gallantry when you step aside to let a veiled woman pass, reoccupation of places where people have parties and mix together, rejection of amalgams [between terrorists and ordinary Muslims] ... Unfortunately, all these gestures are not counted and are not included in the statistics.

As in January, too, security policies are acclaimed and the forces of order are applauded. Now, even more than in January, the government has seized the opportunity to take Draconian measures. This was the case yesterday with the law on intelligence that gives excessive powers to the secret services. It is now the case with the establishment of the state of emergency, made harsher by Parliament, the appeal of the French government for the EU to follow

on, in particular by keeping files on all airline passengers, and the announcement by Hollande of constitutional reform.

France is already equipped with two sets of emergency measures, established in particular during the Algerian War: the state of emergency (a semi-martial law that frees the police and army from judicial control and limits freedoms) and the state of siege (complete martial law, giving full powers to the army). Why is this not enough for our leaders? Because the use of the state of emergency, for example, is limited in time and requires a parliamentary vote – which as it happened was almost unanimously in favour: it was supported by the vast majority of the Socialists, the Greens and the Communist deputies.

The constitutional reform would allow the government (or the President?) to take exceptional measures more freely - and ultimately make the exception the rule: intervention by the army in policing, arbitrary searches, "preventive" detentions, banning of demonstrations and strikes, press censorship, etc. The exact content of the law that Hollande will draft is not yet known, but its intentions are clear. The regime will become increasingly authoritarian, the militarization of society will surge forward.

Many people are worried about what would happen if Marine Le Pen and the National Front won the elections (a scenario that is not political fiction), but they do not ask what Hollande, Valls, Sarkozy or others will do. It is therefore very important to remember what "republican" governments have done in the past - including torture in Algeria and the adoption of an amnesty law that prohibited the indictment of the perpetrators (you can only be accused of condoning torture if, afterwards, you defend its use), the media blackout of the massacre of Algerians in Paris on October 17, 1961(a case of state terrorism if ever there was one), the putsch by the generals in Algiers, the multiple dirty tricks of the secret services, the attack against the Rainbow Warrior of Greenpeace (one person dead, state terrorism again), the assassination of Kanak leaders,

etc. In fact, the whole panoply of security laws adopted in recent years and of the surveillance measures put in place can enable any government to conduct a creeping civil war whenever they want. Finally, over and above the march towards a society dominated by security measures, there is a political calculation. Hollande and Valls are relying on the state of emergency to use once again the Bonapartist arsenal and raise themselves, in a certain way, above parties and institutions.

The operation is aimed at neutralizing the abysmal record of governments since 2012 and promising better election results for the Socialist Party. Hollande and Valls are taking a very risky gamble: they can play the security card, supported by the institutions of the Fifth Republic, but in the present political situation, where bad winds are blowing on the right and the far right, those are the forces that are likely to benefit from this manoeuvre.

Resistance to the extension of the state of emergency has been very weak in the parliamentary left, but more significant among the rank and file (within the French Communist Party, for example, against the vote of its representatives) and in the social and trade union movement: Solidarity, but also the CGT.

The present political moment is fraught with very great dangers. Political democracy has been emptied of its content, elected assemblies no longer having control over the main decisions (which are taken by the European Union, the World Trade Organization, intergovernmental treaties...). Now it is civil liberties, already under attack, which may become an empty shell. The government wants to put society under house arrest. But the population is not conscious of it.

The key is to link together the terrains of resistance, to show our solidarity with the victims of terrorism, to give the peoples fighting for their freedom the material, political and military means to survive and win, to support the progressive and non-confessionalist [2] forces fighting on the ground, at the same time against the bloody, terrorist obscuran-

tism of Daesh and that of the Assad regime that it has so much favoured. It is to stop engaging in wars and bombings, stop supporting absolutist regimes and promoting social and political injustices in the Middle East and elsewhere.

The state of the progressive forces in France is quite disastrous, but at this key moment, points of support for resistance exist: in the shared feelings of solidarity within the population, in the reaction

of young people, in the refusal by many associations and unions to accept Draconian measures, a permanent state of emergency. There is the basis to build a united front in defence of freedom at home and abroad, of living together, of solidarity.

*This article was written for the site **Viento Sur** "El terror del Estado Islámico, el estado de excepción en Francia, nuestras responsabilidades".*

BELGIUM

Belgian Fourth Internationalists denounce move to strong state

LCR-SAP SECRETARIAT ·

The LCR/SAP denounces the march to the strong state by the Michel government

The LCR/SAP has sounded the alarm over the anti-democratic procedures that have been introduced in the name of fight against terrorism

For the LCR/SAP, it is unacceptable that the Security Council can hide behind opaque feedback of OCAM [Belgian security services] to impose a state of emergency, without being subject to any democratic control.

On Monday, the Prime Minister announced the continuation of this state of emergency for a period of at least ten days. On behalf of the government, he refused any explanation. We are supposed be content with the fact that members of the executive say they are acting "in good conscience" ... It opens the door to abuse, in the opinion of the LCR.

For the LCR/SAP, the Michel government is cynically exploiting the feeling of horror provoked by the ignoble DAESH attacks to impose a climate in politics and the media of ultra-security, where any challenge to its unjust neoliberal policy is pointed to as being the playing game of the enemy.

The incoherent decision to reopen schools and the underground despite the level 4 alert illustrates the cynicism of this political exploitation of the situation.

It is not insignificant on Monday 24, the date of the 24-hour strike against the antisocial measure of Michel 1, the minister Jambon called on the unions to "be responsible" in the framework of combating terrorism, so to stop anything that disturbs the current climate. Nor is it insignificant that Joelle

Milquet of the CDH, considered as the "left opposition" to the government Michel, also launched an attack against the unions.

Under the pretext of the fight against terrorism, the right, the NVA in the lead, is seeking to create a strong state. It wants to change the relationship of political and social forces in its favour, especially in pushing the trade union movement into a corner. It is encouraged by the fact that all the parliamentary opposition, led by the PS and SP.a, is giving its support in principle to national unity and strengthening law enforcement. [1]

There is reason to fear that the government will use the current climate to force through, in the near future and without much debate, its attacks against trade union rights, together with a new package of anti-social measures.

The LCR/SAP welcomes the common front of FGTB-CSC [trade-union federations] in Hainaut, which did not yield to pressure and maintained its strike on November 23. It calls on the left not to fall into the "security" trap. For more than ten years, the "war against terrorism" has only fuelled an escalation of terror. The right to live in peace and security is inseparable from a radical turn, at all levels, to social justice, equal rights, the satisfaction of needs, the sharing of wealth, and respect.

In the days and weeks ahead, we cannot just make statements, we must also show in the street, in the public space, that we continue these struggles, we do not accept our rights and democratic freedoms being taken awayneitehr nor by terrorists nor by governments.

Secretariat of the LCR/SAP, Brussels, November 23, 2015

A correspondent from the LCR/SAP adds:

After the banning of the Climate demonstration of 29th of November in Paris, the Belgian coalition asked for permission to have a demo in Brussels (more then 9000 people from Belgium had planned to go to Paris by train or by bus). With "Fase 4" and the banning of all big (and small...) public events in Brussels, this has been refused. As "Plan C", permission was asked for a demonstration in Ostend.

Today this has been refused as well, with the excuse that the strengthening of security in Brussels (500 police officers from all smaller towns have been called to go to Brussels) this week, means no demonstrations can take place in safe circumstances. So, we are now seeing a de facto total banning of demonstrations in Belgium...

25 November 2015

Finally, a new government in Portugal

ESQUERDA.NET

The President asked António Costa to explain six items of the left-wing agreement

After last week's marathon of meetings, the President has finally asked to speak to António Costa and announced he will consider appointing him Prime Minister, provided António Costa explains six items of the left wing agreement.

Over the past week, President Cavaco Silva met with employers' associations, bankers, economists, trade unions and all parties with elected MPs, a total of 31 meetings, but he never gave any indication as to when he would appoint the new Prime Minister and what his choice would be. Today, 50 days after the elections and 12 days after the government was ousted, Cavaco Silva has asked again to speak to António Costa, the secretary-general of the Socialist Party (PS). The meeting lasted for thirty minutes, after which António Costa did not speak publicly. The President issued a statement asking the Socialists to explain the following six items of the agreement with the left-wing parties:

- "1) passage of confidence motions;
- 2) passage of State Budgets and the State Budget for 2016 in particular;
- 3) observance of the budgetary discipline rules that apply to all eurozone countries and to which the Portuguese state is committed, i.e. those arising from the Stability and Growth Pact, the Budgetary Treaty, the European Stability Mechanism and Portugal's participation in the Economic and Monetary Union and the Banking Union;
- 4) respect for Portugal's international commitments in the scope of collective defence organisations;

5) role of the Standing Social Dialogue Council, given the importance of its contribution to the country's development and social cohesion;

6) stability of the financial system, given its pivotal role in funding the Portuguese economy."

The Socialist Party will provide the President with a written answer, probably still this afternoon.

Even with an Interim government, the Parliament has been discussing and voting bills put forth by the left-wing majority. One of these bills, which passed last week, repeals the changes to abortion laws introduced by the right-wing government. Another bill, submitted by the PS, the Left Bloc and the PEV, recognised same-sex couples' right to adopt children, which is a historic advance in civic rights in Portugal.

Next week, members' bills submitted by the left wing will continue to be discussed. On Thursday, 26 November, Parliament will vote on Socialist Party bills, supported by left-wing parties, to change austerity measures that had been implemented by the right wing: wage cuts for public workers, reduction and removal of progressive tax brackets for income tax, and the solidarity tax. On the same day, debates will also include opposing bills, submitted by the right wing, to reduce or maintain these same austerity measures. Medically assisted procreation will be discussed on the same day, with bills from the Socialist Party and the Left Bloc, as well as ending standardised exams for 4th grade children, which had also been introduced by the right-wing government during their previous term.

Source Esquerda Net English "The President asked António Costa to explain six items of the left-wing agreement".

ATTCKS IN PARIS

The attacks in Paris on 13 November: "The aim of terrorism is nothing but to create a permanent state of terror, hatred and mistrust generalized within the population"

ANTICAPITALISTAS ·

The aim of terrorism is nothing but to create a permanent state of terror, hatred and mistrust generalized in the population. If the answer involves less freedom, less democracy and further attacks on human rights, then the terrorists will have succeeded in their goal. To respond to hatred with yet more hatred, and to terror with yet more terror means that the terrorists have won and have re-energized their barbarism.

Those who want to criminalize an entire social group for the simple fact of having a common geographical origin, common human features and common cultural roots, fall into the same blind schema of confrontation and clash of civilizations that the xenophobic right has developed. The misnamed Islamic state, which is neither a state nor Islamic, has nothing to do with the more than 1,500 million Muslims in the world and who, from the beginning, have condemned these attacks and many other similar ones. Today, attention is focused on Paris, but we must remember that the majority of victims of jihadist barbarism, in all its various versions and fractions, are also Muslims. Religious fanaticism of whatever kind is always an enemy of the people, as are imperialism and racist policies.

In the same way that we criticize the simplistic and automatic reactions, we criticize the mechanistic and one-sided analysis. Western imperialism is not the sole cause of religious fanaticism or of the attacks they carry out, although it definitely helps spin a deadly wheel of action / reaction and offers

political cover to those who, on both sides, have an interest in supporting a world of closed blocks that clash with each other, dividing peoples and working classes. The jihadists are born in radicalized and minority mosques, but also in prisons, in neighbourhoods affected by unemployment and poverty, and in the rubble of the bombings.

External military interventions are added to the trade and economic policies that the great powers impose on the countries of the global South. This, along with the walls and the detention centres of Fortress Europe and racial integration by assimilation to the policies of austerity, has generated worldwide poverty, inequality and war. This is the breeding ground of fanaticism. Fighting it means getting rid of it and not adding more fuel on the fire.

Closing borders, suspending civil liberties, militarizing the public space, hardening the Penal Code and stirring racial hatred is the real agenda of terrorism. Perpetuating a state of emergency in which the so-called anti-terrorism agreements, which do not attack the cause but only the symptoms, are only cosmetic solutions being played for the gallery and contribute to the endless spiral of global terror. Solidarity is what can comfort the peoples, not the collusion with those who provoke horror and the feeding of the spiral of violence. For this, we are concerned at the idea that the answer to these attacks requires strengthening of values and practices these terrorists seek to establish. We are also concerned that this massacre is used to criminalize even more refugees arriving in Europe and specifi-

cally fleeing religious fundamentalism, and the hatred and death that it generates.

It does not depend on the final number of victims for the Paris bombings to become the "European 9/11", but on the reactions and political consequences that flow from this attacks. The cycle of permanent global war, reduced liberties and racist policies started in 2001, explain broadly the attacks in Paris and should be a lesson for this new challenge. There is still time. However, the main political forces in France, Spain and Europe are already talking about the "war of the 21st century" and respond in terms of national unity, police security and racial hatred. More than an answer, this seems to be an electoral program for a government of the most reactionary right. If we let the Le Pen and Sarkozy in each country lead the response against terror, we will always find yet more hatred and terror. The memory of the war in Iraq and the man-

agement of the 11March 2004 attacks in Madrid by the Aznar government should serve as a warning.

If the bombs manage to clear the streets and break the "living together", then repression and hate will occupy the space. This is not a time for fear and to shut oneself up at home, leaving the field open to those who, on one or another, want to erect walls of mistrust between the popular classes. It is time for people to create living, open and supportive communities where solidarity exists. Where people are organized together, then fanaticism and hatred will not come, whether jihadist or neo-fascist. There is only one answer: more democracy, more rights, more "living together". Our firm rejection of all forms of hatred and of those that feed this on all sides, is only comparable to our firmest solidarity and firmest support for those who suffer from them and those who fight them. Only the people can save the people. Only the peoples can save peoples.

Anticapitalistas, November 14, 2015

PORTUGAL

Towards a new government?

LUÍS LEIRIA ·

Portugal: Parliament topples shortest-lived government in country's history

Pedro Passos Coelho's second government was toppled on Tuesday, the 10th, by the majority of the members in the National Assembly. The government plan was rejected by 127 votes to 107. The Socialist Party (Partido Socialista, PS), the Left Bloc (Bloco de Esquerda, BE), the Portuguese Communist Party (Partido Comunista Português, PCP), the Green Party (Partido Ecologista Os Verdes, PEV) and the People, Nature and Animal party (Pessoas, Animais e Natureza, PAN) voted for rejection of the plan put forward by the right-wing government. The Social Democrat Party (Partido Social Democrata, PSD) and the Social Democratic Centre/Popular Party (Centro Democrático Social/Partido Popular, CDS/PP) voted in favour. The already expected outcome made this 20th Constitutional Government the shortest in the country's history - it lasted only 12 days, from when the government officially came into power on the 30 October to the rejection of its main policies on 10 November.

Portuguese recent history records just one similar case, that of Alfredo Nobre da Costa's 3rd Constitutional Government. Costa came into power on 28 August 1978, only to see his government plan rejected on 22 November of the same year by the Assembly. The difference was that Costa's government had been directly appointed by the President,

rather than having parliamentary party support or the majority of votes from the electorate.

Last Tuesday's decision came only to confirm what *Correio da Cidadania* readers already knew: that, as opposed to what the wider media had been reporting, the Portugal Forward (Portugal à Frente) coalition, comprised of the two right-wing parties that ruled the country for the past 4 years (PSD and CDS/PP), did not win the 4 October General Election; they lost it. For, in spite of its being the political alliance with the biggest share of the vote, it lost its Parliament majority and it was also the only alliance that lost votes vis-à-vis the last election (730,000 votes less).

Why, in the Portuguese electoral system one does not vote for the prime-minister (and that is why media outlets who claimed Passos Coelho had been 'reelected' were wrong), but rather for members of the Assembly (parliament). They are the ones who approve the government, after the prime minister has been appointed by the President based on the electoral results and party support.

The Ruling Arch

Apart from the so-called PREC (Processo Revolucionário em Curso - Ongoing Revolutionary Process), the 'hot years' following the 25 April 1974 Carnation Revolution, Portugal has always been ruled by two parties (PS or PSD, which the CSD would join in different scenarios - usually allied with the PSD, though it has formed one government with the PS). These three parties were regarded as part of 'The Ruling Arch', whereas the PCP (Portuguese Communist Party) and, later on, the Left Bloc - created in 1999 - were seen as 'protest parties' that would never ascend to power.

Not even when the French Communist and Socialist parties formed a government in France, under Mitterrand's aegis, was a similar scenario considered in Portugal. The PS and the PCP had their backs turned against each other. Until two weeks ago.

The 4 October General Election left the PS in second place and in a liaising role. In spite of the weak result and the Parliamentary minority, the party led by António Costa had the luxury of deciding whether the right-wing would stay in power or not.

Since both the Left Bloc and the Communist Party had already announced they would put forward a motion of rejection of the right-wing government plan, the PS had the option of abstaining from taking part in the motion.

But there was also another option: that of forming a government propped up by the majority formed by the combination of elected assembly members from the PS, BE, PCP and PEV.

Since this had never happened before, no one believed the theory would come into practice. That is, until the PCP declared that it would not be through their vote that the right-wing would stay in power. "The PS will only not rule if it does not want to", said Jerónimo de Sousa, the party leader. "We have always considered the PCP to be ready to take all responsibilities, including governmental, to form a different type of politics to the one carried out by the majority in the last few years. This availability continues.", assured the PCP leader.

As for the Left Bloc, its spokeswoman Catarina Martins ensured her availability to 'discuss a government solution'. She further clarified: "The parties that had over 3 million votes, that today possess over 50% of the seats in the Assembly, based their campaign on the promise of breaking with the right-wing cycle. It is now necessary in Portugal that we be coherent with our election campaign."

"Political obscenity"

PS officials then declared they would conduct negotiations with both the left and the right-wing, but made it clear that no negative coalition would be made. That is, the PS would only vote down the right-wing government if it had a governmental alternative to propose. Why, this alternative would only be feasible if it included the Left Bloc and the Communist Party; it would have to be both parties - if only one of them were included, there would not be enough parliamentary members for a majority.

The meetings started on 7 October; but whilst the right-wing meetings made little progress, those between the PS with the Left Bloc and the Communists seemed to be giving out promising signs. A left-wing government started to be discussed and a government based on the PS-BE-PCP-PEV to look more likely.

For the political country, this meant an earthquake. And the right-wing started saying that a government not comprised of the PSD and the CDS/PP would be a 'coup PREC-style', and a 'political obscenity'.

The fear of "pasokization"

But what prompted the PS - a social democrat party in tune with the neoliberal wave that dominates the European social democracy - to make such an abrupt turn after all?

Much will still be said about the matter, but there are some seemingly evident reasons. The first is PS' horror at a possible 'pasokization' - a reference to Greece's Pasok, that was virtually obliterated after committing itself to the troika governance. The PS expected to win the 4 October General Election, but, on realising that this would not be possible, the party started to fear that the slightest of support, however passive, for a right-wing government could push it toward a similar fate to that of its Greek counterpart.

On the other hand, the Bloc and the Communists knew full well the electorate would be unforgiving if they did not strive to strike a deal with the PS in or-

der to keep the former government away from power.

Passos Coelho's term in office deeply scarred the populace. His 'austerity' meant lower wages and pensions, record unemployment, forced emigration of over 500,000 Portuguese who could not find work in their country. Passos Coelho and his ally Paulo Portas, from the CDS/PP, ruled with arrogance and lashed out at the poor and vulnerable.

The mere thought they could remain in power for another 4 years was reason for panic - and hatred - amongst the 'lefties'. That is why both the BE and the PCP sought an agreement with the PS, notwithstanding some substantial differences, in order to create a left-wing majority that would put an end to the politics of 'national impoverishment' - i.e. austerity.

On 14 October, Passos Coelho told the journalists that it was perhaps "time to stop what the country has been watching in bewilderment", a reference to the meetings with the PS. Three days later António Costa answered via a letter, considering 'inelegant' the form which Passos Coelho announced the end of negotiations.

On the 12th, Catarina Martins had already asserted that 'as far as the Bloc is concerned, it is clear that the Passos Coelho and Paulo Portas' government has ended'. On 20 October, when the president initiated talks with the parties to decide who would become the prime-minister, it was fairly evident that the PSD and the CDS/PP would not be able to form a majority government, and that the PS, the Left Bloc, the PCP and PEV would. At which point the president, Aníbal Cavaco Silva, entered the scene.

The Cavaco Silva affair

If there is a man involved with power in Portugal in recent years, this man is Aníbal Cavaco Silva. As PSD leader, he was the Portuguese prime-minister between 6 November 1985 and 28 October 1995. He left office with a fairly tarnished reputation, but time renders the electorate forgetful, and, after a

period outside the spotlight, Cavaco Silva won the presidential elections on 22 January 2006, and was reelected on 23 January 2011. He is now coming to the end of his term in office and can no longer run for further elections, as there is a two-term limit.

According to the Constitution, the decision to appoint someone to form a government was in his hands - whether Passos Coelho, as leader of the most-voted coalition but without the conditions to stay in office due to his parliamentary minority; or the leader of the second party in terms of votes, PS' António Costa, who promised to have worked out grounds on which to propose a stable government.

Cavaco Silva chose the first alternative, instead of warnings from the left that it would be a waste of time given that Passos Coelho's cabinet would be brought down in Parliament.

When justifying his decision, Cavaco Silva introduced a new element to the already complex political entanglement Portugal was in. He evoked the tradition of always appointing the leader with most votes to form a government, and so chose Passos Coelho. But it did not stop there.

In the speech he gave to justify his choice, he violently attacked both the Left Bloc and the PCP, accusing them of being against Portugal's external commitments, such as NATO membership, the EU fiscal compact and the euro itself. He also implied a plea to PS deputies to rebel against their leadership decision.

The speech went down terribly, even in the right-wing camp. On one hand, it seemed to be saying that democracy only applied to the three parties of the 'Ruling Arch', and that the others, no matter how good a result they might achieve, were to be, in Cavaco's view, barred from ever achieving power. On the other hand, the plea for PS rebellion had the opposite effect: even the most dissident deputies did not want to be associated with Cavaco.

Formally appointed on 22 October, Passos Coelho presented the government that would come into office on the 30th, and announced that he would

make full use of the 10-day period designated for the inception of the government plan. The Parliamentary debating sessions were scheduled for the 9th and 10th of November.

The left-wing agreements

The agreements were disclosed on the same day Passos Coelho's government was brought down. They are separate deals, between the PS and the Left Bloc, the PS and the PCP, and the PS and the PEV. They can be viewed [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

António Costa testified to having encountered "in all three parties we negotiated with a constructive, loyal, serious and responsible spirit" to the Socialist Party's National Politics Commission. The deals allow for the formation of a PS government backed by the PS-BE-PCP-PEV majority. But neither the Left Bloc, the PCP nor the PEV get into government. The government programme is the PS programme modified by about 70 measures that were negotiated with the other left-wing parties.

Measures such as the end of wages and pensions freeze, a higher minimum wage, and the return of civil servant's wages to post-crisis levels and four public holidays are all part of the agreement.

There are fiscal policies that are favourable toward families, and the lowering of VAT (value added tax) for restaurants from 23% to 13%. Measures will also be taken against low-paid labour and collective recruitment is relaunched. It is against the law the repossession of private habitation due to debts to the state.

The PS also relinquishes a few policies it had advocated in its election campaign, such as the reduction of employer's contribution to worker's and Social Security with pension cuts, what the PS called 'conciliatory dismissal', that facilitated lay offs. Additionally, the privatisation of public transport in Lisbon and Porto are cancelled and reversed, whilst water will be protected as a vital state resource.

A procedure of parliamentary cooperation and mutual consultation was also agreed, including the inception of committees that must present quarterly reports on the sustainability of the external debt and the future of social security.

What is missing

For Francisco Louçã, professor of Economics and former Left Bloc coordinator, who defended the agreement, structural answers to investment, the dealing of the external trade balance and the improvement of the balance of payments are still missing, and they will only come with debt restructuring.

"Without it, it seems impossible for there to be any room for manoeuvre to resist external pressures and to boost employment. Investment and the creation of productive capacity are needed, and the State must take a strategic role in coming up with answers to the prolonged recession we have been experiencing."

Louçã also warns about the reactions in Brussels and Berlin, in the ECB or rating agencies, which, according to him, will not be favourable. "We must remember that the European Commission published a directive demanding new policies for Social Security just 2 days after the General Election and this will be a contested domain, and that the rating agencies have been threatening the Portuguese Republic."

Cavaco Silva's choices

What is to happen now? The ball is again on the president's court. The most likely outcome is that he will, however begrudgingly, invite António Costa to form a government. Portugal would then have a government led by a party who came second in the share of votes at the elections, supported by a parliamentary majority. It would be a first for Portugal, but it is rather common in Europe. There are currently 4 countries whose head of government is not a member of the party with the biggest

share of votes: Luxembourg, Denmark, Belgium and Latvia.

Cavaco Silva cannot dissolve the Assembly and call new elections because he is at the end of his term and the Constitution forbids a president from doing so in their last 6 months in office. The presidential elections are in January 2017. Therefore, only the new president could take such measure, after coming into power, what should happen in March. The elections would take place 55 days later, which would take them to May-June.

Another option would be to keep Passos' government as a an 'interim government' (governo de

gestão), which would risk paralysing the country, since the government could only carry out ongoing measures and even so with an adverse majority in parliament. And, indeed, this would also force the decision on the succeeding president.

But with Cavaco Silva nearing the end of his time in office, you never know. The story is not yet finished, for the next chapter's scenes have not yet been written.

19 November 2015

Source **Esquerda.net**

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TUNISIA

Nearly five years after the fall of Ben Ali

DOMINIQUE LEROUGE ·

It is in this framework that the situation in Tunisia will be addressed.

A restorationist government

Since January 2015, power has been exercised by a coalition led by the Nidaa Tounes party. This formation is a continuation of the governments of the Ben Ali era. In the coalition government it formed, Nidaa included the Islamist party Ennahda, its declared opponent before the October 2014 elections, as well as the UPL (around the shady businessman Slim Riahi) and the ultra-liberal party Afek Tounes.

The first objective of the government was to block the revolutionary process in Tunisia and to restore the neocolonial capitalist order, dictated especially by the European multinationals, the international financial institutions and the European Union. To achieve this, it proclaimed a state of emergency in the aftermath of the terrorist attack in Sousse [1] with the aim of restricting democratic freedoms, combating strikes and stifling the social movement. [2]

The specific objective of Ennahda in choosing to take part in the government was not to suffer the same fate as its Egyptian cousins, sentenced to death or imprisoned by the armed forces, to obtain impunity for its leaders (in cases concerning corruption and involvement in acts of violence) and to maintain the positions of the thousands of people it installed in the state apparatus following its triumphant arrival in power in 2012.

The objective to which Nidaa Tounes is particularly attached is to guarantee impunity for those guilty of corruption during the Ben Ali era, as evidenced by the bill called "economic reconciliation". [3]

The chain of events since 2011

On December 17, 2010, a wave of mobilizations began, launched by youth in the poorest regions of the country. The trade-union and associative left was very involved in it. Subsequently, the rallying to the revolutionary insurrection of the high school student movement and the inhabitants of popular neighborhoods, especially in Tunis, made possible its extension to the whole country. On January 14, the dictator Ben Ali was forced to relinquish power.

It should be noted that the Islamist organizations did not participate in this process, all the more so in that at the time the majority of their cadres were in exile and others were in prison.

Between March and December 2011, the elder statesman of the old regime, Beji Caid Essebsi, who had been retired from political life for twenty years, became head of the government. He managed, not without difficulty, to partially demobilize the movement, which accentuated the distancing between a part of the youth and the workers' movement.

After the election victory of the Islamist party Ennahda on October 23, 2011, Essebsi announced his withdrawal from political life. He then made a spectacular comeback by founding the Nidaa Tounes party. This assembled around him different political traditions, united in a discourse of almost visceral rejection of political Islam.

In 2012 and 2013, the policy of the governments led by Ennahda [4], focused on the following objectives: to continue the neo-liberal policy, infiltrate the state apparatus, Islamize society, undermine the rights of women, organize and/or cover violence against the social movement and the left. Islamist militias were set up, including the "Leagues for the protection of the revolution" (LPR). Middle Eastern Islamist preachers, among the most retrograde, roamed freely in Tunisia. The

president of the republic, Marzouki, officially welcomed some of them, as well as leaders of the LPR, [5].

In January 2014, the Ennahda government was finally forced to resign. [6] Some Islamists, especially among the youth, switched over to terrorism in Tunisia, as well as to jihadism in other countries. Simultaneously there was an upturn in strike activity.

Following the legislative and presidential elections at the end of 2014, power passed into the hands of Nidaa Tounes, who opened up his government to Ennahda and two smaller parties. An unprecedented strike wave developed in the first half of 2015, as well as important social mobilizations in the most deprived areas.

A Tunisian exception: the UGTT

In no other country in the Arab region does there exist a trade-union organization comparable to the UGTT. [7] With 750,000 members, mainly belonging to the civil service and the public sector, 47 per cent of whom are women [8], the UGTT organizes about a third of the workers in the sectors where it exists. Since its founding in 1946, the UGTT has not been satisfied merely with the defence of its members. It has on the contrary always been engaged simultaneously in political action, especially during the struggle for Independence, where it played a leading role. There coexist within the UGTT members belonging to the entire Tunisian political spectrum. They must therefore put in second place their party affiliation, if they have one, which is most often on the left of the political spectrum.

Throughout its history, the UGTT has fluctuated constantly between resistance to government and corruption by it, between ability to confront and readiness to negotiate, between bureaucratic top-down methods of decision and a system of internal pressure on the leadership, between a multiplicity of centrifugal forces and determination to maintain a collective framework. Faced with the repressive regimes that have succeeded one another since in-

dependence, the UGTT has often served as an effective refuge for the forces of the political and associative left. This has resulted in a deep and lasting capillarity between these three types of organizations.

For all these reasons, the UGTT has played a central role in every crisis that Tunisia has gone through. So it was no accident that it was around it that the departure of the Ennahda government in January 2014 was finally organized.

The difficulties of the political left appearing as an alternative

Unlike other countries in the Arab region, the political left was able to maintain a continued existence in Tunisia, even in the worst moments of the dictatorship, thanks to the shield represented by the UGTT. In January 2011, it was still numerically weak, marked by a long tradition of clandestinity, dispersion and sectarianism.

After a first ephemeral attempt following January 14, 2011 [9], most of the left forces regrouped in October 2012 under the name of Popular Front. This front involved formations coming from Marxism-Leninism, Trotskyism, Arab nationalism and social democracy. [10] Many of the activists of the Front are also personally involved in the UGTT, the UGET (student union) and various associations.

What united the Front was a tradition of common struggle of its founders against the Ben Ali dictatorship, indeed against that of Bourguiba, the desire to end the tradition of fragmentation of the left as well as to achieve the social demands of the revolution.

The main initial orientation of the Front was to fight simultaneously against the two neoliberal currents which were competing for power: the Islamists of Ennahda (in power in 2012-2013) and the "modernists" of Nidaa Tounes, who wanted to succeed them.

Among the many weaknesses of the Front the main ones were its organizational weakness, its lack of

political clarity and programmatic precision, its heterogeneity, its permanent fear of splitting and the risk of soft consensus that could result from that. Added to this were, in the background, painful memories of the years of imprisonment and torture, as well as hundreds of dead and wounded during the general strike of January 26, 1978 and the revolt of January 1984.

Following the successive assassinations of two leaders of the Popular Front, a wave of hostility towards Ennahda mounted across the country. Chamkhi Fathi explains: "The Popular Front had remained transfixed after the assassination of February 6, 2013. After that of July 26, 2013, the Front initially reacted strongly, even calling for insurrection. It then immediately retracted under pressure from Nidaa Tounes, and finally remained within the boundaries of respect for established order and legality." [11] The leadership of the Popular Front then decided to form an alliance with all the forces opposing the Islamist party in power.

The day after the assassination of Mohamed Brahmi, this "anything but Ennahda" resulted in the establishment, alongside Nidaa Tounes, of an ephemeral "National Salvation Front" (FSN). One of the main objectives fixed by it was the establishment of a "government of national salvation" to replace the existing government [12]

Finally, it was a provisional government not dependent on political parties that replaced the one led by Ennahda. A smooth process of Ennahda giving up power was in fact organized from mid-September, under the direct auspices of a "Quartet" consisting of the UGTT, the employers' organization UTICA, the Tunisian League for the Defence the Rights of Man and the association of lawyers. As for the FSN, it rapidly became inactive and then disintegrated.

Fathi Chamkhi adds: "In fact, it was the European governments – in particular the French, Germans and British - but also the United States, who were the real masters of the game. This was shown by the way they succeeded in imposing the head of

government that. they wanted, namely the ultra-liberal Mehdi Jomàa, Franco-Tunisian senior executive of a subsidiary of the French oil company Total." As the the newspaper *Le Monde* put it at the time, Jomàa was "a new prime minister appointed under Western pressure" [13]

Since January 2014, the Front has gradually returned to its original orientation. its present line can be summarized as follows: neither Ennahda (and its allies of 2012-2013) nor Nidaa Tounes, nor the return of out-and-out Benalists. This line has been reflected particularly by the following successive positions adopted:

- The refusal of its deputies, on January 29, 2014, to vote confidence in the neoliberal government of Jomàa that succeeded the one led by Ennahda.
- The affirmation, on December 11, 2014, of the need to fight both Nidaa and the Marzouki-Ennahda-duo in the second round of the presidential election.
- The refusal, at the end of 2014, to vote for the 2015 finance law and the budget that resulted from it.
- The refusal in January 2015, to vote confidence in the Nidaa Ennahda government, and even more so to participate in it.

This orientation of the Front was confirmed recently in the demonstrations on September 12, 2015 against the bill offering amnesty to corrupt figures of the Ben Ali era. This document envisages granting them amnesty in return for payment of a given sum. Under the guise of stimulating the economy, this project of "economic reconciliation" aims to take a further step in the return to the situation before the revolution. The Front refused to adopt a position along the lines "anything but the corrupt figures of the former regime." It was out of the question for it to find itself in the street alongside forces who are certainly opposed to the present regime, but who have participated in violence against the social movement and the left. This was above all the case of the "Leagues for the Protection

of the Revolution" (LPR), today officially dissolved, but also that of the CPR of Marzouki, which was in power alongside Ennahda in 2012-2013 and for whom the LPR had campaigned in the presidential election at the end of 2014.

Faced with the procrastination of other political forces on this important point, the Popular Front organized autonomously its contingent in Tunis, along with only the forces that agreed with its approach, and this firm attitude met with success: on the one hand, the demonstration led by the Popular Front was by far the most numerous of those that took place one after the other at different times on the Avenue Habib Bourguiba in Tunis; on the other, the forces coming from the LPR did not dare to come, and the few dozen demonstrators of the CPR came individually and later slipped into another contingent, in the most discreet way possible.

The Front has now managed to regain the confidence of some of those who were bewildered by its turn in the second half of 2013, as shown by the elections at the end of 2014: the number of its members of the Assembly was multiplied by 2.5 [14], its vote in the first round of the presidential election was multiplied by 2.4 compared to the percentage of votes obtained in the legislative elections. But for Fathi Chamkhi "in a situation of serious social crisis, to have 15 deputies out of 217 (less than 7 per cent) is not enough. Admittedly, the Popular Front's score could have been worse, in view of its organizational failures, the weaknesses in its analysis of the concrete situation, its repeated political vacillations and hesitations. The fact of having allowed themselves to be trapped in July 2013 by Nidaa into the National Salvation Front (FSN) was a mistake. This is very clear today. [15] What is positive is that the Popular Front has shown that it has the ability to manage tensions and correct its mistakes. It has matured, although weaknesses remain in its analyses. The Popular Front has indeed in its ranks activists with the necessary ability and the experience to formulate a coherent and understandable project. It remains for it not to limit itself to acting in Parliament, but to

take its place in the mobilizations in the context of the the economic and social crisis that the country is going through." [16]

The positioning of the Front over the the past year has not however been free of oscillations and ambiguities. Fathi Chamkhi explains, for example: "There was in 2014 an intense debate within the Popular Front, on the question of electoral alliances: part of the Popular Front situated itself in the wave of the "useful vote" and favoured a broad anti-Ennahda electoral alliance. Nidaa finally helped to resolve this debate by deciding to stand on its own in the legislative elections." [17] A similar debate took place at the presidential election at the end of December. At the end of 2014, the Popular Front was even on the verge of a split: the two deputies of the LGO, Nizar Amami and Fathi Chamkhi, had announced in advance that they would neither give a vote of confidence in the government led by Nidaa nor vote for its budget, and that they would do so whatever the decision adopted by the Front. In the end, Nidaa opted for a government alliance with Ennahda, and that once again helped the Front to decide in favour of independence from the government.

Conversely, in the wake of the terrorist attack in Sousse in June 2015, the deputies of the Popular Front voted for the Terrorism Act, which had, however, been denounced by many associations, as well as by the journalists' union of the UGTT. [18]

Two of the challenges facing the Tunisian left

The need for the left to strengthen its links with young people.

Between December 17, 2010 and early March 2011, the youth revolt was one of the driving forces of the Tunisian revolution. Subsequently, the blocking of the process and the continual deterioration of already precarious conditions of existence made some of young people bitter and/or attracted by dreams of exile in Europe. More worryingly, some of them turned to armed Islamism.

On this question, an activist of the social movement, Abderrahmane Hedhili, explained in January 2015: "There is a question concerning poverty that is never addressed. This is the poverty of the young Salafists. Nobody talks about it. There are many of them, over 100 000. I am not talking about those who have taken up arms and moved on to terrorism. I am talking about young people who are at the beginning of the process. Do we have a social, economic, cultural programme? How to address this issue? Neither the government, nor the opposition, nor civil society does - nobody. The Salafists are very active among the youth in poor neighbourhoods. Because unfortunately we, the left, should be present in these areas, but we have given way to the Islamists." [19]

The necessary convergence between the coastal regions and those in the interior of the country.

For generations, the regions in the interior have been the poorest in the country. It is no coincidence that the 2010-2011 revolution started in Sidi Bouzid. It was preceded in 2008 by the uprising in the Gafsa mining region, then in 2010 by the riots in Ben Guerdane.

The most emblematic of the recent struggles in the interior regions was that of unemployed youth in the mining region of Gafsa. For more than two months, they organized sit-ins, almost completely blocking the production and transport of phosphate, and therefore the chemical industry that is linked to it. Faced with their determination, the authorities were forced to promise to create 1500 jobs in three years, including more than a third in the summer of 2015. But this figure falls far short of the needs of this region, where unemployment is officially 26 per cent, whereas it provides about 10 per cent of the country's GNP.

Multiple forms of resistance

An unprecedented wave of strikes.

The social mobilizations that had slowed down from spring 2011 to the end of 2013 recommenced

in 2014 after the departure of Ennahda from power. They reached unprecedented levels in the first half of 2015. [20]

Some of these struggles were conducted by "the most precarious workers, such as those who work on construction sites, many of whom earn less than the minimum wage, or the unemployed. This category will not sit idly by. They waited for four years in the hope of proposals taking into consideration their circumstances. But there was nothing," explained Abderrahmane Hedhili. Multiple struggles of the unemployed took place in the first half 2015, for example in the mining zone of the Gafsa region.

Under the initial impulse of the sectors where the left of the UGTT is influential, there was an explosion of strikes in the first half of 2015 among workers with a stable job. The public sector had in fact been straining at the leash for more than three years: civil service salaries have been frozen since 2012, while cumulative inflation was 17.2 per cent over the last three years. Prominent among the demands were those for the implementation of agreements that had been signed but never put into effect.

Public transport workers started the ball rolling at the beginning of 2015, including a strike without warning that paralyzed Tunis for several days and subsequently led to the satisfaction of some demands. [21] In early April, secondary school teachers and their union won a historic victory. Since autumn 2014, they had conducted several two-day strikes with nearly 100 per cent participation. Faced with the stubbornness of the government, they blocked the conduct of the examinations of the first quarter of 2015 and also threatened to block the end-of-year exams. Their determination paid off: on April 6, they won very significant wage increases, which should be able to guarantee their purchasing power over the period 2012-2017. This victory has strengthened the confidence of workers in their ability to fight, and conflicts have multiplied in government departments and public sector enterprises. The demands are generally centred on wages, for the government to respect agree-

ments that it had signed previously, for the defence and reconstruction of public services.

The forms of struggle adopted by the workers and their middle-level and/or local union structures, bear witness to the extent of their exasperation: repeated one-day national strikes, the decision to boycott the exams in primary education, and strikes, sudden and without warning, in public transport and electricity supply, days of free care in public hospitals, etc. Some of these audacious forms of struggle were, at least initially, publicly disavowed by the executive committee of the UGTT. It is significant to note that in the case of electricity supply, strikes including power cuts began following the refusal by the rank and file of an agreement signed the day before by the UGTT federation concerned.

Strikes have also taken place in the private sector, for example in supermarkets, the food industry and tourism. Unlike in the cases of public transport and secondary education, most of these struggles have generally not led immediately to real progress.

A halt then followed the terrorist attack in Sousse in June, amplified by Ramadan, the heat wave, the summer holidays, threats against strikes by the government, etc.

After the holidays, strikes recommenced in primary education and road freight transport. The pursuit of these struggles is felt to be all the more necessary because in the public sector, the increases contained in the national agreement of 22 September between the UGTT and the government are not enough to maintain purchasing power (except perhaps in secondary education). Moreover, at the time of writing, no national agreement has been reached in the private sector.

The recommencement or not of strikes should logically depend on the combination of a variety of factors including:

- the progress of negotiations in the private sector;
- respect or not of their commitments by the government and employers;

- the evolution of inflation from now until 2017;

- How struggles in different sectors will develop, including those at present underway in primary education and road transport.

Resistance to challenging of democratic freedoms

These are the only remaining gains of the revolution of 2011. Attempts to challenge them have intensified following the proclamation of a state of emergency after the attack in Sousse.

In a statement issued on July 25, 2015, a series of associations, along with the UGTT and the National Union of Journalists (SNJT,) protested against "the serious attacks on human rights and freedoms", "the repeated attacks against citizens, journalists and employees of the press" and "law-and-order harassment" [22] The signatories also denounced the rushed adoption of an "anti-terrorist law" which they considered to be an attack on fundamental rights. This included: "the vague definition of the crimes of terrorism and incitement to terrorism", "non-compliance with the principles of a fair and just judgment", "the lack of guarantees on the inviolability of suspects", "calling into question the public nature of trials and the retention of the death penalty", "gagging of the freedom of the press and of free access to information" and maintaining legal provisions "that reinforce sanctions against attacks on the security forces, despite the unanimous demand of the entire society to withdraw them in view of the threat they pose to basic liberties". [23]

The mobilization against the bill aimed at whitewashing corrupt figures of the Ben Ali era. [24]

Welcomed by the Tunisian employers, the bill described as "economic reconciliation", intended to whitewash the corrupt figures of the Ben Ali era, is rejected in particular by participants in the campaign "I do not forgive," the political and associative opposition and the UGTT.

As explained by the leader of the Workers' Party and deputy of the Popular Front, Amroussia Ammar, "nothing can justify whitewashing those who have looted public money without them being held accountable". [25]

. Asked about this, Fathi Chamkhi added: "This bill is a political manoeuvre towards the bosses of the criminal economy, and of course towards crooked capitalists who got rich under the dictatorship. It aims to ensure their support for the stabilization of the dominant order. This support is essential for the government in order to complete the implementation of the new neoliberal capitalist restructuring, which is particularly demanded by the international financial institutions and the European Union. " [26]

Up until the last moment, the authorities wanted to prevent the demonstrations planned for Saturday, September 12 against the bill, insisting that all demonstrations were banned under the state of emergency. On the evening of the previous Thursday, the Minister of the Interior even sought to terrorize potential demonstrators, claiming that "terrorist sleeper cells" were preparing to target the demonstrators, especially on the Avenue Habib Bourguiba in Tunis where the demonstrations had been called. [27] But the opponents of the law did not give in and demonstrations were finally held in Tunis and in many other places, such as Sfax, Gafsa, Gabes Tataouine, Tozeur, etc. The fact that the Minister of the Interior had reaffirmed until the last moment that all demonstrations were banned due to the state of emergency has had a boomerang effect since the September 12 demonstrations took place: on October 2 the Presidency of the Republic announced the lifting of the state of emergency. But concerning the whitewashing of the corrupt, the government has not for the moment changed its position.

The rise of struggles on ecology.

As Abderrhamane Hedhili points out, "the environment is no longer a preoccupation that only interests the elites. The subject also affects a significant

part of the population, such as the problem of waste on the island of Djerba, pollution in the Bay of Monastir, the factories in Gabes, and of course in the mining area." [28]

What has changed since January 2011?

1. Political Power. Before January 14, the entire state power was in the hands of Ben Ali and his clan. The elections were a pure simulacrum. Today, the President and the Assembly are elected. But the administration, and in particular the police, military and judicial apparatuses, were not purged.

2. Economy. The present economic orientation is in direct continuity with the neoliberal policies of Ben Ali. The reality of economic power has not changed, and the present political authorities even want to give an amnesty to most of the corrupt figures of the Ben Ali era who had been prosecuted after January 14. All economic indicators are showing red: growth is close to zero, inflation is around 6 per cent, the level of external public debt exploded between 2010 and 2014 from 15.5 to 25 billion dinars (from 7 to 11.4 billion euros). The standard of living of the population continues to deteriorate, the levels of unemployment and inequality between regions continue to widen. Young people and women are the first victims of this situation.

3. The "Law and order" Dimension. In the days of Ben Ali, "order" was ensured by an omnipresent police. Torture was widely practised, freedom of expression and organization was very weak. Immediately after January 14, the grip of the police on society greatly weakened. Freedom of expression and organization reached a level that had never before existed in Tunisia. In recent months, in relation to the fight against Islamist terrorist groups and some of the attacks they managed to commit, especially those of Bardo and Sousse, the law-and-order dimension regained ground. These terrorist attacks were followed by the proclamation of a "state of emergency", the accentuation of the return of the use of torture, restrictions on freedom of expression and the arrest of about a thousand suspected terrorists.

4. **Trade unionism and workers' struggles.**

Before 14 January 2011, much of the leadership and the apparatus of the UGTT had submitted to the government of Ben Ali. Opposed to them were a series of intermediate leaders and rank-and-file militants. The right to strike was very restrictive and struggles were sometimes harshly repressed. From the end of 2011, most of the leaders of the UGTT who had been associated with the Ben Ali regime were eliminated. The readiness to fight of the workers and their intermediate union structures can now be freely expressed within the UGTT. Some forms of struggle adopted by them have been publicly disavowed by the Executive Bureau, which is really looking to find a balance between the conflicting demands of workers and those of employers and government

6. Political Life. Prior to 2011, political life was monopolized by the Ben Ali clan. Political Islam

was brutally suppressed, even though discreet contacts seem nevertheless to have taken place between Ennahda and members of the government. The political left was essentially illegal, repressed, weak numerically, dispersed and marked by sectarianism. Today, for the first time in decades, there is real political life in Tunisia. But at the same time the government is now in the hands of Nidaa Tounes, which increasingly embodies the continuity with the former regime. The first big difference with the past is that Ennahdha is associated with a government that declares its determination to eradicate armed Islamist groups. The second big difference is that the political left is no longer in hiding and is practically all grouped in the Popular Front. No other left political formation has any influence. Despite its weaknesses and ambiguities, the Popular Front is today the leading political opposition force, including in Parliament.

BELGIUM

A meeting on Syria banned in St Gilles (Belgium)

LCR-SAP SECRETARIAT ·

The 80 people present met as a decision-taking general meeting and initially decided to hold the conference outside, in spite of the police threat to arrest an organizer and a speaker, the only Syrian present. But the police then prevented the meeting going ahead. Those present then withdrew to a nearby establishment where they could hold the meeting.

The SP burgomaster of Saint-Gilles and the police thus decided unilaterally to ban a debate, without any preliminary contact with the organizers. This ban was not based on any threat or risks public disorder, but simply the topic of the evening. The purpose of the conference organized by the Léon Lesoil foundation was to discuss the cruelty of the Syrian regime and Daesh, the popular uprising in Syria and building solidarity with the democratic and anticapitalist currents there here ([Belgium] and of there [Syria]).

The planned speakers were: Joseph Daher, doctoral student at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS – London), and assistant at the university of Lausanne, member of Solidarités (Switzerland) and the Current of the Revolutionary Left in Syria; Sophie Aujean, specialist of the Middle-East with Amnesty International and member of the citizens' collective "Syria Action". Pascal

Fenaux, journalist with *Courrier International* and the editorial board *Revue Nouvelle*; and Rhodi Mellek, committee for Rojava (Kurdistan Syrian), Brussels representative of the PYD (Left the democratic union).

The LCR strongly denounces this ban and considers that it is censure and a breach of the rights of free meeting and association.

The Belgian State, the government and the local authorities want to lock up the population at home and stop it discussing and mobilising. The answer to the terror of Daesh cannot be a limitation of democratic rights and freedoms.

The LCR invites the social movement and the anti-capitalist left to reject the traps being set for us, from national unity to ratcheting up national, through a "truce" in social fightback. It is More important than ever to consider the origin of this extreme violence. And to understand that the only way out is the unity of the popular classes and a continuation of the determined struggle against our ruling classes, for equality and against imperialist wars.

The emergency today is democratic, social and ecological!

Secretariat of the LCR/SAP
21 November 2015

FRANCE

Solidarity with the victims of terrorism, no to war and racism

NPA-L'ANTICAPITALISTE (NPA-A) ·

The NPA shares this feeling of revolt and solidarity with all those who are affected by this tragedy, the families of the victims and all those close to them. The deadly violence is especially shocking and unbearable that, instead of fighting the (states) governments, which are at war in Syria, Iraq or Africa, it deliberately strikes innocent victims here, members of the public, just as in Iraq and Syria where it imposes dictatorships.

Refuse their war

Holland, Valls, Sarkozy and Le Pen tell us that France is at war. This is true, but the war is not ours. It is not a response to terrorism because it is the wars waged by successive governments of this country in Afghanistan, Mali, Libya, Syria, which created the chaos from which was born first Al Qaida and then Islamic state. And it is the decision of Hollande to intervene in Syria that caused the response of terrorists.

These bombings are supposed to fight the Islamic State, the jihadi terrorists, but in fact, together with the Russian intervention and bombings, they prop up the system of the person mainly responsible for the martyrdom of the Syrian people, the Assad dictatorship. There too it is civilians who are the first victims condemned to survive under terror or flee in fear of their lives.

France must immediately withdraw its troops from the Middle East and Africa.

No to national unity

Hollande, just as he did as after January 7, called for "national unity" and has met all the political parties, with members in parliament or not, who support this call. [received this from all parliamentary parties associated with it or not.] This unity is a hypocrisy that has nothing to do with solidarity with the victims. Hollande (tries) is trying to use the tragedy in his favour and to get people's support for his war policy. He also wants to silence the growing discontent in the country.

The right and the extreme right have gone full throttle, equating Islam and fundamentalism, proposing that "preventive detention" is imposed, that mosques are closed down and so on. Yet it is not Muslims who cause wars, on the contrary they are the first victims, in Syria, Iraq and France.

We must fight the causes of barbarism, namely the pillaging of poor countries by the big powers. For this, we need the unity of the workers and peoples, beyond their origins, their skin colour, their religion, beyond borders, against those who have built this world.

The choice of the government to implement the state of emergency goes in the opposite direction. The state of emergency does not guarantee the security of civilians. On the contrary, it gives the state control over the press and bans public meetings and demonstrations. Under these conditions, how to express our indignation and solidarity with the victims? How to protest against redundancies at Air France and elsewhere, against racism, against wars?

The NPA calls for the lifting of the state of emergency and an end to draconian measures.

In solidarity with the victims, to say no to war, no to terrorism, no to racism, we stand together.

Montreuil

16 November 2015

In solidarity with the victims of Paris, Beirut, Ankara, Baghdad...

SOLIDARITÉS ·

Divide and Conquer

ISIS seeks to drive wedges between believers and non-believers, between Muslims, Christians, and Jews, Sunnis and Shias, etc. Its strategy is to create an atmosphere of terror in order to encourage the hatred of the other, which fuels its growth. Its recruitment efforts in Europe are based on the deliberate stoking of virulent racism and islamophobia.

Criminal, reactionary, fundamentalism is not unique to Islam. There are many other political tendencies that engage in and justify the murder of civilians in the name of ideologies with varying degrees of religious content: the massacres of Muslims in Myanmar, of Palestinians in Israel, of African-Americans in the US, of Christians in India, of young Socialists in Norway, etc.

The Bombs and torture

It is a contemporary phenomenon, the result of the extreme brutalization of the peoples under capitalist globalization: the dispossession of the masses of small farmers, the growth of slums, the deepening of inequalities, including between men and women, the growing flow of refugees and the internally displaced, the tyrannical regimes supported by the dif-

ferent imperialist powers, the indiscriminate aerial bombardments, the remote killing with drones, the widespread rise in racism and religious sectarianism, etc. The mythical past to which these terrorist groups appeal serves only to conceal their origins in the present.

Like Al-Qa'ida before it, ISIS is the outcome of decades of blood-soaked dictatorships, pillage, and foreign military interventions in the Middle East. Their spectacular savagery emerged from underneath US, British, French, and Russian bombs, from the prison cells of Tunisia, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, and from the torture chambers of Ben Ali, Mubarak, and Assad.

We must resist together!

As happened earlier in the US, the French government is preparing to restrict our freedoms in the name of the war against terrorism. Switzerland is on the same path. We call for the very opposite. We must reject the growing physical and administrative walls that are being erected against refugees. We oppose the populist and racist discourse and the violence it encourages.

Finally, we demand the end of foreign military interventions in the countries of the Middle East, and likewise the end to the arms sales to and military collaboration with the bellicose regimes of the Egypt, Iran, Turkey, Israel, and the petromonarchies.

FRANCE

Against fear: solidarity !

ENSEMBLE!

Today is a time for mourning.

The murderous terrorist attacks which took place on Friday 13 November have caused numerous victims. They are a terrible tragedy. Our compassion and solidarity go to all who have been affected, to the victims' families and everyone close to them.

These terrorist attacks follow those of last January in Paris against Charlie Hebdo and the Hypercasher supermarket, and those against the Bardo Museum and in Sousse in Tunisia. They are an echo of the tragedies which have struck the Middle East, in the Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Palestine and elsewhere. The terrorist groups behind them are inspired and organised by the Islamic State, an organisation driven by a totalitarian ideology which cloaks itself in religion in order to trigger a war between different peoples.

These fanatical political groups have found a fertile terrain in Iraq and Syria, with the bloody war waged against his own people by Bachar El Assad, and the terrible consequences of the US intervention in Iraq. They find an audience amongst desperate people who are then pressed into service and caught in a deadly sectarian logic.

We face a challenge.

The answers will not be found in any so-called 'national unity', nor in a race to remove civil liberties. Measures are needed to guarantee the safety of the population, but we oppose a state of emergency which prevents meetings, rallies and demonstrations, and allows individual freedoms to be eroded.

More than ever, we must resist blaming any section of the population for actions over which they have no control, and oppose all racist and islamophobic reactions, as well as conspiracy theories and anti-semitic ideas which these attacks are intended to encourage.

We call for support for the peoples of Syria, Iraq, the Lebanon, Palestine, Turkey, and Kurdistan in their struggle for their freedoms and democratic rights.

Fear must not prevail over the movement of citizens. We call for a united and popular movement for solidarity, a welcome for migrants and refugees, social justice and democracy.

14 November 2015

Bagnolet

FRANCE

Your wars, our dead

JULIEN SALINGUE ·

FRAGMENTS

Those who died last night are ours.

In a restaurant terrace, in a bar, in the street, in a concert hall.

Ours.

Dead because the murderers decided to strike in the middle of Paris and shoot into a crowd with the aim of creating as many victims as possible.

11:30 a.m. Sarkozy appears on TV to declare: "We are at war."

For once, I agree with him. They are at war.

You are at war, you Sarkozys, Hollandes, Valls, Camerons, Netanyahus, Obamas. You are at war, you and your political allies, you and the your friends who own the multinationals.

And you have dragged us in as well, without even asking for our opinion.

Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Syria...The number of us who have protested hasn't always been very large. We haven't succeeded in convincing enough people that these military expeditions only ever bring more instability, violence and tragedy.

Over there, and right here.

Because the war did not start last night. It did not begin in January with the killings at Charlie Hebdo and the Hyper Cacher kosher deli.

In January, I wrote the following:

One of the causes for the shock hitting large sections of the population, including circles of left-wing activists, is the (re)discovery of this truth: Yes, France is at war. A war which does not always speak its name, a war which is not discussed

in the governmental assemblies or in the media, and is generally not talked about in the public arena, a war against enemies who are not often identified, an asymmetric war—but a war all the same. The recent killings, in the most brutal way, brought this to light for those who did not know, or those who refused to see, or those who had forgotten. France is at war, war creates casualties, and these casualties do not always only fall in your enemy's home.

With whom is France at war? According to various discourses and the media, it is at war against "international terrorism," against "jihadism," against "fundamentalist barbarism," etc. I won't discuss these imprecise labels and the abusive generalizations they imply, nor the paradoxes that underlie them (alliances based on an unstable geometry, support for regimes that support the development of "jihadist" currents, participation in military interventions that reinforce these currents, etc.). It is enough to underline that France has, in reality, followed the lead of George W. Bush and the United States after September 11, 2001, in the rhetoric and politics of the "clash of civilizations," even if not always saying so out loud.

France has been at war for almost 14 years without saying so. [1]

I find no reason to change a single line of this extract. In doing so, I mean no disrespect to the victims or their relatives.

All the emotion, the indignation, the pain, these are all self-evidently legitimate. And the actions of the murderers who last night wrecked hundreds of lives, thousands of lives, are inexcusable.

Midday. ISIS claims responsibility. Apparently, they are at war as well.

According to the Agence France-Presse, citing a witness in the Bataclan theater, one of the killers shouted, "It is Hollande's fault, it is your president's fault, he shouldn't have intervened in Syria."

One can always close one's eyes and shut one's ears. One can become lost in the smoke of the depoliticizing rhetoric of "blind terrorism" as an inexplicable force.

But the killers in Paris are not poor "fools" who bear no responsibility for their actions, nor are they manipulated by some I-don't-know-which-secret-service. We'll know more in the hours and days to come, but there is no doubt the killers will have a profile and a message roughly similar to that of Said and Cherif Kouachi and Amedy Coulibaly, who carried out the January attacks, about which I wrote the following last January:

The killers themselves have a discourse (see their interviews and videos, in which they speak about Syria and Iraq, the offenses suffered by Muslims at the hands of France and in the world in general, etc.); they have their own theory (especially note the article published by Mediapart); they have their own organizational reference points (Islamic State, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula)...

They believe, rationally, that they are at war with a certain France, and that they consider, rationally, themselves to be engaged in a legitimate defense. See this statement that Coulibaly gave in a post-humous video:

You attack the Caliphate, you attack the Islamic State, so we attack you. You can't attack and expect nothing in return.

Yes, ISIS is engaged in politics. They are killers, but they are political.

And last night they struck powerfully, very powerfully.

Blindly? Yes and no.

Yes, because they targeted people who are not directly involved in this war, people whose only crime was to be in the wrong spot at the wrong time, people who might have been elsewhere and so would still be among us today.

No, because in striking in such a way, they are sending a message: "Your country is at war with us, and as long as this war continues, none among you will be safe."

This is politics. It is detestable, but it is political.

We live in a world at war. Russia, France and the United States are bombing Syria. Saudi Arabia is bombing Yemen. The French "operations" continue in Mali. Obama just announced that U.S. troops will not be leaving Afghanistan.

According to the UN High Commission on Refugees, there have never been more refugees and internally displaced persons than there are today and there is no reason to believe things will improve any time soon.

THE TOTAL, as of this moment, is 128 dead. 128 is too many.

128 dead on November 13, 2015.

That's about the average number of people killed everyday in Syria since March 2011.

Yes, nearly the daily average: 250,000 dead since March 2011, about 4,500 deaths per month, nearly 150 dead every day.

This might explain some things to a compatriot who says he does not understand why Syrians have been fleeing to Europe for more than four and a half years. There is a November 13 every day in Syria. And it is Assad, your new ally, who bears primary responsibility for this, having brutally suppressed a peaceful uprising.

We live in a world at war. And this allows some people to conduct business.

Arms sales: 2015, a record year for France

France congratulates itself on selling war machines to Egypt. France congratulates itself on selling war machines to Saudi Arabia. France congratulates itself on selling war machines to the United Arab Emirates.

Yet France is surprised, indignant, protesting against becoming a target itself.

Hypocrisy. Cowardice. Lies.

They have released the hounds, foaming at the mouth.

Laurent Wauquiez, who served as Sarkozy's Minister of Higher Education, tweeted "I demand 4,000 people suspected of terrorism be placed in internment centers #AttaquesParis"

Lionnel Luca, conservative member of the National Assembly, tweeted "Tonight Paris is Beirut. The logic of a count on the path to Lebanonization. We will pay dearly for our cowardice faced with communitarianism."

Philippe de Villiers, conservative French member of European Parliament, tweeted "Terrible drama in Paris, this is where laxity and the mosque-ification of France has led."

We must remember these statements.

Returning to what I wrote in January:

Any repressive, stigmatizing or blind response to the economic, political and social realities of France in 2015 is not only doomed to failure but, more importantly, will be merely another step toward new killings tomorrow.

So here we are. Tomorrow turned out to be last night.

1 P.M. Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, the first secretary of Hollande's Socialist Party, announces that "France has just suffered an act of war."

They keep saying, keep repeating, that France is at war. But when they say this, they mean to empha-

size that "we are at war." A "we" in which they want to implicate us.

No. Fourteen years of your war have only brought more violence, tragedy and new wars to the four corners of the globe.

If Iraq had not been razed, ISIS would not exist.

The great 19th century French poet Paul Valéry once wrote, "War: a massacre of people who don't know each other for the profit of people who know each other but don't massacre each other."

He was right.

It's always the same people who burn.

And if we want it to stop, then once the shock wears off, we must do everything to stop this headlong rush towards generalized barbarism.

It's not too late. There is still time to do something different. Radically different.

We can refuse their injunction: "With us or with the terrorists."

We can refuse the calls for unity with the torturers and warmongers who are day by day building a more barbaric world.

We can refuse their world based on exploitation, robbery, violence, injustice, inequality and misery; instead, we will come together with those with whom we should unite.

Fight for another world, a world that is not only possible, but more necessary than ever.

Keep our heads and don't give in to emotional pressure and shock.

You may accuse me of being a dreamer. But my dreams never killed anyone in contrast to your "pragmatism."

More than ever, we must "resist the irresistible." That's the only way to move ahead.

So...No, Cambadélis. No, Sarkozy. No, Hollande. "We" are not at war.

It is not my war, it is not our war. It is your war.

And once more, they are our dead. Just like Madrid
in 2004, London in 2005, Egypt two weeks ago,
Beirut this week.

And everywhere else you sow your terror.

Your wars, our dead.

Your war, no more.

*First published at
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Todd Chretien for socialistworker.org.*

FRANCE

The cruelty of imperialist wars results in the cruelty of terrorism

NPA-L'ANTICAPITALISTE (NPA-A) ·

The horrible attacks which took place in Paris on Friday evening, killing more than 120 people, causing dozens of casualties, this blind violence, provokes revolt and indignation. The NPA shares these feelings and expresses its solidarity with the victims and their close relations. This tragedy is even worse in that it has hit innocent victims, the murderous attacks were aimed at the population.

This contemptible cruelty in central Paris is an answer to the equally blind and even more fatal violence of the bombings perpetrated by French war-planes in Syria following the decisions of François Hollande and his government.

These strikes supposed to fight the Islamic State, the terrorist Jihadists, with the Russian intervention and bombings, in fact protect the regime responsible for the martyrdom of the Syrian people, the dictator Assad.

And there too the civil populations are the first victims, condemned to live under terror or to flee at the risk of their lives.

Imperialist cruelty and Islamist cruelty feed each other. And do so to control oil supplies.

In a pitiful intervention, Holland broke down and stammered some words about the Republic. He, as a warmonger, carries an enormous responsibility in this new tragedy asking for "trust". He has decreed a state of emergency throughout France, consider-

ing that the answer was to trample on fundamental freedoms. He has immediately been supported by Sarkozy. Thus, from now on, the political authorities can ban public meetings and control the press.

Once again, those responsible for this surge of barbarian violence are calling for national unity. They are trying to turn the dramatic situation to their advantage in order to choke off indignation and revolt. They have a ready-made scapegoat, Muslims. We reject any national unity with those responsible for wars, the bourgeoisie, Hollande, Sarkozy and Le Pen. We denounce the racism that the State vehicles in the name of alleged « values of the republic » when at the same time, in the guise of fight against terrorism, democratic rights are threatened. We demand the state of emergency be lifted.

The only response to wars and terrorism is the unity of workers and people, over and above their origins, their skin colour, their religions, across the borders, to fight together against those who want to silence them, to dominate them, and to do away with this capitalist system which generates cruelty.

To put an end to terrorism, it is necessary to put an end to the imperialist wars that aim to perpetuate the plundering of the wealth of peoples dominated by multinationals, to force the withdrawal of French troops from all countries where they are present, in particular in Syria, in Iraq, in Africa.

Montreuil,

November 14th, 2015

JAPAN

Anti-militarisation protests in Japan: An interview with Chie Matsumoto.

CHIE MATSUMOTO ·

What is the content of the new Japanese military legislation? Is it true that it is an historic change?

The legislation basically allows the Japanese military, which is a self-defense force, to join the collective force at times of war. Although it limits the capacity of the Self Defense Force (SDF) to providing logistical support to allied forces, it allows Japan to join the offensive forces outside of the country, which is unconstitutional, according to constitution experts.

The U.S.-drafted constitution restricted the Japanese military to be only a defensive force, and so yes, this is a historic change.

Which slogans were chanted during the demonstration on August 30 outside the Japanese Parliament? What are the main criticisms from those who took to the streets to protest? Why do you think there was such widespread participation in the event?

People protested outside of the Diet building against the security bills, which they call "the war legislation" because it leads Japan into war of aggression. They demanded that Prime Minister Abe strike the war legislation and step down.

They are against the security bills, but they are also angry about how the bills are (not) deliberated in a

democratic way. That's why they also chant, "Tell me what democracy look like," "This is what democracy looks like."

I think that there was the largest number of people gathering in protest ever since the 1960s demonstration against the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty because this is not just about the security bills. This movement is about taking democracy back in our hands.

From your point of view, why is the Japanese government approving this new and epochal Japanese military legislation?

The Japanese government is aware of the opposition. But more important than the majority opposition is the pressure from the U.S. government. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced and promised that he would pass the security bills in summer when he was invited to speak before the U.S. Congress. He did this before deliberation started in the Japanese parliament.

Do you think that the protests by the population in Japan will continue?

Yes. They are still going almost every day, every week.

October 5 2015

LeftEast

CATALONIA

The Catalan Parliament votes: complexities and contradictions

JOSEP MARÍA ANTENTAS ·

The strategic proposal of a constitutional process itself and unsubordinated, popular participation, has become increasingly stronger in the official independence roadmap , but imagining a constituent process with a popular base remains very unlikely while CDC runs the country. It is clear that CDC does not want a constituent process, unless it is to promote a neoliberal restoration. The same goes for the social proposals in the Appendix, which would mean nothing if there is not a change in the balance of forces in parliament. [2]

This weakness stems from a strategic weakness of the independence movement, which has been the demand to unplug the independence proposal from an explicit and specific citizen rescue plan against corruption, thus giving wings to the CDC and ensuring that a section of Catalan society remains on the fringes of the movement. To broaden the social basis of the break and in turn to try to put the CDC in a minority position, the movement must give strategic centrality to the constituent proposal, put forward a concrete rescue plan and leave open the end of the journey, combining this so that the perspectives of those who defend independence and who seek an institutional break do not divide.

The split of the rupturista left into two blocks has made it impossible to overtake the CDC and ERC

and make possible a new political majority that does not require CDC to go through a long and deep and even contradictory crisis. Trying to reestablish themselves by riding on the independence process, giving a reason for its project, but at the same time it is under strain from four factors: a confrontation it is poorly prepared to handle; it must deal with harassment from ongoing corruption scandals; ERC did not get caught and decided to stand independently in the elections December 20 elections; and it depends on the CUP in Parliament. Mas is a survivor, but walks on a tightrope. Without a doubt we must not vote for his investiture.

The position of Catalonia Yes We Can (CSQP – Catalunya sí que es pot) today has been very confused. It is very difficult to defend a constitutional process by voting against a statement that refers to it, and being imprisoned in a No bloc led by Ciudadanos, one of the main electoral opponents of CSQP which it should to look differentiate itself from as much as possible and not be obscured by its long shadow. Since September 27 CSQP has been absent politically, not seeking to influence debate and without putting clearly on the table a perspective towards a constituent process that influences the roadmap to sovereignty, which is not only propagandistic rhetoric to avoid close scrutiny. Mistakes like this have strategic consequences. Always.

PORTUGAL

An exchange of views on the situation in Portugal

CATHERINE SAMARY ·

Thoughts on Stathis Kouvelakis's text "From Greece, taking the risks into account: Some thoughts on the situation in Portugal"

"The risks are however immense and seem to me to outweigh by far the expected gains," says Stathis Kouvelakis. What are what he calls "the three ways of summing up" this opinion? (His text below.)

First thought?

The question of the debt is dodged – whereas the PS repeats that it wants to remain within the framework of the European commitments. ("it is just impossible to see how even a "relaxation" of austerity can take place without dealing head-on with the issue of the debt and the straitjacket of the eurozone, and it is just crazy to imagine for a second that the PSP is willing/prepared to do that - actually even the BE and the PCP are relatively cautious on these two issues".)

This is true. And it will be a major question. But:

a) the ratio of debt to GDP in Portugal is weaker than in Italy, close to that of Belgium and does not imply a current subordination the European mechanism of stability (EMS): there are more margins than for Greece; and it is necessary to see more closely what are the agreements and means of financing recommended to implement them: Stathis seems to affirm an "assessment of costs/benefit", without concrete evaluation of the gains for the population and the room to manoeuvre ...

b) Why not propose to all the European and Portuguese left to put back on the table the question raised by Tsipras, of a European conference about the debt, to thus loosen the grip of the bilateral relations with the Eurogroup: it is a major "lock" for the dominant policies and a subject

which requires acceptable and coherent "rules" for a Union, therefore the respect of principles. Let us discuss democratically, and on pluralist bases: in short let us seek a European politicization of the challenges of the debt, making possible a democratic challenge to the legitimacy of the pressures from the Eurogroup, shedding light on the mechanisms and criteria of tax and budgetary effectiveness, and what are the European common popular interests against the dominant "arguments" on the national debt;

c) This could also be prepared by a procedure of audit started in Portugal independently of the governmental agreements – launched by groups from the civil society.

Last remark on this same subject: neither the leadership of Syriza, nor its left (for opposite reasons that do not finish the debate) supported the work of the Committee for the Truth on the Greek Debt, and thus truly did not campaign around these challenges. A European campaign does not interest those who consider that there are no specifically European strategic and internationalist stakes.

This is in fact linked to the second point:

Second "thought"?

"The Greek experience has also shown that between full scale confrontation and capitulation there is no intermediate way".

Was that "shown"? And is it thus general? In other words does one need a European campaign for all countries to leave the EMU and the EU? There is no place for struggles for rights against or within the EU and the EMU?

And has that "been shown" simply by the Greek case alone? In other words, there weren't any other

possible policies than that of Tsipras – or leaving, despite all the debates on this subject?

In addition, would there be no more room for struggle in countries in a better relative situation than Greece? Was the Greek experiment the only and last – or the first attempt to carry out a national fight against austerity, in the name of the interests of the people in all the Union, in particular?

Third thought *The difficulty of the "red lines" - and logic "would you dare to reverse the left government"? - in Greece, or in Portugal?* ("It is conceivable to withdraw support if the government crosses some "red lines" - but experience shows that defining those "red lines" is far from being simple.")

This is an essential question. But in what has the example of Syriza, on this point too, exhausted the subject and "demonstrated" the absence of possible criteria and safeguards?

In the contribution that I attach, written for next issue of the review *Les Possibles* of the Scientific Council of Attac, I comment on this argument in particular – which is in my opinion essential for any political struggle apart from in a clearly revolutionary situation: what are the acceptable compromises? Who judges? On which criteria?

All betrayals are made (sincerely or not) in the name of the "lesser evil". One cannot face these difficult dilemmas by pre-existing recipes, outside a concrete examination of what the suggested compromises would bring, in their context and dynamics: do they improve the concrete situation of the population and give – or not – confidence in an alternative policy? The procedure to judge this is more important for transforming a failure into support for the future, than the choice itself. Let us hope that this will be the fundamental lesson learnt by the Portuguese comrades for deciding at each stage.

This itself implies that a judgment from outside – although not without interest – should at the very least be relativized.

The 3rd Memorandum accepted by Tsipras continues the austerity policy and breaks a great hope of resistance to austerity. This is the opposite situation to that opened by the 70 points of the agreement negotiated in Portugal: they are commitments to real breaks with the policies in operation in Portugal, opening new possibilities. The path will be strewn with obstacles, faced with difficult confrontations and choices which will arise rapidly. Nothing is guaranteed. But each battle can and must shake the legitimacy of the Eurogroup and the operation of the EMU if it is carried out in defence of fundamental human, social, political rights: this is the guiding principle to which all currencies and finance must be subordinated.

Thank you to the Portuguese comrades, for widening the new possibilities, from which we must still learn.

From Greece, taking the risks into account: Some thoughts on the situation in Portugal

I am very hesitant commenting on the recent developments in Portugal and I listened yesterday with a lot of attention the arguments of comrade Mariana Mortágua at the plenary session of the *Historical Materialism* conference. I also read the interview Francisco Louçã, the historical leading figure of the Left Bloc, gave to Ugo Palheta in the *Contretemps* website [1].

However, on the basis of the Greek experience, the lessons of which have now begun to be widely understood by the European radical Left, I feel I have some responsibility issuing a comradely warning to the comrades of the Portuguese radical Left (Left Bloc -BE- and PCP).

I understand the situation is far from simple for them. There is huge pressure from the electorate to "give a chance" to the Socialists to form a government and bring down the attempt to constitute a minority government of the Right, staged by Cavaco Silva and Passos Coelho with the full backing of the EU. It's clear that a socialist government dependent on the support of the radical Left and, at

least formally, committed to reverse some austerity measures, will be from the outset under the fire of both the EU and the domestic ruling class. In this context one could perhaps understand the tactics of "external" support to a socialist government on the basis of some common agreement which becomes void if violated by the socialists.

The risks are however immense and seem to me to outweigh by far the expected gains. There are three ways of summing this up.

1. The first is the idea that a party such as the PSP would be ready to confront the EU and the domestic bourgeoisie to implement some, even modest, anti-austerity measures seems to me a complete illusion. Even a party of the radical Left such as Syriza, in a country which has experienced social movements of a magnitude unknown in Portugal, proved utterly unable to pursue the confrontational approach that is necessary to get even the most minimal of "concessions". To put it very simply, it is just impossible to see how even a "relaxation" of austerity can take place without dealing head-on with the issue of the debt and the straitjacket of the eurozone, and it is just crazy to imagine for a second that the PSP is willing/prepared to do that (actually even the BE and the PCP are relatively cautious on these two issues).

2. Secondly, the Greek experience has also shown that between full scale confrontation and capitulation there is no no intermediate way. And this applies not to some kind of radical anticapitalist set of demands but to the very moderate programme on the basis of which Syriza won the January 2015 elections. Even the current Syriza government, which has signed up a horrendous Memorandum and is committed to its implementation, is totally unable to get the slightest concession from the EU on issues such as an ultra-minimal and incomplete protection for home repossession by the banks. The EU institutions will be even less inclined to be lenient with a PSP government supported by the BE and the PCP and they will most certainly behave in a way comparable to the blackmailing to which the first Syriza government was subjected.

3. Of course supporting a government without being part of it is less risky than full participation. It is conceivable to withdraw support if the government crosses some "red lines" (but experience shows that defining those "red lines" is far from being simple). In any case, it's quite likely that the PSP leadership will use the agreement with BE and the PCP the way Tsipras behaved vis-à-vis the left of his own party when he entered the downward spiral of concessions paving the way to surrender. That is constantly blackmailing it by saying "don't you dare overthrowing the leftwing government of this country". And his calculation proved right: he trapped Syriza's left until it was in way "too late", that is until the cost of withdrawing from the government became costly for the left opposition and quite manageable for him. The experience of Rifondazione Comunista "external support" to the first "centre-left" Prodi government (1996-1998), a support that was withdrawn after two years, also showed that a "junior partner" to the left has more to lose in such an exercise than the main "moderate left".

Concerning more specifically the BE, to which I feel very close, I think this move contradicts the lucidity with which these comrades drew the lessons from the Greek tragedy and changed significantly their position on the euro - a point emphasized in both interventions of Mariana and Francisco mentioned above as well as the great piece of Catarina Príncipe in *Jacobin* [2] published after the elections.

It's always a very sensitive issue to express disagreements with comrades giving the fight in another country but I fear that the Portuguese radical Left is entering a road that will end up dilapidating the precious political capital it has so painfully succeeded gaining these last years. However, the extent of the disaster suffered by the Greek people and the Left of my country, and my own personal responsibility in this outcome, oblige me however taking that risk.

Hoping of course, as I did when I was writing on Syriza in these last months, that I prove wrong.

Dixit et salvavi etc...

London, November 8, 2015

Source Facebook Stathis Kouvelakis.

PORTUGAL

What will happen after this weekend's agreement between the Socialists, the Left Bloc and the Communists?

FRANÇOISCO LOUÇÃ ·

Over the weekend, the Socialists and the Communists signed an agreement. Since the Left Bloc and the Socialists had already done likewise, there is, right now, a parliamentary majority to defeat the briefest government in the history of Portuguese democracy, bringing an end to the Passos Coelho and Paulo Portas saga. The outcome is fundamental as much as it is historical: after the horror of austerity, a new page is being turned.

Over the previous weeks, I have been quite critical of the time it took to close a deal and of its lack of audacity, because two separate agreements – even if they are basically the same – and three motions for rejection to take down the government mean a choice was made not to come up with a strong statement. But now that an agreement has been reached and it is public, it's time to focus on its contents and durability, which I shall discuss from the only point of view that matters (to me): how to answer to the social crises exacerbated by the torment of austerity.

I will start with the agreement's contents.

The three conditions mentioned by Catarina in her television debate with Costa were, even before the electoral campaign, the starting point for this weekend's agreement: the SP must drop the reduction of the Single Social Tax paid by the employers, as well as the Single Social Tax for workers whose pensions have been cut; forget the so-called "conciliatory lay-offs" and unfreeze pensions. Faced with electoral results, which left the right wing with no majority, the SP accepted these conditions. And there were

plenty of socialists sighting in relief, for they did not support those three ideas put forward by their own party.

But the agreements that have now been made public go further than that – much further than that, actually. They did come up with an emergency response embodying emergency measures, but did go the extra mile, inasmuch as some of them could become longstanding alternative answers to austerity if there is a will to do so.

The agreements stipulate the end of privatisations – there will be no more privatisations. They also cancel the recent processes of handing the urban public transports of Lisbon and Oporto to private companies. They protect water as an essential public asset.

As for labor incomes, which affects millions of workers, public sector wages will be fully restored (in 2016), while wages in the private sector will benefit (those over 600€ due to a reduction in the surcharge, which will be abolished in 2017; the ones bellow 600€ because of a decrease in social security contributions, with no future impact on pensions nor the sustainability of the social security). Four public holidays will be restored. Bearing in mind that losing them meant workers that to work more hours for the same wages, all workers will be positively affected – all 4,5 million of them.

All pensioners will be better-off (pensions bellow 600€ will be unfrozen and shall see a small recuperation, while those above 600€ will no longer have to pay the IRS surcharge), and that means two million people will be better-off. In contrast, the

right wing had vowed to go ahead with a 4000 thousand euros cut in Social Security (1600 millions by freezing pensions, plus 2400 in 600 million a year in benefit cuts, as promised to Brussels). The difference is abyssal.

New fiscal rules will apply: IRS progressivity is restored with more tax brackets; the familiar quotient, beneficial for wealthier families, is replaced by an IRS deduction per child; there is a limit clause for rises in Municipal Property Tax (it cannot exceed 75€ per year) and Corporate Income Tax reductions will come to a halt; the deadline to report company losses will be reduced to five years, instead of the twelve, and new rules will curb fiscal benefits from dividends. Finally, VAT in restaurants will return to 13%.

To fight poverty, the minimum wage will rise to 557€ on January 1st, 2017, and to 600€ by the end of the mandate. Poor families will be entitled to reduced electricity fares. Such measures will benefit one million people.

Measures shall be adopted to make sure false autonomous workers are provided with proper contracts; collective bargaining shall be reinstated; the special mobility regime for public workers, which lead to lay-offs, will be cancelled.

Attachment orders on people's homes due to public liabilities will no longer be allowed. Mortgage debts will from now on be settled whenever there is dation in payment (that is, the bank keeps the house), if there is no alternative in terms of new deadlines and interest rates.

The list of measures on health and education includes reducing NHS user charges and a textbook exchange mechanism.

The Socialist Party withdrew its electoral law proposal, which included single member constituencies (the "first to pass the post" system used in the UK).

Finally, a parliamentary cooperation proceedings have been agreed, with multiple meetings between the parties, and including setting up committees on

external debt sustainability and the future of social security. These committees shall write trimestral reports.

What is thus achieved is stability in people's lives, relief for pension holders, wage recovery, jobs protection and more fiscal justice. On the other hand, such an increase on aggregate demand will cause an immediate positive economic reaction.

What is then missing?

The agreements lack structural solutions for investment and on how to manage and improve both external and income accounts. Only debt restructuring will enable it; otherwise, there will be no leeway to resist external pressures and launch employment. It will take investment and promoting the productive capacity, and the State will have to play a strategic pivotal role in reacting to the protracted recession we have been dealing with.

Besides, we cannot yet foresee what the conditions imposed by Brussels, Berlin or the ECB will be, but we know they won't be favourable. We must keep in mind the statement issued by the European Commission only two days after the elections, which demanded new measures on social security – the subject will remain a matter of dispute. And we must also keep in mind how rating agencies have been threatening the Portuguese Republic. Lastly, the Novo Banco issue [the bank that was created after the bankruptcy of BES and that the government has been trying to sell, unsuccessfully] will blow up before the summer, bringing about wither important losses to the budget balance, demands for recapitalisation or a new bank resolution process, which must be carried out in accordance with technical demands that protect the public welfare and cut down on external debt.

These are the problems that will be knocking on our doorstep over the next months and years. The new majority is quite aware of it, because there is a safeguard clause guaranteeing that no budgetary unforeseen event or situation will lead to higher taxes on labor or lower wages and pensions. The

time has surely come to start devising the answers to such unforeseen events and situations, because

they will be here before the new Budget.

Source: Esquerda.net.

PUERTO RICO

U.S. Workers & Puerto Rico's Crisis

 RAFAEL BERNABE ·

More often than not, the island is offered as a yet another lesson on the consequences of "big government" and of too generous social provisions. Other factors are rarely mentioned — such as the tax privileges of U.S. corporations, or the potential consequences for working people of the austerity measures under consideration.

Working people in the United States need their own analysis of Puerto Rico's crisis, not the least because the austerity measures under discussion here are similar to those ruling sectors would like to impose there. Our fight in Puerto Rico and the United States should be a joint struggle.

Here we will consider four elements: structure, policy, conjuncture and alternatives. By structure we refer to long standing features of Puerto Rico's economy, which are often ignored in discussions about the present crisis. Policy refers to the measures that the Puerto Rican government has adopted in recent decades to promote economic growth, above all the policy of tax exemption.

Conjuncture refers to the present situation, which combines economic stagnation and debt crisis. Alternatives refer to the different proposals put forth by creditors, the Puerto Rican government and Puerto Rico's progressive organizations.

Structure: Colonial Domination

Through the different epochs into which we may divide Puerto Rico's development since the onset of U.S. rule in 1898 some features have remained constant. [1]

First, since 1900 Puerto Rico's economy has been shaped by the priorities and preferences of U.S.

capital. Such was the case before WWII, when sugar production was the main industry, during the expansion of light-manufacturing from the 1940s to the 1970s, and during the following period, characterized by capital intensive manufacturing (pharmaceuticals, for example).

While specializing in the production for export, largely controlled by U.S. capital, the island has imported most of the consumer goods needed for its reproduction. This one-sidedness is the distinctive second feature of Puerto Rico's colonial economy. An example of this is the destruction of Puerto Rico's agriculture, to the point that we now import more than 85% of our food.

Third, an additional consequence of the domination of Puerto Rico's economy by U.S. capital has been the constant outflow of a significant portion of the income generated in Puerto Rico. At present, around \$35 billion leave every year, in the form of payments to external investors. This is around 35% of Puerto Rico's Gross Domestic Product.

Needless to say, this capital is not reinvested in Puerto Rico, leading to a fourth feature of its economy since 1898: Puerto Rico's dependent economy has never been able to provide sufficient employment for its workforce.

At present, Puerto Rico has a 40% labor participation rate. The official unemployment rate is 14%. Even between 1950 and 1964, i.e. during the period of rapid postwar growth, the number of jobs fell. Manufacturing was not able to compensate for the jobs lost in agriculture.

Yet the unemployment rate remained fairly constant due to a fifth feature of Puerto Rico's evolution: given the lack of employment, mass migration has been a feature of Puerto Rican life since the early 20th century. This was the case in the 1910s

and 1920s, when the first Puerto Rican colonia took shape in New York, as well as in the mass migration of the 1950s and during the last decade.

Mass unemployment also conspires against higher wages, which deepens economic inequality and insures high levels of poverty. This helps explain the sixth feature: the persistence of the wide gap in living standards between Puerto Rico and the U.S. mainland.

Puerto Rico's per capita income is a third of the U.S. figure. It is half the per capita income of the poorest state. Around 45% of the people in Puerto Rico live under the poverty level. The corresponding figure in the mainland is 15%.

The present crisis has intensified these problems, but it did not create them. It should be the occasion for addressing the problems as such, not only their intensification.

Policy: Corporations Benefit

The attraction of U.S. investors has been the main feature of the official economic policy in Puerto Rico. In turn, since 1947 tax exemption has been one of the main instruments for attracting foreign investors.

Exemption from both federal and Puerto Rico taxes was indeed an attractive proposition for many U.S. corporations. Yet one leg of this two-legged policy disappeared as of 2006: exemption from federal taxation has been phased out. This fact, combined with the global economic recession, has led to a shrinkage of Puerto Rico's manufacturing sector, where jobs have fallen by half in the last 20 years (from close to 170,000 to less than 80,000).

We are thus faced with a paradox: a stagnant economy that nevertheless generates considerable profits for U.S. corporations. As indicated, on the average about \$35 billion leave the island every year as earnings of U.S. multinationals. This massive outflow lies at the root of both the present stagnation and the growing debt.

In other words, the Puerto Rican government's unwillingness to reconsider the tax privileges of U.S. corporations has been the key factor perpetuating the present recession and pushing toward increased and ultimately unsustainable borrowing.

Conjuncture: Debt and Austerity

As government revenues fell, successive administrations applied austerity measures such as new sales taxes (IVU) in 2006, mass firing of public employees (law 7) in 2009, attack on pensions and public sector workers (law 66), plus further sales taxes (gasoline) in 2014 and increased IVU in 2015.

This was combined with increased public debt. Puerto Rico's total public debt (including the central government and public corporations) grew 64% between 2006 and 2014, from \$43 to \$73 billion. Servicing the growing debt demands an increasing portion of the public budget.

On June 29, 2015 the Governor of Puerto Rico admitted that Puerto Rico's debt is "unpayable," as he put it. In other words, paying it in the terms it was originally contracted would impose unacceptable human sacrifices and prevent the government from financing initiatives needed to revive the economy.

This admission is, in itself, a step forward: the Partido del Pueblo Trabajador (PPT, Working Peoples Party) has been arguing as much since February 2014. Yet the Governor's new position on the need for debt restructuring has not led to the determined campaign required to confront the predictable resistance of creditors and Wall Street interests. Worse: trying to placate the latter, the government seeks to combine debt restructuring with harsher austerity measures, contained in its Fiscal Adjustment Plan, made public on September 9.

Alternatives: Creditors vs. Reconstruction

The perspective of Puerto Rico's creditors has been expressed most openly in "For Puerto Rico There is a Better Way," a report commissioned by the Ad Hoc group, which includes close to 40 investment funds that hold part of Puerto Rico's debt.

The document argues that Puerto Rico's public debt should not be renegotiated. It should be paid in full. To enable such payments it proposes closing schools, reducing public employment, lowering salaries and pension benefits of government employees, privatizing government agencies, selling off state properties, and limiting public health insurance coverage, among other measures.

Such austerity programs have been enacted in many countries, as part of the neoliberal policies dominant since the 1980s. Their results have been so disastrous, both socially and in terms of generating economic growth, that even enlightened sectors of the established economic profession have come out against them.

Joseph E. Stiglitz, Nobel Prize winner and former chief economist at the World Bank has denounced the myopic approach of the creditors. He warns:

"Creditors, focusing narrowly and short-sightedly on repayment, force a cutback in government expenditures (austerity), and the combination of financial constraints and decreases in private and public demand bring on a major recession or depression. They wrongly reason that if the country is spending less on itself it has more to spend on others — to repay its debts. But they forget the large multipliers that prevail at such times: the cutbacks in expenditure decrease GDP and tax revenues. The underutilization of the country's resources makes it more difficult for it to fulfill its debt obligation — the austerity policies are normally counterproductive even from the creditors' perspective."

Unfortunately, creditors have more often than not imposed their narrow policies, with dire consequences. They do so through the threat of both market and legal retaliation (denial of further credits and litigation to collect owed payments).

But according to Stiglitz, the capacity of creditors to impose their terms does not only block the efficient resolution of debt crises when they arise — it promotes their emergence to begin with. Creditors, confident that they will recuperate their investment

(through litigation if necessary), lend when they should be more cautious.

Such was the case with the \$3.5 billion Puerto Rico bond issue in March 2014, just after the government's credit rating had been degraded to speculative or junk level. Governments, conscious of the difficulties and the political cost of seeking debt restructuration, prefer to borrow more and pass the problem to a future administration. This is what successive administrations did in Puerto Rico.

In order to do so, argues Stiglitz, governments agree to ever higher interest payments and further concessions, such as the litigation of any disputes in U.S. courts. This is what happened in Puerto Rico.

Finally, the foreseeable success of creditors in the courts invites the intervention of vulture funds. They buy distressed bonds at a discount price and seek payment at their nominal value; their business depends on debt renegotiation failing or being insufficient. This is also the situation in Puerto Rico where at least 25%, and perhaps as much as 50% of the debt has been acquired by hedge and vulture funds.

In Puerto Rico, this debt-promoting machine had an additional lever: the exemption of its bonds anywhere in the United States from local, state and federal taxes.

Such are the guilty parties in our drama: a government unwilling to reconsider a failed tax exemption policy, investors eager to acquire triply tax-exempt bonds, intermediaries happy to collect the fees for issuing them, and a creditor-friendly framework that promotes over indebtedness.

Escaping Disaster: A Road Forward

According to Stiglitz, overly indebted countries do not need short-term temporary relief, nor regressive austerity measures, but rather measures that allow them to reconstruct their economies. Economies should not be subordinated to the debt;

on the contrary, debt payments should be subordinated to the needs of economic rehabilitation.

In Puerto Rico this must include a reconsideration of the tax exemption policy mentioned above, which allows around \$35 billion in profits to leave the island every year while not generating economic growth. Yet the government insists in combining its plea for debt restructuring with both unjust and regressive austerity measures and a return to the pre-1996 combined local and federal tax exemption policy. In other words, instead of revising its reliance on tax exemption it seeks to revive it. [2]

The proposed labor "reforms" include redefining overtime in order to reduce compensations for it, weakening seniority rights, making firings easier and reducing severance pay, excluding young workers (under age 25) from increases in the federal minimum wage, eroding the right to an end-of-the-year bonus and eliminating it for young workers, and extending probation periods from 90 days to one year.

Through attrition, the plan also seeks to reduce government employment by 2% every year and extends to 2020 the suspension of labor rights and many contract dispositions, decreed in 2014 through Law 66. The plan also includes the operation of more government services as Public Private Partnerships as well as the privatization of the generation of electricity.

The mix of limited debt relief, extended corporate tax exemptions and/or reductions and austerity measures can only result in extended recession and perpetuation of the present economic structure characterized by the extraction of profits, high unemployment and lack of development funds.

Even debt renegotiation is uncertain. The government is seeking a voluntary agreement with bondholders, which is not likely. It also hopes that Congress will approve legislation extending Chapter 9 of the U.S. bankruptcy code to Puerto Rico, thus allowing its public corporations to file for bankruptcy under federal legislation (as Detroit has done).

So far the bills pending in Congress show little promise. What will the government do if bondholders fail to negotiate or if Congress does not act? Nobody knows. There seems to be no Plan B.

If Congress does act, Puerto Rico's situation would be in the hands of a federal judge. In that case, how will the government act to insure that the judge's decisions are beneficial to Puerto Rico? This is also unknown.

The PPT has put forward a five-point program for escaping the disaster, including:

- revision of the tax exemption policy, as an emergency revenue measure and as part of a larger shift in economic strategy
- true renegotiation of the debt to prioritize fairness and economic efficiency, a process that must include, first, a citizens' audit of the debt in order to determine which parts of it are illegal or illegitimate and to determine who exactly owns it and under what conditions it was acquired, as well as secondly, a willingness to unilaterally suspend payments when appropriate.
- democratic and participatory public sector reform that transforms how services are provided and resources are used (ending both corruption and mismanagement).
- a program of economic reconstruction that should emphasize internal initiatives (public, cooperative, private) that enhance workers' rights and participation, distribute wealth more equally, and reinvest in the island the surpluses or profits generated.
- federal support and financing for such a project, which would also be funded through tax and debt measures mentioned above.

Fifteen years ago, mass mobilizations and activism in the island and the United States forced the U.S. Navy out of Vieques (an island the U.S. military used as a base for target practice). With or without Chapter 9, similar actions are needed if bondholders, the courts, Congress and the White House are going to respect Puerto Rico's needs. Yet Puerto

Rico's government is intent on attacking, not mobilizing Puerto Rico's working people.

Such a project demands an expansion of the public sector, economic planning at the expense of the destructive imperatives of capitalist competition, and placing social well-being over private profits, that is to say, the very opposite of the neoliberal policies dominant since the 1980s.

This is not a local agenda. Broadly speaking, this must also be the agenda of working people in the United States, who are suffering the consequences

of several decades of pro-business policies promoted by both dominant political parties. All the more reason, then, to combine the agendas of progressive movements in Puerto Rico and the United States.

The fact that these movements are still minority forces in both the United States and Puerto Rico makes it all the more urgent that those seeking to build them join forces and collaborate as effectively as possible. [3]

Against the Current

PORTUGAL

Left Bloc closes negotiations with the Socialist Party

ESQUERDA.NET ·

In a recent interview, Catarina Martins argued that a political relevant event has taken place at the last Portuguese elections: the right wing lost its parliamentary majority, although it is "having some trouble in coming to terms with it." According to Catarina, negotiations with the socialists were complex, but their essential goal was reached: "to put an end to the cycle of impoverishment the country was going through".

"We know that it is necessary to do much more than what the Socialist Party is willing to do"

Catarina Martins added that the Left Bloc is quite different from the Socialist Party. "We think that in order to end austerity and redistribute income in favor of those living off their work it is necessary to do much more than what the Socialist Party is willing to do. For example, we believe debt restructuring is needed in order to enable such income redistribution and protect the country", stated Catarina. "I am quite sure that those who voted for the Left Bloc and the Communist Party, and who were one

million people, are the ones to be held responsible for this different governmental solution. It is thanks to them we are today entitled to hope for a government that won't bring about more impoverishment throughout next year".

It was during the campaign, in her debate with the leader of the Socialist Party, António Costa, that Catarina Martins announced that the Left Bloc was willing to reach some sort of agreement with the socialists, in case they promised to stop the impoverishment, protect the welfare state and bring the privatisation process to an end. Catarina thus concludes that "those who voted for us were quite aware of what was in our program and what agreement we were willing to sign".

The agreement reached with the Socialist Party, which will allow them to go into government, was endorsed by Left Bloc's Political Committee. The document summarises the program and specifies the contents that should guide the next government, supported in Parliament by a left-wing majority.

7 November 2015,

Source Esquerda.net.

PORTUGAL

Left-wing agreement increases incomes and ends privatisations

ESQUERDA.NET ·

Following negotiations with Left Bloc and the Communist Party, the Socialist Party added over 70 measures to its government programme, including restoring wages and pensions to pre-cut levels. Pensions' values will be reinstated in January, whereas public sector workers will see their wages increased every three months throughout 2016, until their full wages are handed back.

Minimum wage will rise to 530€ in 2016, 557€ in 2017, and 600€ by 2019. Workers whose income falls below the poverty threshold will be entitled to a new Annual Wage Complement.

The agreement also establishes that Child Benefit, the Solidarity Supplement for the Elderly and the Guaranteed Minimum Income will return to 2011 levels. The same applies to public companies' workers whose pensions were subjected to cuts.

Fighting precarity and protecting collective bargaining

A new workgroup will be established, aimed at coming up with proposals to be included in a "National Program Against Precarity". The Authority for the Working Conditions' resources will be increased so that it can control common abuses, such as hiring people as false autonomous workers and creating fake internships. The agreement will also promote collective bargaining when hiring workers.

To fight the precarity affecting researchers working in Portugal, and their subsequent "forced emigration", post-doctorate scholarships will be replaced with contracts, granting researchers the social protection they lack right now.

Public workers' careers' development will be restored. Once a balance in terms of wages expenditure is ensured, the 35 hours working week will be reinstated and the public sector will be allowed to hire again.

Further support for SMEs and Social Security protection to autonomous workers

Single Social Tax paid by workers who earn up to 600€ will be reduced up to 4%. This will mean a 7,5 to 9 euros increase for workers with a gross monthly wage between 505 and 600€.

In order to finance the social security system, the "excessive rotation of workers" will be penalised, by means of a new tax on companies that rely on precarious contracts to hire. Companies with larger profits combined with smaller workforces will also be subjected to a new tax.

Autonomous workers, who nowadays pay a monthly social security fee based on a fixed rate (even if they have no income whatsoever), will have their social security contributions estimated according to their income in previous months instead.

Changes in taxes and penalties, public holidays restored and the end of privatisations

Public holidays celebrating the Republic and Independence will be restored in 2016, for such decision rests solely on the government; the remaining religious holidays, also abolished by the right-wing government, should follow, but only after negotiating with the Catholic Church.

Regarding fiscal reform, the number of IRS tax brackets will be increased, to ensure more progressivity. The IRS surcharge shall be totally cancelled

by 2017, and cut in half in 2016. The familiar quotient created by the right-wing coalition government will be replaced by a deduction per child. A safeguard clause will be applied to a predicted increase in Municipal Property Tax: it cannot exceed 75 euros per year in low value privately owned property.

As far as VAT goes, the biggest change was predictable: the return to 13% tax in restaurants. The Socialist Party did not agree to reduce electricity VAT to 6%, as proposed by Left Bloc; however, the agreement comprises an electricity social fare for 500 thousand families with low incomes.

Indebted families will be protected from attachment orders on their homes. Additionally, tax enforcement proceedings will be prohibited whenever the amounts in debt are lower than the home equity value. Flexible mechanisms to facilitate agreement on instalment plans will be provided for those with outstanding fiscal or social security debts.

Ongoing privatisations of public transportation companies in Lisbon and Oporto will be cancelled, as well water companies mergers implemented against the will of municipalities. The Socialist Party hence agrees on not issuing any new concessions or privatisations of public companies.

Textbook exchange mechanism and reduction in NHS user charges

In order to achieve gradual free access to resources required for attendance of public schools (families are forced to spend huge amounts of money every year in new textbooks), a mechanism for book "acquisition and return" shall be put in place. Smaller class sizes will be a target for the new government, as well as universal pre-school provision.

More university degrees in health care will be available; moreover, patients referred to hospital emergency departments by the telephone health advisory service, family doctor or nurse, or other pre hospital emergency service will not be charged.

Lastly, existing public-private partnerships will be subjected to an external independent evaluation. The quota for generic drugs prescription will increase to 30%. Reimbursement rules for medicine purchased by chronically ill patients outside hospitals will be reviewed, and the new government vows to employ all means necessary to reduce waiting time in NHS hospitals.

Source Esquerda.net.

TURKEY

Nationalism and War Mongering Won the Election

BERTIL VIDET ·

Turkey:

by Bertil Videt

It did not improve the mood of the left-wing activists to see the Justice and Development Party (AKP) obtaining forty-nine percent of the votes and an absolute majority in the parliament, giving it the ability to run a single-party majority government. This was exactly the mandate the omnipresent President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan wanted with this snap election, which basically is a re-run of the inconclusive elections in June. Erdoğan's AKP got the majority needed to begin down the path of introducing a presidential system, which will make the post of president much more powerful *de jure*, something Erdoğan has already accomplished *de facto*. While the AKP does not have enough seats on its own to call a constitutional referendum (which would have required 330 seats), let alone pass constitutional changes to adopt a presidential system directly (which would have required 367 seats, or two thirds of the 550 seat parliament), securing a majority gets them closer. Indeed, one of Erdoğan's first responses to the electoral result was to call on the other parties to join the AKP on the path to constitutional revision.

Return to Civil War

Several factors can explain the impressive victory of the AKP, contradicting opinion polls, which all forecast a result very similar to that of June. As I spent election day traveling around Erzurum province and visiting polling stations, it became clear that this was not a fair election or a fair campaign. In many ways, Turkey's situation has deteriorated dramatically in the few months since the last election. The peace process between the Turkish state and the PKK has collapsed, and the Kurdish-dominated southeast of the country has seen a return of

the too familiar scenes of civil war that raged through the region throughout the 1990's. Scores of civilians have been killed during day-long curfews in Kurdish towns and "anti-terror" bomb raids in the Southeast.

Erdoğan as Safe Bet in Chaotic Times

Left-wing and Kurdish forces, in particular the HDP, have been subject to violent attacks throughout the country. A common trait from the many attacks on HDP offices and businesses belonging to Kurds or leftists is that the authorities hardly ever intervened to stop the mobs. The HDP's Erzurum office was filled with election materials, as the party had decided it would be too dangerous to distribute them. This wave of violence culminated with double suicide bombs that killed over one hundred participants in a peace rally called by the HDP and trade unions in Ankara on 10 October. No perpetrators have been caught, and among Kurdish and left-wing activists, most people believe that the state is involved in these murderous acts. The AKP has used this atmosphere to stir up nationalist sentiment and demonize the HDP. It seems that Erdoğan won his gamble of appearing as the strong man, and the safe bet, in times of war and uncertainty. The hardened nationalist rhetoric of the AKP attracted many votes from the far right Nationalist Action Party (MHP), which saw its vote share decline from sixteen percent to twelve percent. Analysts and Turkish opposition figures accuse Erdoğan of purposefully creating a situation of conflict and instability specifically to be able to make the case for a strong leader—himself.

Arrests and Threats

The attacks on the HDP and the pressure exerted against their supporters have been harsh. Many of

the party's leading members and activists have been arrested in the run-up to the election. In Erzurum, one of their six candidates is imprisoned on charges of supporting a terrorist organization. Twenty-two HDP mayors have been removed from office and another twenty have been arrested this year.

The HDP office in Erzurum was hectic in the early morning of election day. Many of the party's election officials called to cancel, and party officials called members who had not shown up at the polling stations they were assigned to. It turned out that people simply did not dare to show up as election officials representing the HDP. Many had been threatened with violence and others reported that they feared losing their jobs in the public sector.

Reports of Election Irregularities

Reports of problems and irregularities came in throughout election day, where police and military were heavily present in Kurdish dominated areas. Danish politician and election observer Serdal Benli was told by police that he would get arrested if he did not immediately stop observing the election process. I myself was expelled from the vote count, which officially is open to the public, in a remote Kurdish village. The chairperson of the polling station said that military police had been there and had told her not to let outsiders in, and she simply did not dare not to comply. Mysteriously, this village went from being purely HDP in June to purely AKP this time. The local HDP candidate, Zahir Uzun, was watching the count and confirmed in disbelief that all votes indeed had gone to the AKP. He reckons that it either is a matter of vote-buying or that the villagers had been threatened. Election officials, who preferred to remain unnamed, in another nearby village were also flabbergasted by a huge drift in votes from the HDP to the AKP. Despite not having any hard proof, they were convinced that the AKP had bought the votes.

In another HDP stronghold, the Be?iri district of Batman province, the official results announced

that the AKP had received fifty-nine percent of the votes. But photos posted on Twitter of the results of the vote count in the district showed a clear victory to the HDP.

Many irregularities have been reported from election day. But so far, reports of large-scale vote rigging are limited. This is despite fears that were confirmed by a number of Tweets from notorious AKP whistle-blower Fuat Avni, who exposed detailed AKP plans to rig the election.

Movement of All Progressive Forces Gives Hope

In terms of fairness, the biggest problems probably relate to the campaign, rather than the election itself. "This campaign was unfair and characterized by too much violence and fear," said Andreas Gross, the head of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's [OSCE] elections observer mission. In its preliminary findings from the election, the OSCE lists a number of problems related to violence, arrests, and media freedom. The co-leaders of the HDP have said that the election campaign was not fair, as they were unable to lead a campaign due to the ongoing violence.

The big question is what is next in Turkish politics. What will the effects of the elections be for Turkish democracy, for the stalled peace process, and for the country's minorities?

A BBC analysis suggests that the AKP might use its comfortable majority to steer the country towards a more stable path and try to revive the peace process with the Kurds. This would, however, require the party to break with its populist rhetoric, which has stirred up nationalist sentiment in broad parts of the Turkish population. The immediate signals from Erdo?an were hardly conciliatory. The pro-government Daily Sabah quoted him as saying that the election sent a message to the PKK that "violence, threats, and bloodshed cannot coexist with democracy and the rule of law." With this short statement, the president managed both to imply that the PKK was taking part in the elections and

that they bear principal responsibility for recent bloodshed.

This election is another confirmation that Turkey, with its controversial president at its head, remains a deeply polarized nation, divided in two equally big camps. With the HDP's repeated success in surpassing the high ten-percent threshold, a legacy from the 1982 military coup, the party might be able to establish itself as a stable force in Turkish politics. The difference from previous pro-Kurdish

parties is that the HDP manages to unite with left-wing progressive forces, feminists, LGBT activists, and others on the left. If the HDP can continue to build a movement uniting the different peoples of Turkey and translating this into successful parliamentary politics, then there might be a hope for a better Turkey.

Nov 04 2015

jadaliyya

MIGRATION

Why We Need Open Borders

TERESA HAYTER ·

In Britain, a petition in the Independent that urged the government to take in more refugees received more than 370,000 signatures. The people of Austria and Germany have provided an overwhelmingly generous reception. The mayor of Rosans, a small village in southeast France, has offered two public-sector flats to Syrian refugees. In Oxford, an unprecedented 2,000-person demonstration welcomed refugees.

Pope Francis, as well as government officials and voluntary associations, are proposing that religious or local communities aid the refugees; the Pope has said those who close their doors need to ask for God's forgiveness. A vast fund of goodwill toward refugees exists in many rich European countries, even though their mainstream politicians appear to believe the only way to win elections is to appease racists and claim to be tough on immigrants.

Perhaps more people will now recognize that their governments and ruling elites bear a heavy responsibility for creating conditions that force people to flee.

They do so in direct and indirect ways. Not long ago, the great majority of people who claimed asylum in Britain were from four countries bombed or invaded by the US, Britain, and their allies: Iraq, Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, and Somalia. Afghanis and Iraqis are still fleeing in large numbers from the terrible aftermath of Western invasions.

In other cases, the connections between the policies of rich Western governments and the refugee crisis are not so direct. They have their origins in a long history of imperialism. As young Asians in West London say: "We are here, because you were there."

The now-rich countries of Western Europe have since the sixteenth century plundered the wealth of the rest of the world. They divided communities by drawing lines on maps. Nowadays, rich nations are using their economic strength, and the leverage provided by foreign aid, to impose policies that protect the rich — foreign and local — and their banks and private investors, while creating inequality and hurting the poor.

The rich countries' agencies, the World Bank and the IMF, have long imposed neoliberal policies on the countries they lent to, demanding austerity, cuts in public expenditures, and privatization, much of it to raise money to service foreign debt.

To promote their poverty-creating policies, Western countries systematically support oppressive governments. They attack other governments, including elected governments that attempt to introduce reforms, redistribute wealth, and resist foreign exploitation. Often, this has meant support for right-wing coups or military intervention. The West sells arms to such regimes, or makes loans or even gifts of weapons. The arms trade has become a major industry.

These rich countries continue to exploit the wealth and resources of the rest of the world. Notoriously, their demands for oil have been one reason for interventions in the Middle East and elsewhere. The need for coltan, an ore used in mobile phones and games consoles, has fueled conflict in eastern Congo, where millions have died.

In Senegal, European commercial fishing fleets encroach on traditional fishing waters, thus destroying much of the livelihood of Senegalese fishermen, who resort to hiring out their boats to transport refugees to the Canary Islands.

Elsewhere in Africa, small farmers are evicted from their land for corporate plantations to export vegetables for Western markets. Climate change, as a result of elite consumption in the West and the apparently irresistible pressures of the fuel lobby, is gradually increasing desertification and other problems for the survival of rural populations.

Currently, the world is experiencing what has been described as the biggest movement of refugees since World War II. For many, this is a phenomenon that must be stopped, not because of the suffering of refugees, but because of the burden they supposedly impose on host countries.

The majority of refugees currently entering, or trying to enter, Europe are Syrian. The crisis in Syria has been exceptionally severe. During the last four years, nearly half of Syria's 22 million people have migrated abroad, been internally displaced, or been killed.

For its part, the West has done much to fuel the growth of Islamic fundamentalism, and of ISIS in particular, both of which have now intensified the horrors of war in Syria. Fundamentalist groups, including the founders of Al-Qaeda, have in the past received support, funds, and arms from the US and Britain, as a counterweight to perceived threats from the Left.

The denial by former Prime Minister Tony Blair that the invasion of Iraq, support for the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and the racism and violence toward Muslim immigrants in Britain (including their segregation and denial of access to housing and schools) have had anything to do with the rise of fundamentalism is clearly untenable.

The view of many on the Right in British politics is that the "refugee crisis" can only be resolved by "ending the war in Syria," by which they may imply military intervention. But the lesson of military interventions by the West must be that intervention creates more problems — not merely death, disorder, and chaos, but also anger and alienation among Muslims around the world.

The further prescription of the Right for "stemming the flow of migrants at its source" is an increase in what is euphemistically called foreign aid. In West Africa, French authorities have called this *co-développement*; aid is conditional on African governments taking action to prevent citizens from emigrating (despite the fact that blocking emigration is barred under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). In Libya and other North African countries, governments are paid to build detention centers and otherwise prevent migrants from moving further north.

In any case, foreign aid in its traditional form has arguably done more to create poverty than alleviate it. It is used to promote the interests of foreign firms, sometimes to support projects that displace local people, and above all to force governments to cut spending to service foreign debts. Unless aid radically changes, on balance it does more harm than good.

The remittances migrants send home — money they save from usually badly paid jobs — not only exceed foreign aid by two or three times, but are also superior: they come without conditions, they go straight to those who need it, and they do not have to be repaid.

The Solution

If Western governments desired to reduce the number of people trying to find safety in Europe, and the suffering that results from such attempts, they would refrain from invading other countries, from impoverishing their peoples, from providing arms to repressive regimes that collaborate with the West, from requiring neoliberal policies that create inequality and poverty, and from destroying the world by their consumption of fossil fuels.

They could also abolish immigration controls. Immigration controls are explicable only by racism. Governments maintain they must be tough on immigrants to combat racism, but in reality the controls feed it. They legitimate the arguments of the

racists, making it appear that the only way to win votes is by appeasing them.

But the new and massive support for refugees in Europe shows this is not the case. Many have an exaggerated and false view, fed by both politicians and the tabloids of the number of immigrants, of their criminality, of their effect on jobs and wages. Abolishing controls, and acknowledging that they lead to suffering among fellow human beings, would be one good way of countering racism and encouraging a politics of solidarity in its place.

Ending controls would no doubt lead to some increases in migration. There might also continue to be surges in the number of refugees, and a continuing need for far greater levels of compassion than currently exist. But abolition would not mean millions would move to Europe or North America; few people choose to leave their families and communities for an uncertain future.

Migrants come because there are jobs. Refugees come because they are desperate to flee war, oppression, and poverty. Many would return if they were free to come and go, but they are trapped. In Britain, with the immigration controls of 1962, and in the US, as the Mexican border is made increasingly hard to cross, migrants must settle permanently and bring their families.

Abolishing controls should not be an economic decision, but the reality is that refugees and migrants add to a country's prosperity and public finances. Immigration suits not just corporate interests.

Most research, including the government's own, has shown that immigration leads to increased employment and higher wages. Any threat migrants may pose to the wages and jobs of natives is based on the precariousness created by immigration controls and the threat of deportation, and is in any case likely to be temporary.

Even Migration Watch in Britain, an organization with connections to the eugenics movement, recognizes that immigration increases general prosperity and incomes per head.

The problem with immigration, Migration Watch and others say, is not an economic problem but a problem of "social cohesion" — the preservation of the purity of the white race, whatever that is.

Similar conclusions were officially reached before controls against immigrants from former British colonies were introduced in 1962. Official government reports referred to the "non-assimilability" of immigrants from Asia and the Caribbean, but found no economic reason for excluding them.

In any case, immigration controls work only to a limited extent. The vast apparatus of repression used to deter migrants has not stopped them from coming; it has mainly increased suffering and death. Governments spend billions on fences and walls; on detention centers and prisons; on immigration officials, police, and private security companies; on apparatuses detecting the presence of migrants and uncovering false documents, even on legal aid to asylum seekers. The money could be better spent.

The fact that the people entering Europe are now acknowledged to be refugees, rather than merely categorized as "illegal immigrants," as they usually have been in the past, is progress of a sort. There is virtually no "legal" way for refugees to enter Europe; increasingly effective checks on false documents have forced significantly more refugees to travel clandestinely, usually with the help of so-called traffickers.

But the outpouring of compassion for refugees, especially Syrians, is often accompanied by a distinction between refugees, who are welcome, and economic migrants, who must be treated with severity. Refugees, it is said, should be received in much greater numbers "so that their claims can be processed."

The British government, under pressure from public campaigns, now says it will take 20,000 Syrians for humanitarian protection for as many as five years. If they fail to prove they need asylum, they will be deported, including children who have by then reached the age of eighteen. The reasons given

for refusing refugee status are often ludicrous (such as, "you could not have escaped across that river, because it contains crocodiles," which it doesn't), and the immigration officials who make the decisions have quotas in effect for the numbers they refuse.

The German government, which has said it can take more than 500,000 asylum seekers each year, gives refugee status to 87 percent of Syrians who apply for it. What about the other 13 percent? Are they sent to Syria? And of the others who claim asylum in Germany, only 40 percent are accepted. How can authorities in Germany, Britain, and elsewhere be depended on for a fair process?

Meanwhile, violence against refugees and migrants, plus the cost in human suffering and death, and in money, escalate in a largely futile attempt to stop and deter relatively small numbers of people. Around 310,000 Syrians are estimated to have crossed the Mediterranean to Europe in 2015, out of a total of 626,000 migrants.

This is a small fraction of those who could go no further than to the countries neighboring Syria. It is also a small number in relation to the European population of 503 million. In 2015, around 2,500 people are estimated to have drowned trying to cross the Mediterranean in small boats. In Calais, a port near the shortest crossing between France and Britain, there are said to be 3,000 people trying to migrate to Britain.

The view among them that human rights are more respected in Britain than elsewhere is no doubt reinforced by the appalling conditions they face in Calais. These are exacerbated by the brutality of French police who, inexplicably, are cooperating with the British in preventing them from leaving France, and who tear gas and beat them, destroy their makeshift camps, and evict the squats estab-

lished by supporters. The British have spent £35 million building razor-wire fences around the port and supplying equipment to detect migrants who have managed to get into, or under, lorries.

Those who have worked to support refugees and migrants for years, and who know well the suffering they experience, begin to see hope in what seems to be a real change in the attitudes of many people who, maybe for the first time, realize they share a common humanity with those who flee persecution, war, and poverty. They may also be coming to share the view of some, such as No Borders campaigners, who have, especially since the 1990s, been calling for free movement and the right of everybody to choose where they wish to live and to work.

Volunteers with Secours Catholique in Calais who try, and fail, to provide a minimum of sustenance to migrants stranded there, when asked what the solution is, say the only remedy is the abolition of frontiers. Volunteers with CIMADE, a government-funded organization that supports refugees and has official rights to visit detention centers in France, are increasingly coming to the view that the only solution is the abolition of borders.

To many, this prospect seems remote. Immigration controls seem set in stone, a matter of common sense, indispensable to the survival of capitalism. But they are a relatively new phenomenon.

In Britain, they were first introduced, following campaigns by far-right groups, against "aliens" in 1905 and against citizens of former British colonies in 1962. Even many mainstream politicians initially argued they were unthinkable and irrational. So they are. They should be consigned to the dustbin of history, recognized for what they are: a cruel but relatively short-lived twentieth-century aberration.

Jacobin

Political resolution of the national leadership of the Left Bloc

BLOCO DE ESQUERDA ·

Political Resolution of the National Leadership of the Left Bloc

1. The Left Bloc is the party that, even before the elections, emphasized the need for a political dialogue with the aim of interrupting the cycle of impoverishment of the country and restoring income from work and pensions. The challenges and the conditions posed by the Bloc, particularly by Catarina Martins to António Costa, marked the pre-election debate.

2. By the will of the people, the Bloc is now a force that is indispensable for a solution that puts an end to the present cycle of the right in government: that is what has opened the way to the present negotiations. Today as yesterday, proof has been given that such concepts as "useful vote" and "arc of governance" have no content. At the moment of finding solutions to end austerity, the contribution of the Bloc has been the one that appeared earliest and most clearly.

3. In the context of these negotiations, the Left Bloc is united around the goal of bringing about fundamental political change, starting by removing the right from government and by affirming a majority that is committed to the protection of employment, wages and pensions. It is an ongoing process, in which we see advances and outstanding difficulties, but one which requires decisions that provide clarity.

4. To the permanent invocation, in the public debate, of the need for a "commitment to stability", the Bloc responds with its clear mandate: concerning the setting out of a government programme, as

also the vote for every state budget, the Bloc is a guarantee against any attack on wages, pensions, now and in the future, or jobs. The stability that we defend is that of people's lives, it is that of the restoration of the income from work and public services that have been attacked in recent years. It is not the Bloc that will be found lacking for a majority that would meet these objectives.

5. In these elections, the PCP has obtained a positive result, strengthening its parliamentary group and declaring itself to be available for the development of an alternative government to the PSD/CDS minority, something which is fundamental for such a possibility to materialize. We take note of this readiness and, in the framework of the dialogue that the two parties have established, the Left Bloc has already met with the PCP to analyze the process of negotiations that each of them is conducting with the Socialist Party.

6. The Left Bloc is now faced with essential choices concerning the Presidential elections to be held in January 2016. The Bloc had decided at its National Convention that it "would be ready to support an independent candidacy which would be placed unambiguously in the anti-austerity camp, for a break with the Fiscal Compact [4] and for the implementation of the Constitution [5]. The Bloc does not exclude the possibility of presenting its own candidate."

7. Three months away from the presidential elections, we see that there has not been a left candidacy that is strong, mobilizing and broad enough to confront the right in the context of this election. That is why it is time for the Bloc to launch its own candidate.

8. After ten years of the presidency of Cavaco Silva, who has played the role of leader of a faction and has repeatedly violated the Constitution, the right appears as the big favorite in this election. Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, with the advantage of being well-known thanks to the hegemonic television coverage that he has been given, is aiming for a first-round victory.

9. It is the left that has the responsibility of giving more density to the presidential campaign, imposing a debate around themes that are essential in choosing the President of the Republic, by mobilizing the electorate and unmasking the conservatism of the candidate of the right. Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa represents the PSD and the big economic groups, as well as the conservatism that has opposed essential conquests of human rights, such as the decriminalization of abortion.

10. The Left Bloc faces this responsibility with a candidacy focused on three fundamental themes: the questions of sovereignty, faced with international treaties and trade agreements that were not subject to referendum, and with powers devoid of legitimacy that endanger democracy and national decision-making; the fight against conservatism, for the defence of human rights, equality and freedom; popular mobilization for political participation and democratic decisions.

11. It is Marisa Matias that we have chosen to embody this candidacy. Her political experience and the fact that she is a well-known figure on the national and international levels, her extensive knowledge of European affairs, her dedication to human rights causes, provide guarantees for a campaign that is extremely competent and capable of mobilizing people. This candidacy contributes to greater electoral mobilization on the left in the first round, to thwart the ambitions of the right. And it

is a fundamental contribution to popular participation in the debate on the major issues of the present political moment.

So, the National Leadership of the Left Bloc decides:

- To present a motion of no confidence in the government programme of the PSD/CDS alliance, should Passos Coelho be chosen as prime minister by the President of the Republic;
- To defeat any motion of no confidence presented by the right against a Socialist Party government programme;
- To continue negotiations with the Socialist Party for the inclusion in the government programme of fiscal policy principles consistent with the protection of employment, wages and pensions, with the perspective of the establishment of a government with parliamentary support from the left;
- To continue the dialogue with the PCP on the process of negotiations with the Socialist Party and the challenges that the anti-austerity left will face in the coming period;
- To organize meetings to present the candidacy of Marisa Matias to the Presidency of the Republic;
- To promote open and public debate and proposals, in contact with the local population, social actors and militant organizations, making it possible, without fixing priorities in advance, on the one hand to make an inventory of initiatives that organize people, of direct experiences of solidarity and of social movement organizations, and on the other to take forward the discussion on the political strategy of the left and the creation of networks for co-ordinated intervention

Lisbon, October 18, 2015

BRITAIN

The Momentum is with Corbyn

SOCIALIST RESISTANCE ·

The way he engaged in debate and discussion began to reshape politics and move its centre to the left was already apparent over the summer – and that dynamic has continued. The Corbyn phenomena has already pushed political discourse to the left and brought real politics back onto the agenda.

At the centre of what is now contested is the Tory idea – which many on the Labour benches left unchallenged or repeated in slightly softer language – that there is no alternative to austerity. On the contrary, as Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell has argued strongly, austerity is a political choice; and one which seeks to make the poor become still poorer and the rich get still richer.

The fruits of this are already apparent. The Labour Party has doubled in size and is now bigger than all the other parties put together. People are getting actively involved who haven't been before – or in other cases not for many years.

Corbyn is continuing to reach out – for example by asking people what they want him to take up in Prime Minister's Question Time. Team Corbyn is giving a voice to disabled activists, to those searching for affordable housing and to those concerned with many other and various issues. The idea that there is no difference between politicians is being challenged by this doing politics differently.

The right in the Labour Party is down – but not out. They can't cope with the fact that Corbyn has declared that the Labour Party is an anti-austerity party.

They are looking for any chance to undermine him. The first major opportunity to move against Corbyn could come after the elections next May – council

elections in most parts of Britain but also elections for the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and for London Mayor. If Labour does badly, there will be attempts to make Corbyn carry the can.

But even that is not straightforward.

Labour can hardly do worse in Scotland than it did last May – even if it would do better still if Corbyn distanced himself from the Unionism which so damaged Scottish Labour then. It would help his prospects across the whole of Britain if he advocated a proportional system for all elections. It would be positive if he used the run up to COP21 in Paris to point out the ways in which the Tories agenda is contributing to rather than contesting the ravages of climate change.

Across Britain, it's clear that the Corbyn surge will mean more energy and more people working for Labour in the elections next May than for many decades – possibly ever. On the other hand, the extent to which the relevant candidates identify themselves with Corbyn's policies and with his way of doing politics will also have an impact.

People who have joined Labour to support anti-austerity policies are not going to be enthusiastic to work for candidates who have been shutting local libraries or playgroups, supporting privatisation of local services or attacking the conditions of council workers.

This is the context in which the welcome and bold decision has been taken to transform Corbyn's election campaign into Momentum – an outward facing national network involving people inside and outside the Labour Party. To defend the politics on which Corbyn won his election – and to build a majority for them in society – a social movement is needed; a movement against austerity, against war, for civil liberties and rights at work – open to all

those who support those ideas and wants to work collectively, in a democratic framework to fight to make them the majority view across Britain.

There are certainly discussions that Labour Party members themselves need to have locally and nationally about the relative priorities in democratizing party structures as well as campaigning on the streets. But organising on that basis alone isn't sufficient to do what needs to be done – or to harness the potential that the summer showed. Corbyn, McDonnell and their co-thinkers seem very clear about this and should be supported in making that point loudly.

Of course all of this poses a big challenge to organisations on the left outside the Labour Party.

Left Unity, set up to provide a political alternative for those who oppose austerity, will not surprisingly, make this discussion the centrepiece of its conference in November. Britain's undemocratic electoral system and unitary trade union movement with its specific historical relationship with its Labour (social democratic) party means that the radicalisation which led to Corbyn's victory goes against the tide of what's been happening elsewhere in Europe as broad parties of the left have come into existence over the last decade or so.

Some people have already decided that they belong in the Labour Party under Corbyn. Good luck to

them and we expect we will continue to work together fruitfully in Momentum and in individual campaigns. Others are proposing that Left Unity ceases to function as a party and becomes another inside outside network – without explaining what its particular selling point would be.

Socialist Resistance thinks it would be a serious error to go down that road. We think that Left Unity should at this stage seek affiliation to the Labour Party – which we see as a demonstrating the seriousness which we give to the movement around Corbyn and the transformation it has already wrought. We think it needs to retain its separate identity, its own policies, structure and leadership.

The need for a radical left party that can lead the struggle against austerity and puts forward policies which are in the interests of the many, not the few, remains absolutely indispensable. Team Corbyn's aim is clearly to forge a Labour Party which can do that – but despite the significant changes that have already taken place, there are many obstacles still ahead.

That's why Socialist Resistance will aim to continue playing a major role in Left Unity as well enthusiastically supporting Momentum and its initiatives

Socialist Resistance

MIGRATION

The global refugee crisis and the crisis of the European Union

PIERRE ROUSSET ·

Today, attention is focused on the war refugees from the Middle East. But there are many other military conflicts, particularly in Africa, all with their processions of uprooted populations. Not long ago, it was the victims of climate change who were the focus of media attention, affected in their millions in Asia. In 2010 and 2011 more than 42 million people were displaced in Asia and the Pacific [1]. This figure includes people displaced by storms, floods, extremes of temperature, drought and sea-level rise. Some returned to their homes. Many became migrants, usually within their country, but also across national borders.

So called "economic migrations" are also "forced". They come from the disintegration of the social fabric under the battering of neoliberalism and the violence of regimes supported by the Western powers. So they too are political.

Migrations have a history. In the previous period, we lived in a migration without hope, incarnated by the Filipino teacher who became a clandestine domestic in Italy, . We live today at the time of migrations of survival.

Although Europeans are not yet at that point, it is a sign of the times that in countries such as Spain and Greece real migratory movements are once again at work. Young people are leaving those countries because their future is completely blocked. This is a situation that had not been seen for decades.

Border fences are being constructed over hundreds, indeed thousands, of kilometres. This is not only

happening in Europe. It is the same in Israel, disregarding the rights of Palestinians to their land. It is the same for Mexicans in the United States- Mexico where decomposition of the State, become narco-State, and the amazing rise of violences, up to and including féminicide, contributes to the flight of the population.

The explosion of the migrations thus has multiple causes: continual wars , the climate crisis, the destruction of the social fabric, decomposition of national states, outbursts of unlimited violence; and also destruction of the earth, the collapse of the fish populations, the monopolization of peasants' land, the marginalization of the urban poor, dispossession of the people to the profit of the multinationals...

All these specific causes have a common origin: a mode of domination imposed by capitalist globalization bringing a previously unknown situation: a permanent state of geopolitical chaos and, legacy of past defeats, a one-way class struggle carried through ferociously by the hard core of the globalized bourgeoisies. This is the counter-revolution without the revolution, opening the way to every type of cruelty. It is sharp competition between old and new imperialisms, sub-imperialisms and other regional powers, as, in the Middle East, Iran and Saudi Arabia. It is permanent war as an answer to permanent instability.

The people are paying a terribly strong price for this world disorder. In return, the "crisis of the refugees" is exposing today the failure of the European project. [2] Recently, the Eurogroup (19 countries of the 28 which form the Union) wanted to put Greece under its guardianship. So it, imposed its own law at the expense of the institutions

at the heart of the EU: the Commission and the Council. Today, when it comes to the way the Syrians in particular are being received, it is each for itself. 26 European countries have an agreement called the Schengen Agreement. There is supposed to be free movement of people between these countries. Now national borders are slamming shut. This is happening not only in Eastern Europe, but also between France and Italy. National borders are being closed even in the centre of the Schengen "freedom of movement" space.

In some countries, especially in Germany, vast movements of civil solidarity have been mobilized to receive the refugees. [3]. In other countries, especially Hungary, xenophobia and racism are winning the day and the extreme right wing is growing.

The EU exists, but European integration has failed. The antidemocratic process of construction of the EU has not give risen to a European citizenship. It could have been hoped that a common, solidarity identity would grow from below, within the framework of the European Social forum or the Marches against unemployment and precarity, but this dynamic failed.

The "top-down" process of building the European Union was founded on two projects:

- the single market, which shows how impotent it is in times of crisis,
- and Europe as a power capable of playing its role in the world facing the United States and, nowadays, China

But the European imperialist powers are toothless. The budget of the French and British armies has been cut in the name of austerity. Germany is an economic giant, but still a military dwarf. How can one stand out in the international arena when one cannot even stand up to the challenges launched by Putin at one's own gates?

Tackling the *source* of the "migration crisis" means tackling globalization. Tackling the *source* of the "European crisis" means re-establishing on new foundations a Europe that is open to the peoples of the East and the South, beginning with the

Mediterranean region. This perspective is crucial so that we can take long-term action and not be fooled by the misleading statements of our leaders –? beginning with their claims to humanitarianism.

The civil mobilization movement in Germany is showing a genuine sense of solidarity. But the bosses of Germany are acting entirely cynically: for them, unemployment is too low. They are hoping that the country will take in a labour force that is well educated and skilled, but also desperate, and therefore ready to accept any kind of work.

The response of European states is quite often more military than humanitarian. It acts in the name of the 'fight against people smugglers'. But instead of opening legal and safe routes for immigration, it gives the green light to conduct armed operations against the boats transporting them. France is using the tragedy of the refugees to justify extending its air force's intervention zone from Iraq to Syria. In a growing number of EU member countries, soldiers are being mobilized alongside the police to control the "foreign" populations.

This is a major trend with which we are very familiar in France, where troops patrol against the terrorist threat [4]. Many experts believe that this policy is very costly and ineffective. It is over-stretching resources, given that the army is already committed in various theatres of operations in the Middle East and Africa. In reality, this tendency is designed to blur the boundary between a situation of war (which is the business of the Army) and a situation of peace (which is the business of the police). It leads the population to become accustomed to a kind of permanent state of emergency. Now, the refugee crisis is being exploited to the same end.

If we are to provide a better defence for the refugees, we need a resurgence of anti-militarisation movements [5]; and we need to expand the fight against xenophobia and all forms of racism. This task comes at a time when the movements of the extreme right wing are riding the wave of inward-looking attitudes - in France the *Front na-*

tional has increased its support. In addition, fascistic state tendencies can be seen right up to the very gates of Europe (in Turkey) and even within the EU (in Hungary). It is entirely logical that the destructive brutality of capitalist globalization should be creating the conditions for the emergence of new forms of fascism.

The "refugee crisis" is thus a tragic facet of the total crisis provoked by capitalist globalization. Nevertheless it has to be dealt with by taking account of its specificities, which require a big effort of "updating" from us. During the recent period, we have had to continually answer xenophobic demagogues, demonstrating with statistics to show that flows of immigration and emigration in France remained constant. It is obviously not true any more – unless the repressive policy of "Fortress France" practised by the government continues to strip the right to asylum of any meaning.

We are facing a humanitarian crisis of exceptional scope; however, the traditional "software" of the radical lefts is not adapted to such a challenge of solidarity. They have essentially considered that the humane urgency was the business of government alone (Red Cross or Crescent) or specialized associations. There are fortunately important exceptions, like the remarkable mobilization of the *Mihands* coalition in Mindanao, in the south of Philippines, from which we can draw many lessons. [6]

In fact, we need to rethink the relationship between the humanitarian and the political. In an already distant past, we used to send medical assistance to the Liberation Fronts which in turn had their own effective and established health services. Nowadays, the vast majority of the displaced populations have been stripped of any form of organization, except for informal networks based on places of origin, using the Internet and cell phones to circulate information.

The response to the various humanitarian crises must become a key area for an internationalist approach. The vast majority of the refugees are not in Europe, but in the countries of the South, which have neither the infrastructure nor the resources of the countries of the North. And the leaders of the North bear a major responsibility for the current situation. In addition, there are huge numbers of "internal refugees" who are still in their own countries. Some have even stayed where they are, as in the case of the victims of climate disaster, because they have not been able to find refuge elsewhere. No official figure effectively conveys the scale of the problem. It is here that solidarity between North and South must be organized and strengthened.

This article was originally written for Amandla magazine, South Africa.

GREECE

Greek soldiers refuse to confront refugees

Collaborative Media Briefing October 19, 2015

.... flesh torn on barbed wire, children drowned on beaches, hungry people on the streets, crowds of people begging for their papers ...

Before they became headline news many of us saw and experienced these shameful images on the River Evros, and on the islands, where we were sent to do our compulsory Military Service of the Absurd as both slave workers and cannon fodder. These scenes have shocked us and dominate our discussions. But we don't want this to become the "new normal". While not having grown used to and not having accepted the Memoranda and all the policies against the people, imperialist interventions and their dirty wars, we will not accept and not get used to the refugees' plight. It is also the plight of our own people, of our own world, the working class world regardless of nationality-religion-gender!

The so-called "increased flow of migrants" is in reality the flight from war and displacement. It is not a natural phenomenon. Someone is responsible for it. It's their capitalist crisis. To overcome this, they abolish our rights, leaving us starving, in poverty and unemployment, making migration a necessity. It's the USA, NATO, the EU, China and Russia. They impose their financial interests using terror and death, maintaining and reviving new passions and hostilities, feeding on religious fundamentalism. It's also the regional imperialist powers (Turkey, Israel, Greece, Arab governments) that sharpen rivalries in the region.

It is those who speak of failed states and inferior nations, those who treat people as garbage and take part in mopping up operations, transforming entire zones into human storage dumps for brutal ex-

ploitation! There is only one enemy of the bourgeoisie and its governments: the workers, whether they fight for their rights or are moving about without documents, even when it is capitalist military interventions that led to the uprooting. But even then, refugees can't choose where to go: they direct migration flows to modern-day concentration camps, the "hot spots", (2) because workers choose where to be exploited! Of course when they're not needed any more or when they try to better themselves they can be got rid of ...

The Greek state and the army are part of the problem and not its solution. The SYRIZA-ANEL government continues the War on Terror, participates in imperialistic plans, targets "asymmetric threats" (immigrants, social movements), playing on the false distinction of "good" refugees from war – and "bad" economic migrants. The Armed Forces call on us, the conscripted soldiers alongside professionals and officers, to make war on the "enemy within", as in the recent Parmenionas 2015 (3) exercise! In this cycle of death-exploitation-oppression, the "enemies" of Greece and Turkey jointly patrol the Aegean, cooperating in harmony! Furthermore, the EU battlefield starts from Gibraltar ending in the Aegean, with Frontex (4) taking a decisive role.

A Greek submarine participates in the European fleet that operates in the Libyan territorial waters. We, the 16th Division in Evros, are on guard against migrants coming from Andrianopolis. We're ordered to take part in Crowd Suppression Drills, as in Kos after the dramatic events in Kalymnos when the governor requested military aid to use weapons against hungry-thirsty-imprisoned immigrants. We guard the murderous fence which is the real reason of all the drownings in the Aegean.

WE DON'T FIGHT, WE DO NOT SUPPRESS, WE DON'T HUNT DOWN MIGRANTS

We, the soldiers in struggle are against all this, against both their past and present crimes.

We call for a mass movement, both inside and outside the Army:

To block in any way we can Frontex, NATO, the European army, the actions of the Armed Forces as this massacre goes on. We don't participate in arrest patrols.

To assist in demolishing fences and not creating new ones. No soldier boards ships on missions against migrants.

Ships, submarines and aircraft should return to their bases. There should be no attempt to supply them.

We refuse to convert the Greek army into a repressive apparatus whether that involves migrants or social movements. We will not accept papering over the cracks in the social structure with "volunteer labour". For us the "asymmetric threat" is the war being waged against us by the governments and the interests they support.

We call on our colleagues to not only show compassion but to take note of our common class interests. It is the bourgeois institutions, bourgeois policies, bourgeois governments themselves which are destroying even our dreams.

What the refugees are now going through, constant persecution by totalitarian mechanisms of every kind, in the struggle for dignity and survival their sad present is for many of us the current and future nightmare that we should not have to experience. It is the Parliamentary totalitarian state in collaboration with the NAZI Golden Dawn.

We are aware the coming revolts will find those on the bottom rung either united together or in conflict with each other.

Today there isn't a better form of solidarity in practice which gives the greatest service to ourselves than attacking the problem at its roots.

We are part of a modern anti-war and labour movement that can exist only within a working class, anti-capitalist and internationalist perspective. We resist, oppose, and totally reject the government, its imperialist mechanisms, and the bourgeois world of oppression.

[The original was signed by soldiers from 38 units of the Greek Army]

SIGNED BY PRIVATES OF 50 UNITS

547 Rethymnon Airborne Battalion, Sparta KEEM, 616 Infantry Battalion, Avlona KETTH, 535 MK/TP 31st Brigade, Patra KETCH, Mesologgi KEN 2/39 SP, 526 MK/TP, 124 PVE Tripolis, Cpt. Paraschos 29th Infantry Brigade, ASDYS, 221 EMA Plati Evros, 401 Military Hospital atallion Administration, Thiva KEPV, 16 TYP, Nafplio KEMCH, Evros Chatzipenti Camp, 211 MK/TO 95 LATETH, Araxos 116 PM, 3rd Cooking Education Battalion-Gythio Supply Dept., 647 MK/TP Litochoro, 50 PEA/AP, SDB Karaiskakis B Company Management, 219 KICHNE Didymoteicho, 173 MEAP Orestiada, 516 MK/TP, 424 SN Thessaloniki, Evros Vogiatzis Feres Camp, 642 TP, Bouga Camp, 32 MPP PN, KEN Kalamata, 643 TE Chios, 123 PTE, 618 M/K TO Plati, 296 M/K TE, KAAV Agios Andreas, 93 TYETH Lesvos, 503 TP, 95 TYETH, 22 EMA Petrohori, 25 EMA Petrochori, B EANETH, 107 A/K MMP PEP Didymoticho, 305 SPTCH, 3rd EAN Alexandroupolis, 107 Chatzipenti Koufovouno Camp, Evros 523 Mavrodentri Kozani.

Adapted from UndercoverInfo.