

INTERNATIONAL VIEWPOINT

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FEATURE

MIGRANT CRISIS

Migration: break the cycle of death, restore dignity and defend freedom of movement

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FEATURE

EUROPEAN UNION

When the Plan B is the Plan A

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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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GREECE

Moment of truth for the Third Memorandum

ANTONIS DAVANELLOS ·

We've reached a point where we might well say, "Enough with the jokes already!" I'm referring to the silly talk about the supposedly positive "compensatory" measures to protect the poor that will flow from the new austerity program.

In reality, we've reached a moment where the truth of the Third Memorandum will be exposed to the light of day. The government will have to sign an agreement with the creditors, and parliament will have to adopt deadly measures concerning social security, taxes, wages and hiring in the public service sector, as well as unpaid mortgages.

The creditors enacting this agreement will deal a serious blow to both social and labor rights. Daily life in Greece will become that much more difficult for workers and the poor. At the same time, this agreement doesn't include any measures that threaten the interests of the capitalists—the part of society that hasn't suffered during the crisis. Instead, they have increased their profits and accumulated even more wealth.

The creditors' anti-social cruelty will come to light as soon as the measures concerning social security become known. They constitute an unprecedented attack on the most vulnerable people among those covered by social programs—people who aren't able to demonstrate their right to a full pension, because of a period of unemployment among other reasons.

Until now, people in this category had expected to receive at least the minimum pension benefit, which up until August 2015 had stood at 486 euros a month. The SYRIZA government reduced the minimum to 392 euros a month under measures proposed by the Minister of Social Security, Pavlos

Haikalis, of the conservative Greek Independents (ANEL).

The agreement under discussion would further reduce the minimum benefit to 346 euros a month. Whole sectors of the working class who are employed intermittently in seasonal or construction jobs, for example, will suffer a 30 percent reduction in their retirement pensions compared to 2014.

Another example of the social violence being committed by the government is the agreement to reduce EKAS [a type of social insurance allowance for the elderly and disabled] even faster within the next six months, including eliminating benefits for widows under the age of 55.

Many women—who capitalism have forced to stay locked within their homes in the name of expanded reproduction for the working-class family—will be forced to survive until reaching this age without any other form of income if they lose their husbands, something that often happens as a result of workplace-related accidents and diseases. Worse still, it's impossible for working-class women to find work when there is an unemployment rate of 38 percent in the sectors most reliant on unskilled women's labor.

This brutality will affect the entire working class, but pro-government press downplays everything. Ethnos (The Nation) reassures everyone of "up to a thousand euros"—a blatant falsehood, and the popular news site EF.SYN describes the measures as "just a bit of a retreat."

These statements demonstrate that the promises made by the very popular Minister of Labor, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity Georgios Katrougalos—who declared that "The pensions will not be reduced"—are simply a thing of the past.

Even after 40 years of work, a 67-year-old retiree in Greece can't expect to receive more than 1,000 euros a month in total allowances.

The meaning of this policy is quite clear: with SYRIZA's stamp of approval, the various thefts perpetrated by the capitalist class will ultimately be paid back, over a period of time, by current and future retirees.

The measures concerning taxes reveal a situation that is equally cruel. The value-added tax (VAT) rate [a consumption tax that hits working people and the poor hardest] is set to rise above 24 percent on bills for water and electricity. As a consequence, thousands of families will be forced to live without these necessities.

Previously, the income tax didn't apply to the lowest of income brackets. This is no longer the case today. The government has proposed a tax exemption for those making up to 9,100 euros a year; but the creditors want to lower the threshold to 8,200 a year. Based on these figures, the greater part of the tax increase, estimated at 1.8 billion euros for the years of 2016, 2017 and 2018, will be paid by taxpayers who have an annual incomes of between 9,000 and 20,000 euros.

Conversely, the government and creditors seem far more concerned with taxation on the most privileged. The proposal to tax profits on OPAP [an organization that controls gambling on football games] has been completely forgotten, even though this could bring in 500 million euros. A similar fate seems to await the proposal to tax overnight stays—in five-star hotels, for example—following a barrage of statements that this would deal a "fatal blow to Greek tourism enterprises."

The ruling class secured complete protection for its privileges, even as it continues to excitedly assert that sacrifices are necessary from everyone for the "good of the nation"—with just a few certain exceptions. Chief among the "exceptions" are those who deposited impressive amounts of money into Swiss banks, as revealed by the "Lagarde list" of wealthy

Greeks with overseas assets or the Panama Papers. [1]

It's clear that the SYRIZA government is participating in the social brutality toward those at the bottom while treating those at the top with kid gloves.

Anyone who has doubts on this score need only consider the meaning of Alexis Tsipras' invitation to the honorable Messrs. Evangelos Marinakis [the president of the Olympiakos professional soccer team, who has a particularly dubious business reputation] and Dimitris Melissanidis [a major player in the petroleum industry, principal shareholder of the Greek sports betting company OPAP and owner of the professional soccer team AEK based in Athens] to meet with him at Maximos Mansion, the prime minister's official residence.

These two are the exactly the sort of characters who SYRIZA used to disparagingly refer to as "underground contractors" in the past—and who the party promised to neutralize once coming power. Today, they are invited to participate in a "dialogue" under the supervision of SYRIZA and the government. The fact that this comes at a time when violence is erupting during football matches, leading international bodies to intervene, speaks volumes.

The current government has been cultivating these relationships shamelessly, as part of a project to confront corruption and conflicts of interest in the spirit of "entrepreneurialism." O tempora, o mores!

The agreement with the creditors includes other harsh measures, including the abolition of any protection for unpaid mortgages, which will lead to large numbers of evictions, and wage cuts and strict limits on hiring in the public sector.

Differences among the European Union, European Central Bank, European Stability Mechanism [an intergovernmental organization that specializes in eurozone finance], the International Monetary Fund and the Greek government have resulted in a delay in signing the agreement. However, this time, the government took part in the negotiations without displaying the least sign of resistance.

Two factors explain the delay.

First, there are differences among the international institutions themselves—for instance, between the IMF and the European part of the quartet. For example, German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble has made it clear that he would not discuss the possibility of easing Greek debt while the IMF, on the other hand, stresses that the Greek government must take more drastic measures for the program to be "viable."

This grueling process reflects the crisis of leadership among the governing bodies of the EU. The day after negotiations over a new agreement fell apart on April 12, Martin Schulz [president of the European parliament and member of the Social Democratic Party of Germany] repeated his formula concerning the danger of a "collapse of the eurozone." He then appealed to leaders of the EU to take bolder action under these conditions of "sharp polarization."

Second, in order to be effective, the "drastic measures" demanded by the IMF require the establishment of a stronger political power in Greece. The institutions now know that Tsipras cannot apply

them alone with only 153 members of parliament in the SYRIZA-ANEL government.

Thus, the creditors are presenting their demands in completely blunt language to Finance Minister Euclid Tsakalotos and Economy Minister Giorgos Stathakis. They are sending a message that they want to accelerate political change—that is, they are pushing Tsipras to broaden his parliamentary base by opening up his government to more centrist and conservative parties. In turn, this broader-based government would take on the responsibility of applying the Third Memorandum.

Workers and popular forces should expect nothing from these negotiations that are capturing headlines. Instead, their determined entrance into the social and political landscape—beginning with an absolutely necessary 48-hour strike against pension reforms—is an essential prerequisite if we want to defend our rights and achievements. [2] The immediate goal should be the repeal of the all the Memorandums!

Looking ahead, the mobilizations in France [3] indicate the potential for changing the political agendas set by the highest echelons of our governments.

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NUCLEAR POWER

Chernobyl 1986: when nuclear power came of age

BRIAN PARKIN ·

Brian Parkin recalls the Chernobyl disaster and explains how what is always explained away as a 'one off' event demonstrated the lethal combination of technical arrogance, corporate and state deceit and human fallibility that will forever lie at the heart of the myth of nuclear power.

Hard rain

The 1986 Leeds May Day demonstration was always going to be a muted affair, coming as it did just 12 months after the historic defeat of the miners. But for me it was memorable in one respect: it rained. Later on that afternoon a post-graduate friend of mine rang and asked if we had got wet on our outing, "because if you did you will have got some caesium-137 thanks to the Ukraine nuclear disaster". Earlier, as a routine task of monitoring overnight rainfall at a Leeds University weather station, he had found clear traces of the radioactive isotope.

Within days, as even the secretive Soviet state couldn't suppress the truth, it was clear that a major explosion at a nuclear station in Ukraine had spewed much of the contents of a shattered and burning reactor into the outside atmosphere. And borne upwards by easterly spring winds, fall-out in the form of isotopes of caesium, iodine and xenon had blown across much of Europe.

Critical times

The international nuclear industry, under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency, has proved over some 50 years to be an effective watchdog and regulator of all matters regarding nuclear power. It has also undertaken the role of

ensuring a uniformity of secrecy and deceit as far as matters of safety are concerned- particularly in the immediate aftermath of a major nuclear 'incident'. But with Chernobyl in April to May 1986, the 'incident' was of such a massive scale that any amount of cover-up was bound to fail.

During the 24 hours preceding the accident at Chernobyl, the operating staff had been engaged in authorised part-load running experiments in order to improve reactor efficiencies. One problem they were attempting to deal with was the build-up of a reactor 'poisoning' isotope- xenon-135- that tended to slow down the reactor neutron speeds when the plant was operating at reduced load.

The 'experiment' involved trying to maintain reactor stability and preventing xenon formation by varying the time span of control rod insertion. This was being done manually when the reactor temperature first fell and then suddenly surged. The consequent massive peak in temperature and the pace of the run-away reaction overwhelmed both the manual and automatic control rod processes.

At 1.23 am an emergency SCRAM state was automatically tripped as the core temperature soared with only 28 out of 211 control rods in place. Within 30 seconds 18 out of those 28 had fractured due to the heat. It was at this stage that the first steam explosion occurred as the steam discharging from the broken fuel channels instantly and massively expanded, ripping the reactor structure apart, shattering the inner containment and blasting the upper containment plate through the roof.

Graphite fire

The Russian RBMK reactor like many designs worldwide, and including all of the UK's reactor

fleet in 1986, was based on a graphite core through which the fuel and control rods were passed in channels. But the problem with graphite, although it can 'moderate' the speed at which reaction neutrons move, is that, like coal, it is around 90% carbon in content. Consequently, when the 10,000 degrees Celsius core was blasted open to the outside atmosphere, the oxygen in the air instantly reacted with the red-hot graphite and started to burn fiercely. (This led to the rather tasteless joke at the time that Chernobyl was the world's first ever coal fired nuclear disaster).

An initial a steam explosion was followed by a hydrogen explosion with a simultaneous graphite core fire – all within seconds. The power station staff were completely overwhelmed. Which is when a collective act of the most tremendous heroism took place. Fully aware, as they must have been, that they were already fatally irradiated, the 30 reactor workers dosed themselves with potassium iodine tablets, donned respirators and decontamination suits and entered what remained of the upper reactor level in a bid to suppress the fire. Although later rescued from the building, they all died in lead-clad hospital isolation units within the next 24 hours.

As they tried to cope with the effects of the second explosion, a third 'runaway criticality' explosion occurred, which was effectively the kind of explosion associated with a nuclear weapon. This explosion effectively removed most of reactor 4's upper building and set fire to the reactor 3 building's roof.

Collateral damage

The fires at Chernobyl raged for 14 days. During this time teams of local miners were drafted in to mine under the blazing reactor in order to get concrete ballast under the foundations and prevent a core melt-down into the water table. Thousands of volunteer 'bio-robots' were drafted into the station complex and it has been estimated that some 500,000 such workers were rationed to a maximum 40 seconds of work near the reactor – during which time they are thought to have received over 50 lifetimes of safe lifetime radiation.

Around Pripjat itself, 53,000 were immediately evacuated, forever. And although the International Journal of Cancer estimated around 4000 deaths in Ukraine from the accident, a further 4000 'excess' cancer deaths were estimated for the neighbouring Belarus region. Greenpeace has estimated over 200,000 excess cancer deaths in Ukraine and surrounding regions for the ten year period following the reactor explosion.

Overwhelmed

The reactor type at Chernobyl 4 was a tried-and-tested design, common throughout much of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Based on a graphite moderator core, this was a material choice common among nuclear power countries and in particular, in the UK where all the Magnox and AGR stations operating at the time of Chernobyl were graphite moderated, albeit gas cooled.

Many of the problems associated with graphite block constructed cores, particularly radial cracking around the fuel and control rod channel pathways, have manifested themselves on all of the 8 AGR stations in the UK. Most of these are licenced to run for at least another 10 years.

The second-by-second cooling requirements of a Chernobyl type and size of reactor are formidable. Each reactor core has 1,600 fuel rod channels, each of which requires a constant flow of 28 metric tonnes of water per hour. It was estimated that a 30 second cooling water failure at Chernobyl would result in a fire. When the cooling water supply began to fail as the pumps were denied power from the reactor, the diesel power took over 75 seconds to come online, by which time the core was alight.

So sequentially every safety system went down, leaving a desperate reactor crew in their dying moments to bring the core under control by trying to manhandle control rods into already blocked control channels.

Circles of Hell

Chernobyl was the first ever level 7 nuclear event-only to be surpassed by the Fukushima events of 2011. But the two events, where there were repeated safety system failures in split-second sequences, were the stuff that any future nuclear catastrophe will be made of. When human fallibility in turn becomes a technological hubris that in turn is applied to energy processes hotter than our very Sun, with the addition of power production for profit, the worst can – and will – happen.

The nuclear age's Pharaoh, Valery Khodemachuk is about to get a new sarcophagus. The original one constructed between 1987-89 has long since begun

to fall apart. But with the assistance of the European Bank of Development and Reconstruction, he is about to get another one. All for the cost of €2.15 billion. It is intended to last for 100 years, compared to the pyramids of ancient Egypt that have lasted 6,000 years. And the half-life of some of Chernobyl's isotopes is beyond 180,000 years- longer than the human span on Earth.

For the sake of both sanity and humanity, the deadly alchemy of nuclear fission must be struck out for ever from our range of energy options. We have been warned.

| BRAZIL

An unhappy end for the PT government

JOÃO MACHADO ·

Almost all the parties of the right who were in the government, and most especially the PMDB, the party of the vice-president, have broken with the government in these past weeks. Only the parties most to the left who supported the government voted against the impeachment process, as well as a few members on the right who did not follow the leadership of their party and the PSOL, the left opposition party in the government.

A significant part of the bourgeoisie supported the governments of the PT when they were going in the direction of class collaboration. However, with the economic crisis which began to intensify in 2014, the bourgeoisie required a tougher government to apply a policy of austerity which has led to the degradation of popular living conditions.

Dilma Rousseff has tried to fulfil this role: she made a significant shift to the right after the elections of 2014. But it was clear that the PT, through the links that it still maintains with the majority of the trade union and popular movement, has difficulties in carrying out this policy. Temer, the vice-president, a bourgeois politician, went even further in the implementation of an anti-popular policy. Nonetheless, the FIESP (Federation of Industries of the State of Sao Paulo) and other federations of business leaders have assumed a leading role in the procedure for impeachment.

Cornered, Dilma Rousseff and the PT have tried to get out of this situation in a shabby way: attempting until the end to offer benefits to bourgeois politicians. They have failed to convince their opponents, who were more interested in the possibility of a Temer government. Many members of the

House have justified their support for the procedure for removal by evoking the great unpopularity of Dilma Rousseff's government and the cases of corruption linked to the PT. This has no meaning: according to the polls, Temer and the PMDB are as unpopular as Dilma Rousseff and are involved even more directly in the cases of corruption that have been revealed. Nearly 60% of the population is favourable to resignation or to the procedure for the removal of the two parties in power.

An illegitimate process

The PSOL, the Party of the Socialist Left, has taken a position against the procedure because the process has no legitimacy, it is a complete farce. The President of the House, a member of the PMDB, the main protagonist in the procedure of impeachment, is notoriously corrupt, indicted in the same investigation which has concerned members of the PT. The legal arguments to dismiss Dilma Rousseff also apply to Temer. In these conditions, the procedure for removal is a coup. In addition, a government led by Temer will be at least as unpopular as the government of Dilma Rousseff and will further worsen the conditions of life of the population.

Sectors of the extreme fascist right also clearly participate in the movement for impeachment proceedings. They will not be present in the future government but will have an influence and will emerge strengthened. Finally, the progress of the right has led to a large popular mobilisation against the procedure, including sectors of the left opposed to the government of Dilma Rousseff

The latter is still President for a few weeks, until the Senate confirms the opening of the procedure for impeachment (which is certain). But it is obvious

that she no longer governs. The governance of the PT ends in a melancholy way. But this does not im-

ply the end of the process: economic and political crises persist and will tend to deepen.

POLAND

Abortion Wars – A threat to women

EWA MAJEWSKA ·

For years, Poland has had some of the most repressive abortion laws in Europe. Abortions are restricted to cases of fetal abnormality, risk to the health and life of the mother, or rape and incest. Even in cases where it is permitted, hospitals often invoke "conscience clauses" to turn away patients.

Now, the country's right-wing Law and Justice Party (PiS) is pushing for an outright ban. Jacobin assistant editor Elizabeth Mahony spoke to the Polish feminist philosopher Ewa Majewska about the proposed law, its political backers, and potential consequences for women in Poland.

Elizabeth Mahony – What is the new abortion law being put forth in Poland? Who introduced it, and what restrictions would it put in place?

Ewa Majewska – The new proposed law, which started the current "abortion wars" in Poland, was submitted to the parliament by a citizens' organization, Ordo Iuris. The project was immediately backed up by key figures in Polish politics: the prime minister, Beata Szydło; Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the right-wing Law and Justice Party, along with the majority of PiS parliament members; and the National Council of Bishops, who issued a letter supporting the complete criminalization of abortion.

This all happened over the last days of March, and immediately led to a massive women's mobilization. Almost one hundred thousand women joined the new internet group against the legislation.

We have not seen such a mobilization since 1993, when the current law was installed. At that time

one million signatures were collected to keep abortion legal, as it was under Communism.

Right now, abortion is legally accessible under three conditions: when the pregnancy is the result of rape, when the woman's life or health is in grave danger, and when fetus development faces serious medical risks.

The woman cannot be punished under the current law, though the doctor and undefined "helpers" can face up to two years in prison. But this was almost never applied — here were some fifteen cases against doctors in the entire twenty-three years of the law's existence.

Now almost everything could change. First and most importantly, women can become objects of investigation, surveillance, and also punishment whenever their confirmed pregnancy does not lead to birth.

Therefore a simple miscarriage can be subjected to institutional scrutiny. This means that the woman loses all her constitutional freedoms and rights, not to mention her dignity.

These are unconstitutional interventions, but since our constitutional court has been blocked since last fall, and is still paralyzed by the PiS machinations to keep it inactive, nobody will be able to stop the parliament if they really decide to pass this law.

There are different versions of the law circulating at this moment, and although one particular version has been submitted to parliament, we do not know which one exactly. This is also unprecedented; we've had bad law proposals in the past, but their authors and supporters at least had the decency to reveal what they prepared to the population.

Now even the legal expert, university professor, and human rights defender Monika Platek, who wrote a legal analysis of the new project, states in her preamble that although she addressed a particular part of the new law published by the *Ordo Iuris*, she cannot be certain whether this is the one being considered. Therefore she refers to other ones in cases when they differ.

The new law proposal suggests three months to five years of prison for any woman and/or doctor performing an abortion. It criminalizes any form of interference with the fetus's life — therefore medical treatment for patients with cancer, for example, should be excluded.

Actually — terminal cancer should be a legal basis for termination of pregnancy anyways — it is hard to imagine women willing to give birth in a situation when their life expectancy is really short, although these cases also happen and should be respected as valid life choices.

The new law criminalizes abortions in the case of pregnancy that is the result of rape. Arkadiusz Czarotyski, a PiS MP, said that during World War II women were raped and "gave birth to many good Poles. Why should that be changed now?"

Polish law also has a statutory rape clause, which classifies sexual activity with anyone under fifteen as rape. But there will be no exception for them; as one parliamentarian said, even eleven-year-old girls should give birth since "there will be many people who will want the child."

It also bans abortion in case of terminal diseases and deformations of the fetus. In cases where the woman must carry a dead fetus or birth a terminally ill infant, she will have to continue the pregnancy.

Media reports state that anyone who "assists or encourages" a termination can also face a three-year jail sentence. What effect will this have on the doctors and institutions who deliver reproductive and sexual health services?

As I emphasized above, the length of imprisonment is not known yet. They are juggling several versions, switching from "we don't know what you're talking about, we do not want to punish women" to "three months to five years" — which was the number in the first draft.

We mostly refer to that draft, although changes have been made in the last two weeks.

The gynecologists are currently the winners of the legal situation. Since abortion is legal in some cases, but illegal in the most common one and the costs of the operation are as high as the median Polish salary (around €600–700), and the state does not really make use of the possibility of legally punishing the doctors, they win by far. And they are not interested in changing the law in any way — they don't want it more restrictive but also don't want it more permissive.

How possible is it for working-class women to get abortions today?

Abortion is very expensive, and only women who can afford it can make it. It therefore heaps more poverty on already poor women, it enlarges the already huge economic inequalities, and it also makes women even more dependent on the goodwill of their partners and doctors.

The high cost is similar whether one gets an illegal abortion in Poland or a legal abortion in one of the neighboring countries. The poorest women cannot afford it at all.

And the impact of the new legislation, especially in rural areas?

Surprisingly, it will not affect their lives very much, because their lives are already terribly affected by the current law and by the practice of not subsidizing contraceptives, which are therefore out of reach for poor women. They also lack sexual education.

Since in small villages everyone knows everyone, the risk of getting the abortion is much bigger than in larger towns. The access to good medical service is diminished, and the chance of finding a practice

willing to perform an illegal abortion is much smaller. Their lives are already endangered by the preexisting laws.

So it is actually the lives of women from medium-size towns and big cities that will be the most affected, since they will not be able to use their resources as easily now. They will risk being "caught" much more than before, and they will be under much more pressure from partners and doctors, and obviously from the state.

Who constitutes the social base for such an extreme law?

The social basis for this law is the Catholic Church.

Since 1989, Poland has restored all the privileges of the Catholic Church, including special laws allowing the church to reclaim the property lost after World War II. It has been recently confirmed that the church also reclaimed what it never owned, and now possesses more property than ever.

The new proposal for the anti-abortion law was introduced right at the same time as the new law concerning property. This is not an accident; the new law allows the church to acquire more land for free or very cheap. The social basis for the ultra-conservatives is obviously also the members of the social elite.

There are also those who have been impoverished over the last three decades, who have no left narrative to turn to, and turn to blaming refugees or women for the situation.

How has Poland's broader political landscape factored into the abortion ban?

The Civic Platform (PO) — which ruled the country from 2007 until last November — has it written in their program that they want to build Poland "according to the rules of the Ten Commandments." I see it as no surprise that they did not try to reform the already-existing law.

They should have, since they lost a case relating to it in the European Court of Human Rights. Alicja Tysi?c, a mother of two, had severe myopia and discovered that if she gave birth she might completely lose her eyesight. She was forced by doctors and the state to deliver the baby anyways. She did have a retinal hemorrhage, and while she did not go blind, she sued and won damages in the European Court.

Her case is similar to those of many other women whose demand for abortion is not respected even when it fits the current law's exceptions.

The supposedly liberal political parties, such as PO or the Social Democratic Party call the current law a "compromise" and want to keep it and defend it against the more conservative party.

For the genuine left, such as Razem, and other left-wing and feminist organizations, the current law is evil since it forces women to pay so much for access to abortion. They are aware of the number of women in Poland who already cannot afford to pay. Under today's law they have to deliver their babies.

Razem is the only political party organizing protests against the new law, joining the protests organized by feminist groups and overtly criticizing the "compromise" law.

24.4.16

Jacobin.

OUR HISTORY

The class struggle in Ireland - 1916

SOCIALIST DEMOCRACY ·

Even if we stay within that narrative The Rising had enormous significance. It was founded upon a wide range of working class struggles across Ireland and Britain and extending across Europe and the USA. Across the world democrats took inspiration from the rising, especially around anti-colonial struggles in Asia and Africa

Yet a deeper level there was class conflict within all the elements associated with 1916.

Connolly and the Citizen Army arrived at 1916 through a bitter struggle with Irish capitalism in the Dublin lockout of 1913. Connolly claimed this as a drawn struggle, but it was, in fact a Pyrrhic victory for the employers. Their main target, the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union survived and the smaller employers had been scared enough not to support any attempt to revive the strategy of the general lockout in Dublin. However, they were able to deny their workers union recognition, and their leaders, the biggest ones, were able to exclude the unions from their workplaces altogether.

What was especially significant about 1913 was the reasons for the setback. Alongside the onslaught of the state and the employers and the relative weakness of the Irish working class ran a strong reformist current in the trade union and labour movement. Connolly, in debates with the Belfast socialist William Walker, had already condemned the gas and water socialism that set as its goal the narrow aim of seats on the councils and municipal reform.

However the problem was much larger than that dispute indicated. Across Europe the trade union and labour movement had developed its own bu-

reaucracy and become partly integrated with the structures of capitalism. There was a widespread view that, if the social democratic parties could win a majority in parliament, they would be able to use the structures of the capitalist state to institute socialism. In the heartlands of the imperialist powers sections of the working class saw themselves as an aristocracy of labour, having common interests with their Imperial masters. The Ulster loyalists were an extreme example of this current, combining an often quite militant trade union consciousness with an abject political loyalty to their Protestant bosses.

They were not Socialists but William Walker tried unsuccessfully to win them by his combination of milk and water socialism and Protestant unionism. His current was linked to the British reformists whose social patriotism deferred to royalty and the Empire

The reformist current had found its expression in the writings of Eduard Bernstein, the German social democrat. He used the social democrats division of "maximum" (socialism) and "minimum" (immediate reforms) to abandon the first ("the ultimate goal is nothing") and urge concentration on the second, the improvement of capitalism. The British Fabian movement was an example of this political shift.

The true cost of reformism was spelt out in the trenches of the First World War. The mass International of working people, the 2nd International, had seemed to be an invincible bulwark against war. Its leadership had declared that the workers would not fight and would rise up against war and institute a revolution. However when war was declared the reformist leaderships swung behind "their own" national capitalist class

and sent an entire generation of European workers to the slaughter.

This background lent a sharp urgency to Connolly's decision to press for a rising. He felt it absolutely essential that the declaration of the International be upheld and that the workers rise up against the imperialist killing machine.

The revolutionary nationalists of the Irish Republican Brotherhood felt similar urgency. British propaganda had based itself around "gallant little Belgium" and the "freedom of small nations" while at the same time delaying on home rule. The revolutionists foresaw the carve up and decay of empires that would follow the war and felt it essential to put forward Ireland's claim to nationhood, summed up as "England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity."

Connolly's decision was within the context of rebellions and revolutions across Europe during and after the war, culminating in the workers seizure of power in the Russian Revolution of 1917. Lenin remarked that the Irish had "risen too soon" but the necessity for rising was never in doubt.

The IRB were also proved right. The war was followed by an increased assertion of national rights across the British Empire and its gradual decay. The Indian nationalist movement especially drew heavily on the Irish example.

As with the socialists there were divisions among the nationalists. These were much sharper, being based on a struggle between contending classes within the movement.

The class division showed itself at the onset of the rising with the leadership of the Irish volunteers countermanding mobilization orders dooming the Rebels to rapid defeat.

The Irish nationalists, representing local capital but excluding the unionist industrialists and the landed gentry, wanted limited home rule, a provincial assembly without any power over foreign affair within the British Empire. The revolutionary nationalist current, based in the Irish petit bourgeoisie wanted

an Irish democracy and an independent economy. From a Marxist point of view the revolutionary democrats exhibited great courage and determination. However their vision of a revolution based simply on national self determination would always include a space for an Irish capitalism that would inevitably be subservient to British imperialist economic interests, and that class would inevitably betray the nationalist revolutionaries. In times of upsurge, the nationalist revolutionaries would break from the restraints of the home rule capitalists. However, there was a faultline amongst them between those, like the official volunteer leadership before the Rising who were clear in wanting a stable capitalist society and who feared losing control of their movement, and those who were happy to take the risk. When the downturn came, the conservative wing was able to block with its Home Ruler (and even unionist) opponents, while the revolutionary nationalists went into often military opposition leading to further splits later.

The British Empire faced a struggle with revolutionaries while in the background was an Irish capitalist class subservient to imperialism, a weak working class with a strong reformist current. The outcome was partial independence, partition, civil war followed by a society with the migrant boat the only escape from the grinding oppression of church and state.

Looking back, it is important to remember that many of the participants were unaware of the full extent of the divisions in their movements. Connolly saw himself as debating with other trade unionists and socialists who could be won to revolution. On the international stage, as part of the general reshaping of the working class movement, even Lenin believed that he was following closely the programme of German social democracy rather than re-establishing a revolutionary independence of the working class.

Within the working class the battle between revolution and reform was fought out in a series of skirmishes that were seen as individual disputes rather than a clash of world views. It was clear to Connolly

that he was isolated within the world socialist movement, an isolation made more intense in that, unlike Lenin, he did not have a relatively homogeneous political party behind him. He tried to make up for this by building working class militancy to clash with Britain, but he was unsuccessful. After the Rising the leadership of the Irish Trade Union Congress and Labour Party (then united in the syndicalist manner) used Connolly's name in vain whilst adhering to reformist (though never actually unionist) principles closer to those of his reformist opponent, William Walker. In the current peace process they capitulate utterly to unionism.

Since 1916 the class struggle has ebbed and flowed. There were many heroic struggles by the working class including general strikes, determined fights by railway workers, a widespread eruption of bitter struggles by farm labourers and, inspired by the Russian Revolution, a wave of soviets swept the country but we have never succeeded in building an independent working class leadership. The reformists in the Labour and union leaderships have

time after time succeeded in dismantling the struggle and making peace with capitalism.

The revolutionary nationalist movement has ebbed and flowed with the class struggle. When strong it commits to armed struggle. When that fails, as it inevitably does, it surrenders to the capitalists. The latest collapse is a mighty fall, with Sinn Féin operating the mechanisms of a sectarian austerity administration within a British colonial structure.

The American author William Faulkner remarked in relation to the US deep South that: "the past is never dead. It's not even past."

This is certainly true of Ireland today. 1916 and its aftermath saw a partial and incomplete national revolution. Both parts of the country remain firmly in the grip of imperialism and workers continue to flee the country. Those who stay are ground down by a rapacious ruling class. The carnival of reaction predicted by Connolly is here today. The completion of the 1916 rising remains a task for the working class.

Socialist Democracy

BOLIVIA

A referendum won by shots at the goal

PABLO STEFANONI ·

The first, obvious, difficulty with a referendum of this nature is that it unifies all the opponents behind the option of No. From the racists who have never wanted a peasant indigenous government to those who make the opposite criticism: that it is not a genuine indigenous government, but rather a substitute of a "whiteish" matrix or more directly an anti-indigenous government. The No coalition thus enabled the unification behind a vote of forces which are not united and would never unite behind a common candidate. It is something natural, which does not disqualify their reasons, but nuances attempts to read the result in a one-dimensional way. Montesquieu has not been resurrected in the Andes, nor is this about the black hand of the Empire, nor have the Andean deities of the heights awoken to avenge Evo's "populist neodevelopmentalism".

Maybe it is something more simple: a combination of wear and tear after a decade in government - and the resulting difficulties in transforming utopias into mobilizers of existential realities - marked by political errors, such as convening a referendum so soon after the electoral triumph of 2014 with 61% of the votes, not to mention the poor election campaign. Thus, what was envisaged as a process of depolarization in 2010-2014, helped by the economic success of Morales, became a re-polarization, dividing the country into almost equal parts. In summary, according to the results obtained until now, on 21 February 2016, Evo lost against Evo more than against the opposition.

A positive balance sheet and new weaknesses

In the course of this decade, the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) has successfully put in place a new economic model based on statism and a certain macroeconomic orthodoxy, in parallel to a new state more open to the diversity of the country. "Socialism is compatible with macroeconomic stability" said Luis Arce Catacora, who has been Economy Minister for the past decade (which in itself is a feat in a country known for its economic convulsions and which, in the 1980s, experienced hyperinflation). The *Chuquiago boys* – an ironic reference to the Aymara name for La Paz: Chuqi Yapu - have also shown an efficiency that the neoliberals had not attained, thanks, in part, to the high price of raw materials as well as to a policy of extension of the internal market, nationalization of fuels, the collection of taxes as well as a "prudent" management of the economy [3]. Today, the scenario has changed because of the fall in prices, but the economic armour still works and significant public investment is still planned.

The problem is that the referendum has awakened the anti-reelection instincts based on the old anti-state reflexes of Bolivians (although they are calling for "more state"). Hernando Siles, a supporter of a lukewarm social reformism, had to face a popular uprising in 1930 at the time where he attempted to "perpetuate himself" in power. The leader of the National Revolution, Víctor Paz Estenssoro, was the victim of a coup in 1964 after having acceded to his second consecutive term and had to go into exile in Peru. Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, during a second non-consecutive term in 2003, fled by helicopter in the middle of the Gas War. Thus, an aversion to "perpetuation" is one of the marks of the political culture of Bolivia and its distrust of the

regime. Also, we must not overlook the penetration of a certain "liberal" political culture produced by the democratic consolidation since 1982.

Morales has dulled these reflexes and, as president and a symbol of a new era, he won election after election for a decade. But today this magic is in large part dissipated. Be that as it may, after a decade in a country as politically unstable as Bolivia, the fact that he has maintained almost half of the votes is not insignificant. If the supporters of the No vote are very diverse, those in the Yes camp support the continuity of the *cocalero* mandate. For this reason, the opposition knows that the MAS is not yet defeated in 2019. In contrast, there is no doubt that the project of the governing party is weakened. The results of February 21 can be read as a loss of the electoral sectors that the MAS had won over - through its hegemonic expansion - but which were far from being won to an absolute electoral loyalty: the voters in the big cities and those in the autonomist East led by Santa Cruz. The peasants and the medium-sized towns saved the president from a major defeat. Nevertheless, local conflicts in Potosí and El Alto, poorly resolved, weakened Evo in these areas in these Andean bastions of the MAS.

Evo has always been convinced that he has a "covenant of blood" with the peasants, that they would never abandon him, while urban support was always suspicious, volatile. It is there that the strength and the weakness of Evo's project has always been located, this reliance on a peasant matrix (and this paradoxically while the country is increasingly urbanized). We should add to these elements a campaign whose effectiveness was more present on the No side, in particular on the social networks (in fact, the president called, after the referendum, to "discuss their use" because dirty wars are organized there, which "bring down governments"). A series of figures - such as the Amalia Pando journalists or the more polemical Carlos Valverde of Santa Cruz - joined a large number of regional authorities in the opposition and boosted a campaign sometimes without resources (another

difficulty for the MAS has been winning municipalities in the big towns and governorships: the prestige of Evo's government has always been inversely proportional to its low level of local governments).

Since 2009, pragmatism has allowed Evo to broaden his base in Santa Cruz, while his government became ever more "normal" and lost its revolutionary character. It is not a coincidence that discourse on stability has replaced that on change. And, for the first time since 2005, Morales' campaign for February 21 lacked images of the future and took refuge in the conquests of the past. It was no coincidence that, faced with results that went against him, in the midst of the official count, Morales recalled the attacks launched against him in 2005, while he was a peasant candidate for the presidency, accusing him of being a "Taliban" or a "drug dealer". It was a kind of refuge in the peasant Evo that the management of the power had cleared from his profile; a return to the origins and to the surroundings in which he feels most secure, that of the ethnic-cultural "covenant of blood".

In the context of an increasing loss of initiative, the bullets of the opposition - certainly very dispersed - have begun to hit the shield erected over months and years. Thus, the accusation that a former spouse of Evo ran a Chinese company which had received public contracts without tender has had an impact on his moral capital, the source of his political legitimacy. To this was added the scandal of the Indigenous Fund: phantom projects funded by the state putting in question the indigenous capacity to renew politics. On top of that, the revelation that Álvaro García Linera, the vice-president, had not completed his degree in mathematics in Mexico has had a disproportionate impact and forced him to revalidate, on the defensive, his status as an intellectual - despite the fact that he is a regular guest of various prestigious universities because of his theoretical-political work.

But, in addition, the No camp found an argument which was transformed into a powerful weapon because it was the echo of a generalized feeling, especially among the urban sectors: Evo's government

was indeed a good government in many respects, but it was not right that he should "perpetuate" himself in power. The writer Edmundo Paz Soldán, for example, has stated that he observes the Bolivia of the last decade "with an economy which has not ceased to grow, which has allowed the reduction of extreme poverty, the expansion of the middle class and a significant improvement in our health and education indicators". He adds that "Morales has been able to handle the economy, he has promoted the policies necessary for the inclusion of the excluded groups, and he has consolidated a consistent maritime policy; he has also projected the country at the international level".

He argues that "On the negative side, there is institutionalized corruption, the lack of independence of the judiciary, the lack of policies in the area of gender equality as well as the absence of a genuine plan of industrialization meaning that Bolivia ceases to be an economy dependent on its raw materials". And he concludes: "I only hope that Bolivia is up to it and shows the continent that, while it admires Evo and approves his management, it has still more confidence in its institutions and in a democracy which limits the impulses of its leaders to remain forever in power" [4]. This reasoning contains many points which have strengthened the No vote: those who the government finds most difficult to neutralize with its economic data.

The loss of magic has however also conjured up other ghosts. The burning of the town hall in El Alto, controlled by the young opposition mayor Soledad Chapetón, by "family fathers" who were protesting, has highlighted the fact that the repertoire of collective action that, in 2003, paved the road to the epic Gas War, in another context may become the survival of forms of excessive protest, which hinder the normal functioning of institutions and cause deaths. All this generates a strong rejection by the "silent majorities" of social movements, based on corporate bodies and even with mafia overtones, as happened with the trade union leader in El Alto, Braulio Rocha, who had warned

Chapetón that he would be "his nightmare" and who is today in detention for the fire.

Continue without Evo?

One aspect of national-popular governments lies in their difficulty in accepting a new order, formalized for example in the constitutions approved under their management as well as their tendency to think of these Charters as the result of transitional relationships of forces that must be changed as soon as it is possible to "advance". This causes paradoxical situations, as also seen in Venezuela. Because of the attempts to change these new Magna Cartas, the defence of these constitutions falls into the hands of the right which had attempted to prevent their approval. Another challenge is to practice politics in an effective manner after having weakened one's opponents.

The MAS must consider a change of candidate for 2019, which could have as a positive result compelling the party to abandon the inertia of automatic electoral triumphs and updating its transformative offer. It is still too early to anticipate future candidates. The chancellor David Choquehuanca, the vice-president Alvaro García Linera, the president of the Senate and former journalist Alberto Gringo González? During a recent interview published in the newspaper *El Deber*, the president seemed uncomfortable when asked if the vice-president (who has accompanied him these past ten years) would be the plan B if he should lose the referendum. Although he has praised him as a kind of co-pilot, he has compared him to a "secretary" rather than a potential president [5].

Perhaps it was only a sentence stemming from the discomfort of answering on the subject of a possible defeat. But perhaps it also marked the terrain. On the other hand, the referendum could also be a No to García Linera because the consultation focused on the empowerment of the pair in their search for a new mandate. Will Evo seek to be a kind of Putin in search of his Medvedev or a Lula in search of a candidate who is not a simple dauphin? At a certain point in time, they spoke of a woman "to complete

the cultural revolution", but for the moment, Gabriela Montaña, former president of the Senate and current president of the Chamber of Deputies, will have to overcome the polls which are very unfavourable to her. This said, with Evo, we can never rule out a surprise as to names in the future. The changes in the region, without any doubt, do not help for the moment the MAS.

But, beyond the nominations, the doubts relate to the fact of whether the government will be able to capture the affection of Bolivians with new transformative proposals. The ideas on Bolivia as an energy power contain an excess of enthusiasm (and a tone recalling the 1950s), which have obscured some current progress in the area of fuels while themes such as health and education remain pending. The same goes for the purchase of a Chinese satellite, which has generated an enormous media fever, effective at the beginning, but which has then proved to be counter-productive. As we pointed out in a recent article: "the possibility of making the industrial "Great Leap Forward" without the technical-scientific apparatus which accompanies it has become illusory and linear. The 2015 Development Plan is too general [...]. The importance assigned by the president of Bolivia to the Dakar rally passing via Bolivia - in spite of its colonialist character and its effects on the environment - is one of the elements of tension in the official discourse, which has transited towards too many centrist drifts. At the same time, the insistence on macroeconomics and on its data obscures some more general debates on the future horizon of the country" [6].

On the No side, a "new right" in opposition, with territorial bases in different regions, will seek to capitalize on the results in the face of more minority-based efforts aimed at building a progressive option which is not linked to the party in government. The No camp will experience its own battles, in order to overcome a strong lack of consensus, the discrediting of old figures (associated with past governments) as well as the need for a generational renovation (there are mayors and governors under 50 who already eye their political future). For the moment, the No is a juxtaposition of multiple voices (against "abuse", "new elites", "dictatorship" - and those who are go very much further, against the Indians - and many in favour of "democracy" or the "constitution"), who articulate authentic claims, reject unnecessary grievances and question the use of a constitution which has been presented as a re-foundation. But as we already know, politics depends very much on those who embrace the "fleeting moments" of history [7]. And these moments will occur at the end of the electoral game, at least as regards the candidacy of Morales and the opening of a scenario which is completely new in relation to 2006. In the meantime, the figure of the "two Bolivias" – so much noted between 2006 and 2008 - is back on the scene. However, against the temptations about the circularity of history, Bolivia is no longer the same; there is no doubt that progress has been made in multiple ways. Although many of these ghosts refuse to be exorcised.

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SOCIAL UPEHAVAL IN TIMES OF NEOLIBERALISM

The deep roots of Macedonia's protest wave

ADELA GJORGJIOSKA ·

by **Adela Gjorgjioska**

The ongoing protests were sparked only by the latest output of the first of these pillars – the privatization of institutions of law and justice. Beyond reactionary revolt, they have exposed a rising demos, growing too determined to be neatly enclosed within establishment politics. Toppling the corrupt governing coalition is its priority. Achieving that priority, however, must not come at the expense of tackling the deeper preconditions of the current predicament. For this protest movement to truly deserve the label "revolutionary", it will need to evolve into a more articulated and determined social movement, which does not shy away from addressing the underlying logic of its context-specific type of neoliberalism, and its implications in the privatization of institutions, commons and the electorate. That evolution will require the movement to be inclusive and truly represent the emerging demos. This will also require the articulation of demands which go beyond the liberal framework of anti-corruption and "un-capturing of the state," and find their expression in the coordinates of equality, democracy and social justice.

Privatizing institutions

Macedonian President Ivanov abolish all judicial cases related to

Protests were sparked by President Ivanov's blanket amnesty to 56 officials under criminal investigation

"Exposure ceases to matter very much, as impunity becomes the rule. Like bankers, leading politicians do not go to prison," wrote Perry Anderson in an article describing the commonplace interlinking between capital and politics across members states of the EU, as well as the institutions of the Union it-

self, following the onslaught of neoliberalism in the 1980s. The recent Presidential blanket amnesty is only the last in a chain of events, which have unraveled in Macedonia over the past year, indicating that the country, although not yet a member of the EU, seems to be fully in line with such practices.

A wiretapping scandal unleashed in February 2015 exposed the intricate methods through which public institutions and property have been privatized by the governing coalition between DPMNE and BDI. The ensuing mass protests (May 5-16, 2015) interrupted the freedom for the Governing coalition to enrich themselves without distraction or retribution. Tens of thousands of citizens demanded accountability, resignations by the Government and criminal prosecution. Instead, however, what followed was the "Przino" political agreement, brokered by the EU, and agreed to by VMRO-DPMNE and BDI from the ruling majority, and SDSM and PDSH from the opposition. Its three key provisions were media and election reform and the establishment of a Special Prosecution Office (SPO) tasked with probing high-level crimes as exposed in the wiretaps. The agreement was based on the premise that the same political parties charged with obliterating the rule of law, would now take a constructive role in its reestablishment. Such a role also required the political parties to work counter their own interests: political survival and avoidance of criminal prosecution for key officials and collaborators. Not surprisingly, that assumption proved fallacious as soon as the implementation of the agreement started to pose tangible threats to the governing coalition.

The main threat came from the Special Prosecutor (SPO). As the only judiciary oasis set against a legal system under the private control of VMRO DPMNE

and/or BDI, the SPO has already opened several cases and has indicted a dozen people, including former Ministers and city mayors in office. Although the courts have so far rejected collaboration, refusing, for instance, to take suspects into custody, the SPO remains a real threat. Preempting the possibility that an independent judge out of the party line will take on imminent cases indicting top figures high up the VMRO and BDI hierarchy, including former PM Gruevski, the President's amnesty came as a self-defence measure.

The second self-defence measure has been the push for early elections. On the third day of protests the speaker of Parliament announced early elections to take place on June 5th. While early elections would indeed legitimize the existing government through a new victory, they would be far from fair and free. Concerns remain regarding a credible clean-up of the electoral roll, still non-existent media reforms, as well as insufficient measures to separate state and political party activities. Indeed, the SPO has revealed evidence that the electoral roll of voters has long not corresponded to the actual number of voters. Irregularities uncovered include the issue of 35,000 identity cards, and over 60,000 new citizenships approved.

The disruption of democracy extends beyond such irregularities into an elaborate and tightly knit clientelistic eco-system, which the DPMNE/BDI utilize on two levels. Firstly, as a tool for building an illusion of popular legitimacy, and secondly, as an instrument for discarding accountability from below.

The privatization of the commons and the electorate

Macedonia's public debt, rose from 1,55 billion to 4 billion euros (from 23 to 46,6% of GDP) between 2008 to 2014. It is expected to reach 50% by 2017. This public debt has not been used to kickstart economic and social development, but was channeled into the clientelistic support base for DPMNE/BDI. The public debt has funneled a support base, which consists of members of two very distinct classes, with largely incompatible interests.

Feeding off the expropriation of public debt, property, and institutions over the course of the past 10 years, the DPMNE/BDI clientelistic eco-system has financed the emergence of a new capitalist-politician elite. Capitalists, whose profits depend on tight links with government did exist throughout the nineties, but the symbiotic relationship has been brought to a new extreme during the reign of DPMNE and BDI. One source of criminal capital has been the megalomaniac urban restructuring project Skopje 2014, with large amounts of its 600 million euro cost either laundered or used to buy off support. Contractors for such re-developments have also served as campaign donors for the governing coalition. These non-productive investments have been made in a social context of demolished healthcare, education and environment, alongside rising poverty and inequality. Their underlying logic has been a familiar neoliberal one — accumulation of public property and money, and its redistribution to a small percentage of close collaborators in exchange for loyalty and support for the party eco-system.

At the other end of the support base, we find a predominantly precarious population. Minimum wage salaries, pensions, subsidies in agriculture and basic social security services have been made conditional on party loyalty. Public debt has also been used to finance salaries for a burgeoning public administration staffed with party servants. The wire-taps revealed conversations confirming how promotions, hirings and lay-offs in public jobs are arranged. In one tape, the former Minister of Interior is heard saying "Everything should be cleaned out [in the Interior Ministry]," by which she meant "cleared of any employees not under direct party control." The same goes for the BDI. After assuming control over the instrument of employment deriving from the Ohrid agreement of 2001, Ahmeti (the leader of BDI) has been able to assume control over employment of virtually all Albanians in the public administration.

The extent of the clientelistic practice goes so far that the people themselves have internalized the

understanding that it is not the state that offers employment in the public sector, or the state which gives agriculture subsidies, but the party that gives it as a reward for loyalty. As party loyalty rather than labour, skills and expertise have come to be rewarded, this has not only created alienation in the workplace, but has also completely twisted the value system in the society.

As political parties have privatized a large section of the electorate the rise of a new type of protester—"the counter-protester" has been made possible. Pulled from the precarious support base, counter-protesters have been exploited as an instrument through which DPMNE has perpetuated the illusion of popular legitimacy. This has been the case also during the current protest wave: threats of layoffs have been used to coerce party servants to attend counter-protests to those organized by protesters demonstrating against the Presidential amnesty.

Such clientelistic practices apparent in the case of Macedonia, are observable also in other countries across the region. They do not simply represent the whims of a bunch rogue Balkan leaders. The organizing principles which make them possible are in fact entrenched in neoliberal logic. "Save your own skin," is a phrase reminiscent of a newly established culture anchored in the neoliberal consensus of the 1990's, which in the countries of the capitalist periphery such as Macedonia has meant the diffusion of ignorance and poverty, making anything acceptable in the race to the bottom for individual survival. In a society with ruined economy where the limited viable prospects for individual success stem from an exchange relationship with a corrupt elite, it is understandable where VMRO and BDI have found the fertile ground for building their clientelistic support networks.

"In a cultural context, however, where there is need of some sort of community spirit, nationalism and party affiliation have come to fill in the gaping void in an individualised, society without solidarity." [1] Nationalism, party affiliation and fears of foreign meddling in the country, have been used as an

amalgam to bring these two classes with hugely incompatible interests together: the capitalist politicians which have benefited from the accumulation of public property on the one hand, and on the other hand the working class, which has suffered a deterioration in living standards resulting from its dispossession from public services and social security. That amalgam has been created and secured through the nearly total control of media and impeccable centralized PR campaigns, which have fed the public with propaganda that incriminates every critical voice as an extended arm of elusive foreign services. In all such scenarios, the party has been likened to the state, and any attack on the party as an attack on the country.

It is in this context that one must consider the popular legitimacy which DPMNE/BDI are presenting both internally and externally as the justification for their rule. Indeed, claims such as "the people are on our side" are constantly used as a legitimating factor. Understanding the dynamics behind this practice shatters the illusion of their popular legitimacy, as well as the corresponding image of a democratically-elected government.

Social upheaval and the role of #Protestiram (#IProtest)

Nevertheless, not all of the demos has been "privatized" and tamed under party control. Those omitted from the clientelistic exchange system— the shrinking urban middle classes, employees in the private sector, students— are just some of the social groups from which the current upheaval has drawn. The dissensus which formed around the President's blanket amnesty united many different groups, political parties and citizens, around a common interest in putting an end to the corrupt regime and the restoration of the rule of law.

The #Protestiram (#IProtest) movement, has served important functions in the current mobilization. It has acted as a common signifier for all those citizens and groups who wish to demonstrate their discontent with the current Government. A post by an anonymous protester, published on the #Protestiram site, best describes this dimension:

"Enough with 25 years of transition, it is about time for the people to come and take what is theirs. #iProtest is not a political party. #iProtest is not an NGO. #iProtest is personal and singular. There is no leaders, no spokespersons. In fact, we are all leaders, everyone's voice matters."

The activists behind the online presence of the movement, the facebook and twitter accounts of #Protestiram, have played a crucial role in building up a discourse which remains faithful to the protesting demos one based on inclusion and a joint purpose. On the second day of protests #Protestiram, published a Proclamation for Joint Action, calling on "all the citizens, formal and informal organizations of citizens, including the Student Plenum, the Professors Plenum, the HighSchool Plenum, as well as LD Solidarnost, Ajde, Lenka, Mugra, the trade unions, the urban initiatives, and organizations that were part of the coalition "Citizens of Macedonia", as well as all others who share the fury, but also the wish for justice and democracy, to join the protests."

Beyond circulating information about protest meeting points, and documenting the different protests and guerrilla actions #Protestiram has created a new platform freed from the bounds of the structures of establishment politics. This has facilitated the mobilization of citizens and groups who wish to demonstrate their discontent with the current Government, but do not want to identify with or be seen as affiliates of an establishment political party. This applies specifically to the leading opposition party- SDSM, which revealed the wiretap scandal, and is presents itself as the leader of the fight against VMRO-DPMNE. SDSM is associated with the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s, which impoverished the population, started privatization of the institutions, the commons and the electorate, and in fact paved the way for the rise of the current coalition. As such it has the power to push away a large section of the population that opposes the current regime but does not see itself represented in SDSM, or any other establishment political party. This is far from saying that SDSM has no mobi-

lizing capacity. Due to its presence on the political scene since the country's independence, its party network branches across the country, and through closely affiliated liberal NGOs, it still has the power to mobilize notable sections of the population. [2]

Considering this, the protest movement, will be successful to the extent that it remains inclusive of the opposition party SDSM and their NGO collaborators from "liberal civil society" but will not be overtaken by either its structures or its discourse. Channeling the protest movement into merely an instrument for legitimating the negotiating position of SDSM (as was the case last year), would be a missed opportunity both for the continued appeal to a section of the demos, but also for a broader and deeper social movement to be built out of the current protest movement.

For the protest movement to evolve into a new social movement, it will need to be able to articulate a vision of an alternative society, built on two levels: democratic inclusion, and a new discourse on social justice. Inclusion is necessary in order to allow each class and social group to give their own meaning to what is happening and why they are protesting. And it requires new platforms of inclusion and articulation in the form of plenums, open forums, and joint actions, which will aim to build up a new civil society– one which is not based on an authoritarian leaning of the demos on political elites but rather corresponding to the newly discovered energy on the streets.

Its scope must go beyond the liberal, anti-corruption, uncritical pro-EU narrative, in order to address all three underlying conditions of the current predicament: the privatization of institutions, commons and the electorate. [3]

That requires a social movement, which has the confidence to challenge in discourse and in action the fundamental direction of the transition, the alliance between the state and capitalism and the depletion/privatization of the commons. Only once such questions are asked can the answer be a new social contract, one which rebuilds the country

around notions of freedom, justice, equality, knowledge and social justice.

What next for Macedonia? Best, worst and most likely scenarios

The best (and the necessary) scenario

The best scenario would entail the establishment of a transitional (or expert) government, established to ensure that the work of the SPO continues, and that the media and electoral reform are implemented in full. It would also require that the protest movement continues to evolve along the lines described above, and starts to find a political articulation into a third political option distinct from the establishment politics in both its democratic tactics and its political objectives. In the best case scenario we would see that social movement appealing to a broader social base beyond those currently protesting, through appeal to currently neutral voters, and also to those precarious and exploited social groups and individuals whose political power and agency is currently being stifled and privatized by the previously clientelistic system of exchange.

The worst (and the most likely) scenario

In the midst of protests now spread to over 10 cities across the country, as well as also counter-protests, the EU has attempted and failed to organise a new round of negotiations among the four establishment political parties. In response, Euro-parliamentarians have published a note of concern stating that they are now "forced to consider further actions." It is difficult to envision what those could be, who they would serve, and what their effectiveness would be. Revoking Macedonia's EU candidacy status for instance is not a tangible threat to the corrupt elite and can even benefit them by removing one source of pressure and fueling the narrative of victimization by the West.

Further actions might include blocking politicians' foreign bank accounts, or revealing details of officials' foreign possessions. Additionally, as it is likely that many of the corrupt activities have extended

across borders, such as in the case of the Macedonian Telekom, the opening of prosecutions against officials in international courts, which might require the extradition of the politicians, might be a viable threat. Such measures however require determination and resoluteness which have so far been absent in the EU's response.

In recent years, the EU has on more than several occasions failed at playing up to its proclaimed role of advocate and guarantor of democracy, social justice and human rights. For instance some consequences of the interlocking of profit and politics in Macedonia are prevalent in EU's own ranks, testament to which are incriminations implicating the very guarantor of the Prizno agreement– the EU Commission for Enlargement. [4]

Additionally, of course, there is the EU's choice of response to recent situations such as the refugee crisis and the Greek Financial Crisis. Seeing how the EU has chosen to sacrifice democracy in the case of Greece and human rights in the case of the refugee crisis, [5] its own position as a defender of justice, human rights and democracy is compromised.

In this context, it is hardly pessimistic to say that the worst scenarios for Macedonia might in fact be those that are also most likely. The worst and most likely scenario would mean a continuation of the status quo, with some shake ups of the governing elite, for instance, the postponing of elections and the revoking of the President's amnesty under pressure from the International Community. However, cutting the deep roots of Macedonia's predicament requires radical solutions that emerge from questioning the very logic of neoliberalism and address its implications in the privatization of the institutions, the commons and the electorate. Such solutions however are not likely to follow from rigged elections, or rounds of negotiation between EU bureaucrats and corrupt party figures of the establishment. Until the decisions start to be made by the real demos, in correspondence with demands for equality, democracy and justice, Macedonia and

Europe will be contexts conducive to injustice, inequality and fascism.

LeftEast

PAKISTAN

Demanding land rights is not terrorism

FAROOQ TARIQ ·

The source of the problem is that while 14000 acres of land in the Okara district is owned by the Punjab government, it is occupied by the Military Farms administration. Since 2001 the tenants of the Military farms have refused to turn over half of their crops (bitai), which they and their families had been paying for over 90 years. How could ordinary people dare to say no to the military officers? But that is their real "crime." They demand their land rights.

The high point of the repression took place on April 16 2016 when police raided the home of Mehr Abdul Sattar, general secretary of Anjuman Mozareen Punjab. He was considered the main "terrorist," having modern weapons at home and surrounded by "proclaimed offenders." He was taken into preventive custody under the Maintenance of Public Order ordinance. As a precaution against massive resistance, the military trucked in tanks from other cantonments.

Yet Mehr Abdull Sattar was arrested without resistance. No weapons were discovered nor were there "proclaimed offenders" who fired back at his arrest. This myth was consciously promoted to demonize the peasant movement.

Despite a severe crackdown by the military and the police, the Anjuman Mazareen Punjab went ahead with its planned convention on April 17, marking the International Day of Peasants' Struggle. Thousands of peasant activists gathered in Okara district to demand an end to use of violent tactics by the state authorities and to seek the release of AMP general secretary Mehr Abdul Sattar and other AMP leaders.

After being unable to stop the huge peasant convention, the police are now resorting to arrests, intimidation and mass charges in order to force peasants off the land.

Currently the police are organising daily flag marches with dozens of heavily weaponized police vehicles patrolling the area.

The Pattern of Arrests and Protests

Following the successful 13th commemoration meeting of Bahsir Shaheed, who was killed by state agencies in 2002, in Ranalkhurd [1], its main organizer, Nadeem Ashraf, was arrested at home. He was charged with murder, attempted murder, anti-terrorism and various other serious criminal charges.

Malik Salim Jakhar, one of the main leaders of the movement from Kulyana Military Estate, has also been arrested and framed up on various criminal charges. Hafiz Jabir and Shabir Ahmad Sajid were arrested as well. Each time tenants protested on the main road. What else they could do? All these arrests took place during 2015/16.

As part of their plan to isolate and destroy the peasant organization, the police charged Okara journalist Hafiz Husnain Raza, who is working for Nawai Waqt group, in April 2016 with breaking several anti-terrorist laws. His real crime is following his father's path to speak the truth. The police prefer journalists who allow them to review articles.

On April 16 2016, police broke down the doors of Hafiz Husnain's home in order to arrest him. Fortunately he was in Lahore to see his mother off as she was going to perform Umrah [2]. Three days later two of his uncles, attempting to locate the journalist at home, were arrested.

In an official communiqué, the district administrator Okara claimed that day around 200/300 Muzareen tried to block the road on April 16 after the arrest of Mehr Abdul Sattar but they were "successfully" dispersed.

On the April 18 the Daily Dawn reported that 4000 Muzareen had been booked under anti-terrorist laws for "injuring police." However no police had been injured on the day as tanks and other military vehicles were used to disperse the crowd.

After arresting Mehr Abdul Sattar on April 16, District Police Officer Okara claimed that he was wanted in 150 cases. But at the Lahore High Court only 26 cases were entered. Among those 26 cases, the lower courts have acquitted Mehr Sattar in five cases earlier while the police themselves declared him innocent in another nine.

Among the other seven cases, one particularly stands out: In 2014 two peasants of Anjman Mozareen were killed by Rangers firing on them. Yet even the deceased's family and the main AMP leadership were charged with committing the crime.

What Drives the Repression?

Under the civilian government of Main Nawaz Sharif [3], the military were given the constitutional power to establish military courts. This was to be the tool through which terrorism could be eliminated. In fact the military operation in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) had some initial success in pushing back the growing tide of religious fundamentalism.

However in Okara, the Anjman Mozareen Punjab became a long-awaited target. A retired military captain turned police officer was posted to Okara to launch the attack against the peasant organization.

The district administration created the myth that "tenants are armed and hosting terrorists" as an excuse to launch massive repression. Yet with thousands attending rallies, there was never any looting, burning, or damage to property or to state security

forces. The protests were a peaceful expression of a most mature and militant peasant movement, representing the collective voice of the voiceless.

It is the unjust control of land by military-run companies and some individual officers that drives the protests. The peasants have built a strong organization and pursued their just cause through their constitutionally guaranteed rights of protest and assembly. The PMLN government is doing what Musharraf [4] as a dictator could not do.

According to traditional accounts the peasantry is expected to resort to armed struggle. Yet in this political struggle against the most brutal intuition of the state, the peasants' main tool was the building of a mass movement.

Defending Peasant Protest

Speaking in defense of the Okara peasant movement at a press conference in Lahore on April 18, the radical human right activist, Asma Jehanghir, said that we will never accept that peasants are forbidden to demonstrate on Grand Trunk roads. "Protest at the place with sound and light" is accepted worldwide.

The human rights lawyer pointed out that when protesters led by Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) [5] and Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) [6] staged a sit-in in front of the parliament for more than two months, no army tanks were called to disband the protesters.

"The military, the federal and the provincial governments must clarify their position regarding the suppression of the protesting peasants in Okara. What is the criteria being used to determine legitimate threats to national security and law and order?"

"The right to assembly is guaranteed in our Constitution," she said. "The government must answer why a group formed to lobby for rights of peasants has been branded a terrorist group. AMP represents more than 100,000 peasants who work and live on Pakistani government and military-

owned land. How did a peasant convention called for International Peasants Day threaten to cause a law and order situation?"

"Use of tear gas and tanks to disperse unarmed citizens is a serious waste of our taxes and calls into question enforcement of the National Action Plan, under which terror laws can apparently be used arbitrarily to crush any form of dissent."

Chaudhary Sajjad Ahmed, brother of AMP leader Mehr Abdul Sattar, told the press conference that his brother had been detained.

"When policemen came to take him away, we did not resist," he said. "If we were terrorists, we would have brandished guns and fought back. We have put up with many search operations and raids. No one has ever found weapons or any literature that indicates that we are enemies of the state."

The misuse of the National Action Plan against Terrorism as a pretext for suppressing the peasants'

struggle is very evident in case of Okara. The peasants are not terrorists. They are victims of state terrorism. They have lost at least 11 comrades in their 14-year struggle. The real issue is that the army wants to take back the land from the peasants. We will not let that happen. The actions of the authorities must be condemned.

The country's Constitution allows the AMP to hold conventions and to press for its demand for land rights, fair distribution of agricultural resources, and an end to state violence. The right of peaceful democratic protest is non-negotiable.

There should be an immediate stop to all attempts at dispossession and violence perpetrated by any state actor. The state must develop a comprehensive land reform plan with a just and equal distribution of agricultural, land and water resources in the country.

NICARAGUA

Ortega's Betrayal

The Sandinistas were an inspiration for a generation of leftists. Whatever their shortcomings, they became a shining example of successful revolutionary politics during a period of disillusionment for the international left. During the 1980s, Nicaragua was a red republic in the United States' backyard, clinging to socialist principles at the height of the Cold War.

When he was mayor of Burlington, Sanders visited the country as a guest of the revolutionary government. While in Nicaragua, he pledged to help stop US intervention in the region — at the time, the Reagan administration was funding a brutal anti-Sandinista insurgency that would ultimately leave more than sixty thousand dead. Burlington even entered into a sister-city agreement with Puerto Cabezas, an embattled city on the country's Caribbean coast.

Sanders's opposition to Reagan's dirty war in Nicaragua was hardly unique — there was widespread opposition to US intervention in Central America during the time, not just on the radical left but also among liberals and moderates. Yet today's Democrats seem to have forgotten this anti-interventionist history.

Sanders was forced to defend his support for the Sandinistas during the latest debate, inviting backlash from Hillary Clinton backers. Salon's Amanda Marcotte jumped at the opportunity to discredit Sanders, immediately linking to an article in which libertarian Michael Moynihan equates Sanders's support for the Sandinistas with an endorsement of breadlines. While this kind of red-baiting may be unfamiliar to younger Sanders supporters, it harkens back to the 1980s, when refusing to de-

nounce the Nicaraguan revolution invited accusations of anti-Americanism.

The defensiveness wasn't surprising. When Sanders visited Nicaragua in 1985, the Sandinistas still represented a vibrant radical force, premised on an opposition to American imperialism and committed to redistributing resources to their country's poorest. But the movement has changed dramatically since then.

While Sandinista president Daniel Ortega currently governs the country — having come to power in 2007 after seventeen years in opposition — the Sandinismo of today is a far cry from the force that once rattled Washington.

A Frustrated Revolution

The Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) came to power in 1979 as part of the Junta of National Reconstruction, a broad-based anti-Somoza coalition that included right-wing entrepreneurs as well as revolutionary socialists.

Education was a central priority of the FSLN-led government, which viewed mass illiteracy as a significant barrier to Nicaraguan development. In 1980, a nationwide literacy campaign connected young people from the cities with peasant communities long neglected by the Somoza regime. Almost one hundred thousand people volunteered to travel to Nicaragua's underdeveloped countryside as members of the Sandinista-led People's Literacy Army (EPA). When the program began, less than half of Nicaraguans could read; five months later, all but twelve percent were literate.

The reforms didn't stop there. The Sandinistas' commitment to land reform led the revolutionary junta to nationalize the Somoza family's former holdings along with those of their close associates,

placing between 25 and 40 percent of the nation's wealth under public control. Soon after, the Sandinistas began a land redistribution program, granting abandoned or expropriated plots to more than eighty thousand landless peasants.

But the FSLN's bold reforms were met with a groundswell of US-backed opposition. Right-wing figures like newspaper heiress Violeta Chamorro soon split from the government and began to collaborate with counterrevolutionary "contra" fighters. When the FSLN claimed exclusive power in 1981, a bloody civil war was already underway.

Despite the raging conflict, the Sandinistas called for free and public elections in 1984. Daniel Ortega — then the party's general secretary and the revolution's most celebrated figure — won the presidency with 67 percent of the vote.

The vote demonstrated overwhelming support for the revolutionary government. But the contra war continued, sapping 62.5 percent of the national budget yearly and preventing the FSLN from realizing many of its ambitions.

In this context, one of the revolution's central shortcomings became clear. When the Sandinistas came to power, they seized the properties controlled by the most prominent oligarchs — including the Somozas — but declined to nationalize many important enterprises in the country.

This strategy was associated with the *Terceirista* tendency within the party, which prior to the revolution had advocated a strategic alliance between workers, peasants, and liberal capitalists to establish a democratic political system as part of an anticipated long transition towards socialism. Once in power, the FSLN established a mixed economy — without the capacity to organize production on a national scale, the government depended on industrialists with deep pockets to invest in domestic production.

At first, this orientation helped prevent the kind of massive capital flight that had followed the Cuban Revolution twenty years earlier. But it also placed

severe limitations on the revolution's transformative potential.

For one, it starved the government of much-needed resources. But more importantly, it linked the survival of the FSLN program to the development of an entrepreneurial capitalist class, which soon became large and well-organized enough to pose a political threat.

As Ortega's first term drew to a close, the country faced an economic crisis. Five years of the American embargo had taken its toll, provoking the kind of capital flight the *Terceristas* had hoped to prevent with the mixed economy. Nicaraguan exports nearly halved in eight years, plummeting from \$415 million in 1980 to \$217 million in 1988. To make matters worse, the government's attempt to cling to domestic capital by controlling exchange rates resulted in a massive black market for American dollars, inflating the Nicaraguan córdoba by a staggering 20,000 percent a year.

In 1989, President Ortega introduced austerity measures. Thirty-five thousand public employees were laid off, including ten thousand members of the Sandinista People's Army. FSLN-controlled labor unions intensified their commitment to "production unionism," reaffirming a nationwide no-strike pledge and advocating work speed-ups. The national budget was cut by 44 percent.

Sapped of resources and battered by the contra war, the Sandinistas were especially vulnerable to right-wing forces within the anti-Somoza revolution. In 1990, with the support of the United States and contra insurgents, the anti-Somoza right united around a single candidate — Chamorro — to contest Ortega's reelection.

Chamorro went on to win the presidency for the National Opposition Union (UNO), a motley coalition of fourteen right-wing and centrist parties. The Sandinistas' electoral defeat in 1990 was a catastrophic blow, ending the national revolution they had inaugurated and initiating a long period of degeneration within the FSLN itself.

Out of Office, Into the Backroom

As Nicaraguan revolutionary Mónica Baltodano points out, the Sandinista electoral defeat coincided with the collapse of radical movements across the world. For some, the times seemed to call for "adjusting to reality"—that is, abandoning socialist aspirations and instead jockeying for power within the constraints of neoliberal capitalism.

After 1990, powerful members of the Sandinista establishment "adjusted to reality" by seizing state-owned enterprises to enrich themselves and suppressing party democracy to consolidate power around Ortega.

Just before leaving office, Ortega and his associates claimed ownership over hundreds of nationalized properties, transforming reserves of national wealth into their own private holdings — a dramatic betrayal of revolutionary principles that came to be known as *la piñata*, in reference to the prize-stuffed party toy.

Former Sandinista vice president Sergio Ramírez insists that *la piñata* was originally an emergency plan, intended to ensure the FSLN's political survival. "Sandinismo could not go into opposition without material resources to draw upon," he writes, so "there was a hurried and chaotic transfer of buildings, businesses, farms, and stocks to third persons who were to keep them in custody until they could be transferred to the party."

But this plan was never carried out. Instead, individual Sandinista officials kept the expropriated properties for themselves, often becoming the owners of private firms with lucrative connections to the FSLN political organization.

Many leaders — including Ortega — consolidated personal fortunes at the revolution's expense, eventually organizing themselves into an economic group that came to be known as the "bloc of Sandinista entrepreneurs." Ironically, they benefited greatly from the business-friendly policies of the neoliberal Chamorro administration — which represented the anti-Somoza liberals who had benefit-

ed from (and recently outgrown) the Sandinista mixed economy.

The opulence of the post-1990 Sandinista nouveau riche became well-known and much-resented in Nicaragua. Ortega's brother Humberto, also a former revolutionary commander, was one infamous example, living for a time in a luxurious Somoza-era mansion with a private baseball diamond attached.

But of course it wasn't just lavish mansions up for grabs in *la piñata*. Sandinista officials also took control of some of the nation's largest companies — including sugar refineries, major media providers, and AgriCorps, the \$100 million food producer that supplies much of the nation's rice and flour. During the period in opposition, these firms funneled money back into the party and often funded FSLN election campaigns. As a result, the affluent officials who ran them accumulated political influence as well as personal wealth.

But the Sandinistas still could not regain national power. After the Chamorro presidency, the party lost the 1997 election to Arnoldo Alemán of the Constitutionalist Liberal Party (PLC). Alemán was even further to the right than Chamorro — in fact, he drew much of his support from the original oligarchs who had once controlled the very enterprises Sandinista "entrepreneurs" acquired in 1990.

In the years following *la piñata*, Nicaraguans saw their national political system devolve into a tug of war between two competing blocs of elites — one comprised of the newly affluent Sandinistas, the other of older dispossessed Liberals — with members of each group often claiming possession over the same properties.

But this contest changed dramatically in 1999 when the FSLN, under Ortega's leadership, entered into a power-sharing agreement with Alemán and the PLC. This notorious backroom deal — known in Nicaragua as *el pacto* (the pact) — continues to shape the country's politics.

El pacto refers to a suite of about thirty different agreements between the PLC and the FSLN, some of which were subsequently written into law when the national constitution was revised in 2000. These agreements consolidated political power in the two major parties by establishing barriers designed to prevent smaller ones from participating in elections. The bargain also subdivided the government into PLC- and FSLN-controlled departments and strengthened the office of the president, among other reforms.

With *el pacto*, the two parties — each associated with a rival faction of the economic elite — became a single political machine. This alliance foreclosed the possibility of genuine democracy in Nicaragua, signaling the FSLN's transformation from an anti-authoritarian revolutionary organization to a top-down political party under Ortega's control.

Rampant corruption at the highest levels — much of it involving Alemán himself — provided the opening for *el pacto*. The divvying up of government offices seems to have been motivated in part by Alemán's desire to insulate himself from prosecution. Facing scrutiny from the comptroller general, Alemán neutralized the threat by ceding sections of the PLC-controlled judiciary to the Sandinista party machinery in exchange for a shake-up in the comptroller's office.

In 2003, Alemán was placed under house arrest after a scandal revealed he had embezzled as much as \$100 million from the national coffers. But the collusion between Ortega's FSLN and Alemán's PLC only intensified as Ortega continued to seek national office.

In 2007, he succeeded. Ortega was elected president with 38 percent of the vote, and the FSLN took national power for the first time since 1990. Two years later, in a stunning turn of events, Alemán's twenty-year sentence was overturned by Supreme Court judges sympathetic to the FSLN. Many suspected that Ortega was behind the pardon, wielding his considerable influence over the

judiciary to maintain the rigged political system established by *el pacto*.

Daniel-ismo

When Ortega became president in 2007, many leftists outside of Nicaragua celebrated the election as a watershed victory for the Latin American left — a triumphant return to power of one of the region's most storied left-wing movements after decades of retreat.

Some claimed Ortega's win signaled Nicaragua's belated entry into the "pink tide" — the wave of left-wing governments in Latin America that challenged much of the neoliberal consensus in the region. This misplaced optimism survives today, as observers on the international left still place Ortega awkwardly alongside figures like Venezuela's Hugo Chávez or Bolivia's Evo Morales.

Ortega hardly deserves such company. Chávez and Morales came to power with the outspoken support of mass social movements that demanded profound changes in the state's structure and agenda. Ortega's route to power could not have been more different.

In the decades leading up to his election, he suppressed party democracy to consolidate his power within the FSLN. By isolating his critics, Ortega ensured his nomination for president in every election between 1990 and his victory in 2007. His stranglehold on the party is so complete that some dissident Sandinistas have described the FSLN's trajectory as a turn away from Sandinismo and towards a new kind of politics — "Daniel-ismo."

But Ortega's popularity with the Sandinista base has waned. Many are resentful that their society seems to have slipped back into the strongman politics and backroom deals of the Somoza era. Widespread disillusionment with today's deformed Sandinismo has emboldened forces on the Right, some of whom even threaten a return to the contra wars.

To make matters worse, Ortega is no stranger to personal scandal, oftentimes enlisting the FSLN bureaucracy as protection against public ruin or even criminal prosecution.

The most shameful example: in 1998, Ortega's stepdaughter, Zoilamerica Narvaez, accused him of years of sexual abuse and harassment. Most Sandinista officials refused to take Narvaez's credible allegations seriously, instead rallying around Ortega. Ortega never faced any criminal proceedings, despite Narvaez's charges — ex-presidents' immunity from prosecution was one of the special privileges negotiated in *el pacto* the next year and officially amended to the constitution the year after.

But Ortega has faced some dissent from within the ranks of the FSLN. As early as 1994, Sandinistas fed up with Ortega's tight control over the party — including prominent officials like former vice president Sergio Ramírez — left the organization to form the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS).

Later, some dissident members of the party, including legislator Mónica Baltodano, refused to support the constitutional changes associated with *el pacto*. In 2000, Baltodano declined to run for an open seat in the party's national directorate, saying "I'd rather be a dreamer than a killer of dreams."

Baltodano is associated with the explicitly socialist Movement to Rescue Sandinismo (MpRS), which grew out of the Democratic Left (ID) tendency within the party and includes such towering figures as poet Ernesto Cardenal and songwriter Carlos Mejía Godoy.

Disgusted with Ortega's suppression of an internal party-nomination process, many Sandinistas even opposed Ortega's 2006 candidacy. The MRS broke from a five-year-old electoral alliance with the FSLN to run the popular Managua mayor Herty Lewites — a left-wing anti-Ortega figure within Sandinismo. Lewites died unexpectedly just weeks before the election, but the MRS still received about 7 percent of the popular vote. And during the municipal elections in 2008, the MpRS joined with the

MRS in an effort to reclaim local power from the FSLN, with limited success.

In the face of corruption at the highest levels of the FSLN bureaucracy, these currents are struggling to keep the emancipatory core of Sandinismo alive.

A Different Way Forward

To his credit, Sanders didn't back down when he was confronted about his 1980s enthusiasm for the Nicaraguan Revolution during the Miami debate. And neither should we — the FSLN victory over Somoza was a watershed moment in the fight against dictatorship and oligarchy in Latin America, and the reforms the Sandinistas were able to bring about are formidable reminders of the potential of left-wing governments.

But we also can't conflate the FSLN of 1985 with the FSLN of today. The party has gone through troubling changes since its defeat in 1990, and today it falls far short of the revolutionary promise it once projected.

Of course, some things have improved during Ortega's current presidency, which maintains a left-wing character in some respects. Under Sandinista leadership, Nicaragua has joined the Bolivarian Alliance for the People of Our America (ALBA) — the left-wing bloc that includes countries like Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, and Venezuela, convened by Chávez as an alternative to the neoliberal Free Trade Area of the Americas.

And some of Ortega's economic interventions have proved successful — in 2011, his government broke with the neoliberal development models it inherited, to great success. Nicaragua's gross domestic product is expected to grow by 4.2 percent this year, compared to an overall negative growth rate for the region.

But for many Nicaraguans — including many Sandinistas — Ortega offers no real alternative to the corruption that came before. And some of his plans may even prove catastrophic.

A mega canal project — the Nicaraguan Grand Interoceanic Canal — is slated to bisect the country, linking the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Funded by Chinese capital, the project is opposed — on both economic and environmental grounds — by peasant groups and indigenous communities on Nicaragua's embattled Atlantic coast. Some even allege the Sandinista authorities have used threats and other strong-arm tactics to force indigenous cooperation with the canal plans.

The way forward for the Nicaraguan left would seem to lie in the example set by FSLN dissidents —

like Mónica Baltodano and the Movement to Rescue Sandinismo — who sharply criticize the trajectory of the party but hold fast to the Sandinista principles of radical democracy and social transformation from below.

The future of the movement is in their hands. Sandinismo faces "a deep crisis," as Sandinista dissident Vilma Núñez de Escoria reminds us, but there is still hope that it can be redeemed from the left.

Jacobin

USA

The Republicans' Trump Problem

CHARLIE POST ·

The Republican "establishment" is haunted by the prospect of the oldest party of industrial capitalism in the United States nominating Trump, with many backing Cruz and encouraging the more "moderate" Kasich to drop out of the race. They hope to prevent Trump's nomination on the first ballot, provoking an "open convention" in Cleveland this summer where the party leadership will be able to select the candidate. Some are so desperate that they have discussed the possibility of the third-party candidacy — even though it would guarantee Hillary Clinton's election in November. Not merely is the party establishment — those with ties to old-line WASP (white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant) industrialists and bankers — embarrassed by a potential candidate who openly brags about the size of his genitals. Rather, they oppose key elements of Trump's program.

Although Trump is a capitalist, he does not represent any significant segment of his class. Though not above racist (particularly Islamophobic), misogynist, and anti-union politics, the Republican establishment and their corporate sponsors embrace neoliberalism and an aggressive foreign policy that seeks to secure the dominance of US capital across the world. Trump's opposition to "free trade" agreements, from NAFTA to the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership, and his isolationist opposition to the second Gulf War and ambivalence toward Israel (the most reliable US ally in the Middle East), is repulsive to the US capitalist class.

Nor do Trump's calls for mass deportations of undocumented immigrants find a resonance among

most business people. Capitalists, large and small, want a politically vulnerable pool of immigrant labor available in this country to work for wages and under conditions that those with citizenship rights would not tolerate. The US Chamber of Commerce, the broadest organization of capitalists in the United States, supported suit by the American Civil Liberties Union and League of Latin American Citizens against Arizona's law allowing local law enforcement to detain undocumented workers, which had led thousands of workers to flee the state and thus deprived the state's agriculture and construction industries of cheap and pliable labor. The Chamber and the Business Roundtable, which represents the largest transnational corporations, back an immigration reform that will expand "temporary worker" programs for both high-tech and agriculture and "a tough but fair process for the 11 million undocumented people who are living in our country today to earn a legal status." Put simply, capitalists want a pool of truly disposable and precarious "guest workers" to labor across the US economy, not their removal from the US labor market.

Where does Trump's support come from? For many on the mainstream right and liberal left, the answer is clear — the white "working class." Unfortunately, their definition of "white workers" is quite broad — all non-Hispanic whites without a college education. Not only does this conception allow mainstream commentators to caricature white workers as ignoramuses swayed by demagogic buffoons such as Trump, but it also allows them to misrepresent the social basis of Trump's campaign. First, although approximately 55% of Trump supporters do not have a bachelor's degree, this demographic makes up approximately 70% of the US population — this group is underrepresented among Trump voters. However, the college-educated white "new

middle class" (professionals and managers), approximately 30% of the population, is overrepresented, at 40% of Trump supporters. More importantly, the category "non-college educated whites" includes both wage workers and the self-employed — the traditional middle class.

Whereas white workers, including some union members, make up a minority of Trump's supporters, the majority is drawn from the traditional and new middle classes — generally older white males and the less well-off strata of these classes. According to the Washington Post, half of Trump supporters had individual incomes of less than \$50,000 annually. The impact of three decades of neoliberalism, in particular, the stagnation of real incomes and growing inequality, combined with massive losses of personal wealth (mostly housing values), growing personal debt, and growing economic insecurity since the recession of 2007-2008 have produced a polarization of US politics in 2016.

The same social and economic forces that have shifted younger, more racially and gender diverse middle and working class people toward the left-wing populism of Bernie Sanders, have made the right-wing populism of Trump attractive to many older white men in the middle and working classes. Caught between a decimated labor movement and an extremely aggressive capitalist class, parts of the middle classes are drawn to a politics that scapegoats immigrants, unions, women, LGBT people, and people of color. The Trump phenomenon is part and parcel of the growth of right-wing populism among the middle classes across the capitalist world — the UK Independence Party in Britain, the National Front in France, and the Five Star Movement in Italy.

Right-wing populism is ideologically similar to the classic fascist movements of the 1920s and 1930s. Without question, the Trump campaign has allowed genuinely fascist elements in the United States — white supremacist organizations organized to physically confront unions, immigrants, native-born people of color, and LGBT people — to emerge into the political sunlight. Clearly, the can-

didate's encouragement of physical violence against his political opponents and the emergence of the "Lion's Guard" — "an informal civilian group dedicated to the safety and security of Trump supporters by exposing Far-Left rioters" — are alarming. However, Trump's campaign is not fascist, nor do the fascist elements around it — nor Trump himself — have a significant chance of coming to power.

Populist ideology alone does not define fascism. Instead, fascism is a social movement of the middle classes that is organized as both an electoral party and a street-fighting organization that seeks to physically defeat the organizations of working people (left-wing parties, unions, etc.) and destroy the institutions of capitalist democracy. Fascism becomes a mass movement with the potential of taking political power when left-wing movements threaten but fail to take power and capitalist classes continue to fear challenges from below. Trump is attempting to win an election, not abolish representative government. More importantly, US capitalists, unfortunately, have not faced any serious challenge to their dominance in the United States. They have no need to turn power over to the radicalized middle classes. If the Republican establishment cannot stop Trump, they will likely cross partisan lines and support a neoliberal politician like Hillary Clinton.

The claim that Trump is a fascist is not simply an academic or analytic problem. More importantly, it buttresses a strategy for the progressive left that is self-defeating. Reasonably frightened by the prospect of a Trump presidency, the official leadership of unions and organizations of women, people of color, immigrants, and LGBT people will double down in their support of whomever the Democrats nominate at their Philadelphia convention — including Clinton — as the "lesser-evil."

This strategy is based on two illusions. First, there is the notion that Trump has a reasonable chance of being elected president. Most political commentators agree that Trump can win only if there is a sharp decline in voter participation, especially among young people, women, and people of color.

If Trump is nominated, there is a strong likelihood that most traditionally Republican corporate donors will jump ship and support Clinton. Her record as "co-President," Senator, and Secretary of State demonstrates that she is a reliable neoliberal representative of capital. Armed with a larger war chest and able to appeal to widespread loathing of Trump, Clinton will probably be able to build a massive "get out the vote" machine. Quite likely, she will be able to mobilize voters in as great numbers as Obama did in 2008, when slightly more than 57% of eligible voters came to the polls — the largest percentage in 40 years.

Second, "lesser-evilism" has actually accelerated the drift to the right in US politics. The fear of alienating their Democratic "allies" has led the official leadership of reform movements in the past 80 years to derail the sort of social movements — militant labor struggles, mass movements against racism, sexism, and war — that can win reforms and build left-wing consciousness and politics. In

the name of "being realistic," these forces adapt to the Democrats and drop demands for real reforms. The Democrats are then free to "compromise" with the Republican right. With social movements weakened and invisible, the "alliance" with the Democrats allows the populist right to remain the main voice of militant opposition to the failed policies of the Democrats.

Fortunately, we have a concrete example of how to fight Trump and the right. The mass mobilization against Trump initiated by immigrant students at the University of Illinois-Chicago that led him to cancel his rally is an example that needs to be replicated whenever and wherever Trump attempts to campaign. Along with rebuilding effective social movements among working people, these sorts of mobilizations will build the basis for a real independent political alternative to both right-wing populism and mainstream neoliberalism.

Public Seminar

USA

Why Blacks vote for "pragmatism"

MALIK MIAH ·

It is easy to assert that the reason was strong support for Clinton by the establishment Black leadership, from the Congressional Black Caucus Political Action Committee to the traditional civil rights groups, church and community leaders.

Charles Blow, a Black columnist for The New York Times, charged those who back Sanders as "condescending" toward African Americans and their decisions. Paul Krugman, an economist and fellow NYT columnist, goes further, implying that Sanders supporters are not realists and are hurting the Democratic Party by challenging the Clinton candidacy.

A more important factor, however, is that Blacks remember the Bill Clinton presidency in the 1990 as positive compared to how they were treated under Reagan, Bush 1 and Bush 2. The racism directed at the first Black president, Barack Obama, is another.

Hillary Clinton is seen as the continuation of the Obama presidency (as she repeats over and over again).

Race and Racism

African Americans are probably the most pragmatic voting bloc in the country. African Americans more than any other ethnic group understand white supremacy, racism and class exploitation.

The fact that Bernie Sanders is from a mostly white liberal state, Vermont, is not why Blacks have failed to rally to his banner. The reality is that Blacks in the Old Confederacy are the most realistic about what is possible to win in today's rising white racist backlash.

African Americans live with state-sanctioned violence and extra-legal terror and discrimination. There is less hypocrisy about race relations in the Southern states, where "them and us" is crystal clear.

But even in liberal San Francisco, a 2013-2015 study of police traffic stops showed that Blacks are pulled over and searched four times as much as whites. African Americans are less than six percent of the city's residents. Whites are 44% (April 8, 2016 San Francisco Chronicle). San Francisco cops are as trigger happy and shoot Blacks and Latinos as "suspects" as much as their comrades in the South.

Few Illusions

The appeal of Clinton is not so much a rejection of Sanders' program, but sizing up which candidate can win in November.

There are few illusions among African Americans that voting in and of itself will stop racism and discrimination. But there is a deep understanding that the white supremacists understand that the vote represents a symbol of political influence and potential power.

Voter suppression is central to the racist strategy to roll back progress made by Blacks over the last four decades.

Kevin Alexander Gray, a Black progressive living in South Carolina, made an important observation in a March 2 article ("Why Black Voters Aren't Feeling the Bern") in The Progressive. He was speaking to those Sanders supporters who came to South Carolina:

Sanders has been in Congress for thirty years, but hasn't developed meaningful relationships with many black elected officials and activists. The way he approached South Carolina was largely to bring in outside black, northern intellectuals — all men — who have made a habit of denouncing President Obama. And Killer Mike — a rapper. Women are 60 percent of the black electorate here, and you are hard pressed to find a black voter who does not feel strongly supportive of the first black President. Sanders might have missed the reality on the ground, since he held his events at the colleges. That isn't a serious bottom-up strategy for getting to where working people in the community really are.

He continued:

Black folks like some of what Bernie says about Wall Street and public colleges, but it's clear he's not really thinking about historically black colleges and universities.

Most historically black colleges and universities are in heavily in debt and many of their students wouldn't be accepted to public universities because of their test scores or grades. These institutions have been neglected in the Obama years. They are already at risk, and they would be even more at risk under a free public university plan.

This is just one small example of how black folks are at best an afterthought in the Sanders campaign. It's the same situation with critical issues like gerrymandering and the Voting Rights Act.

The historically Black college issue exposes a reality of Southern institutional racism. These institutions were formed because African Americans were prevented from attending the whites-only public universities in these states. They remain important centers of higher education for Blacks.

If in fact public colleges were free with open admissions, the possibility would exist to transform these institutions into publicly funded colleges. But Gray's analysis shows that there isn't the confidence that much progress is possible on winning

free college education and funding historically Black universities.

The reality is unless there is a push to make education free for all (pre-K through university) it will be difficult to keep funding for the private Black colleges and eliminate their debts. In the circumstances, the status quo seems safer.

White Fears

Since the rightwing Supreme Court majority gutted the Voting Rights law in 2013 and Republicans took over most state houses and the Congress, there has been a rollback on basic civil rights in the South. Whites there believe it is possible to limit Black political power, limit immigrants' rights and maintain the white-dominated status quo for decades if not forever.

Whites, especially working class whites who back Ted Cruz and Donald Trump, see themselves as the victims of reverse discrimination for the lack of income fairness and jobs. They for the most part see Blacks, immigrants and gays as their immediate target. They fear that these groups could seek "revenge" for what segregation did to them.

It's ironic that the only gun laws supported by the NRA and conservatives (Reagan as governor of California in the 1960s) were in response to Blacks beginning to assert their "Second Amendment rights" to arm themselves!

The backlash against the Civil Rights Revolution began immediately after the 1965-1968 civil rights legislation was adopted by Congress and by presidential Executive Orders. Black Power militants who wanted to go beyond legal equality put fear into the powerful.

The most far reaching gains of the movement were actually expanded under Republican President Richard Nixon in the early 1970s.

Nixon was no friend of Blacks. He used laws and FBI secret surveillance and police violence. Leaders were framed and assassinated. But as the ruling-

class representative, he sought to contain the rising militancy through reforms as well as repression.

White fear has always been a tool of the ruling class. As Timothy Egan explained in an April 8, 2016, article in the New York Times ("A Mason-Dixon Line of Progress"):

Nearly all the states with the highest percentage of minimum wage workers — full-time jobholders making \$290 a week, before taxes — are in the South. These are also the same states that refuse to expand Medicaid to allow the working poor to get health care. And it's in the same cradle of the old Confederacy where discriminatory bills are rising. Don't blame the cities; from Birmingham to Charlotte, people are trying to open doors to higher wages and tolerance of gays, only to be rebuffed at the state level.

Essentially, this Republican-controlled block has decided that it's better to be poor, sick and bigoted than prosperous, healthy and open-minded. And its defense is precisely that: The region is too economically distressed and socially backward to accept progress, so why change? Discrimination, as they see it, is just another term for religious freedom.

Race and class are so intertwined for Blacks that it is never seen as either or. It is our reality.

A majority of whites support better health care, higher minimum wages and end of student debt. The problem is that their political leaders use race-baiting and fearmongering to get these same whites to circle the wagon around their "white (nationalist) communities" and against immigrants and African Americans.

The "Confederate Party"

The United States remains two realities divided along both regional and racial lines.

A majority of whites in the old South especially (including youth) do not really see themselves as members of the Republican Party. Nor did they see themselves as members of the Democratic Party (Dixiecrats) before the civil rights revolution in the

1960s. They don't see themselves as Lincoln Republicans.

Most whites in the South primarily see themselves as ideologically supporters of the "Confederate Party" (the true meaning of "Southern values") even if few would openly put it that way.

That's why governments build statues and monuments for Confederate heroes, not for Lincoln or northern generals who defeated the Confederacy. (Never mind any monuments to former slaves who rebelled.)

Blacks were kept in their place even during Roosevelt's New Deal. The dirty deal (which organized labor accepted) was that improvements for northern Blacks and labor would not be extended to the South. That understanding (so called "respect" of state rights) is why white supremacists would happily vote Democratic.

Democratic Party leaders defended states' rights — the right to oppress and discriminate in the South. African Americans who could vote tended to lean Republican until the middle 1960s when Lyndon Johnson pushed through the civil rights laws.

This complex history of racism of the two major ruling-class parties is a factor in why Blacks in the Southern states voted for Clinton as the practical choice in the face of rising racism. They seek a friendly Federal government. They may agree with many of Sanders' positions but don't see him as likely to be the next president.

The support for Clinton is thus shallow. If Sanders became a realistic choice as nominee his support from African Americans would soar. (It should be recalled that most African Americans initially supported Clinton in the 2008 pre-primary polls until it became clear that Obama could win the nomination.)

Black Lives Matter is Crucial

Sanders for his part has listened to Black Lives Matters protesters and improved his program for Blacks. His long support for civil rights back to his

days as a student at the University of Chicago even forced the media to recognize his record of activism.

Hillary Clinton has made some modifications in rhetoric but her husband continues to attack the new movement as supporting "murderers" and criminals when Black Lives Matters (BLM) protesters attack her language about "super predators" in the 1990s when she was supporting Bill Clinton's harsh legislation.

The most important social movement for African Americans is the BLM. It is not relying on the elections to bring "political revolution" or even to spark a bigger social revolution from the outcome. It sees the electoral arena (correctly) as a way to confront the deeper social problems and explain why the entire state apparatus needs to radically change.

The problems facing Blacks are class and racial. African Americans don't have the luxury of "privileging" one over the other. They are combined in our everyday life.

Pragmatism rules in electoral politics when there is no mass direct action alternative aimed at both ruling parties. Blacks of course support fundamental

revolutionary change if and when it is realistic and in motion. Until then, the greater good (lesser evil) is how they will continue to vote.

To "Feel the Bern" is a concept but not a mass movement. The Clintons are a known quantity, and understanding the choice between Hillary Clinton or Trump/Cruz, African Americans hope for the best with the known quantity.

It will not work. But it does emphasize why movements like Black Lives Matters are so important to bring about real change.

The African-American voter whether in the old South, Midwest, Northeast or West seeks the same goal of ending racism and winning economic justice. What Martin Luther King advocated and Malcolm X explained can only be accomplished by mass direct action.

The protests against reactionary anti-gay/transgender legislation in North Carolina, Mississippi and other Southern states show that non-electoral resistance is growing. The potential of economic boycott is another positive sign.

This article will appear in the May/June issue of Against the Current

| BRAZIL

Why we voted against the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff

PSOL ·

The PSOL is and always has been in opposition, from the left, to the PT governments, from Lula, through to the first term and finally President Dilma's second term. The PSOL largely emerged as a split from the PT itself, during the vote against social security reform that the government put forward in 2003. We launched candidates in opposition to the PT in the 2006, 2010 and 2014 elections and did not participate in the coalitions that elected the parliamentary base of this government...

On the majority of occasions, our six representatives have voted against the government because PSOL and its legislators in the House of Representatives consider this government to be politically indefensible. The application of harsh fiscal austerity on the backs of workers, thereby adopting the policies of the right, is unacceptable. The maintenance of this economic project and of a political base founded on alliances with the most traditional parties of them all, excludes any possibility of this government carrying out policies that genuinely favour workers and poor people.

As is already known, the PSOL does not have any positions in the federal government, it will not put forward ministers and has no interest in participating in the horse-trading of parliamentary amendments in exchange for votes against the impeachment. We condemn this practice, the cause of various corrupt practices that we struggle against on a daily basis.

Our vote will be determined by our conviction that, given the way in which the impeachment process

has been pursued, it has become an attempt at an institutional coup, one that is not only unjust towards the government, but also to the population of the country. The process had malicious intentions for the outset and little or no legal consistency, and represents a political regression.

'Fiscal pedalling'

Dilma is not being put on trial for corruption or for the errors of her government. She is being put on trial for having practised so-called "fiscal pedalling", that is, additional budgetary funds decrees that deferred payments to public and private banks. The reasoning of the lawyers that filed the suit is to allege that "the fiscal manoeuvres created an illusory environment that favoured the president in her re-election".

The first point is that "fiscal pedalling" cannot be characterised as a crime of responsibility, the first necessary condition for dismissing an elected president. The legal case is further weakened by the fact that the suit is only against Dilma, as if her vice-president, Michel Temer, would not have "benefited" along with the president.

PSOL legislators presented a separate vote arguing this case in the impeachment commission.

Handling of the process

The second point is who is handling the process itself. If there is a sector of Brazilian politics that has no legitimacy to depose a president, especially when no crime of responsibility has been committed, and over which direct charges of corruption weigh, it is a Congress directed by Eduardo Cunha

and Renan Calheiros, both from the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB).

Cunha has converted the impeachment process into a campaign of revenge against those who did not want to defend him from the various corruption charges levelled against him. The president of the House of Representatives should, above all else, explain his accounts in Switzerland, the documents from the "Panama Papers" that revealed he is one of the owners of offshore companies used to launder money coming from corruption, and the complaints coming from the seven plea bargains, within the scope of Operation Lava Jato, that cites him as a direct beneficiary of the Petrobras scandal.

Before anything else, PSOL believes Cunha should resign (or be removed by the courts) from the command of the largest legislative house of the country. A process as serious for the country as an impeachment cannot be handled by a politician like this.

Convergence between coup plotters and media

In and of itself, an impeachment is not a coup. It is an instrument enshrined in our Constitution. But the convergence of various dirty agreements that being tied together for the post-impeachment period, together with the elements mentioned above (the lack of legal consistency, the absence of crime, and the vindictive handling of the process by Cunha), make this an attempt at an institutional coup.

The main operators of this process, aside from Cunha, are the tucano (Brazilian Social Democracy Party, PSDB) bigwigs, with Aécio Neves y José Serra leading the charge; Paulinho de la Fuerza (Solidarity - Sao Paulo, SD-SP) and a large group of politicians who hope to avoid the accusations of corruption that are piling up against them; and Michel Temer, the vice-president that hopes to become the great representative of so-called "national unity" in a supposed new and illegitimate government, which will bring with it more fiscal austerity, less workers' rights and, in particular, a grand

agreement to silence the scandals. All those cited previously, are being pursued by the courts.

This strong convergence has as its principal ally the big Brazilian media corporations that, together with the financial sectors, abandoned the mask of impartiality to turn themselves into spokespeople of the campaign for impeachment.

The PSOL will not join this group and this process of convergence simply because we are in opposition. Our political party is based on ethics, on program and, always, on democracy.

Our solutions

PSOL is and will continue being a left opposition. Our differences with the present government are programmatic: we do not believe in this model of doing politics. We are against fiscal austerity and taking rights away from workers. We will vote against subcontracting, social welfare reform and various other projects that the government supports.

That is why we say: the way out of the crisis is to the left. As well as fighting against regressive policies, we present to Brazil a platform of change in economic policy, prioritising the growth of the productive sector instead of financial speculation, with a drastic reduction in interest rates and large social investment.

We also believe that a new cycle can only be initiated through deep reforms: with the democratisation of the media, so that a plurality of voices are not suppressed; political reform, so that people can once again participate in making decisions for the country; tax reform, to end the existing unjust model of tax collection and tax the grand fortunes; among others.

We will only come up with real solutions through a new way of the forms and methods of doing Brazilian politics, that must be made for and with the people. PSOL will be on that side of the battle.

Translated by Sean Seymour Jones

Links

CAPITALISM AND HEALTH

The social history of a virus named Zika

JEAN BATOU ·

It prefers human blood

This virus was identified for the first time in 1947, in Uganda, then a British colony, for which reason it bears the name of a forest in this country. At this time, it was transmitted by a forest mosquito, *Aedes africanus*, whose closest relatives, *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus* (the tiger mosquito), proliferate in deforested areas devoted to monoculture and mining, even in the bordering urban areas, where they transmit this germ in the same way.

However, whereas in the complex ecosystem of the forest a large amount of pathogens live in balance with their hosts, it is quite otherwise when we are dealing with an environment disturbed by the quest for profit, in the epoch of globalized capitalism, carried now by vectors accustomed to living in close contact with human societies.

With widespread deforestation, the expansion of export monocultures and galloping urbanization in the global South, Zika has contaminated Southeast Asia and then French Polynesia, before reaching Colombia in 2014, then Brazil in 2015, where its epicentre, to the west of the state of Bahia, corresponds to the current border of neoliberal expansion.

In this region, millions of hectares have been transformed into ranches and dedicated to the irrigated monoculture of soybean, cotton, maize, coffee, fruit trees and so on for export. These ecological upheavals have caused an invasion of anthropophile mosquitoes, which particularly like human blood, of the type *Aedes albopictus* and *Aedes Aegypti*, as well as other species that carry the virus.

At the epidemiological level, there is for the moment only one certainty: economic policies of austerity have caused endemic poverty and dismantled public services and social benefits, rudimentary as they were, in terms of food, housing, water, sanitation, health and so on. They are thus responsible for an increasing exposure of the poorest populations to the diseases transmitted in particular by mosquitoes.

Zika and microcephaly

But if Zika has suddenly focused the attention of the whole world and led the WHO to declare a global health state of emergency, it is because it is strongly suspected of having caused an epidemic of microcephaly among the new-born in Brazil, where more than 1.5 million people have so far been infected. But why have such malformations not been observed in Colombia, where 2,000 pregnant women have also been infected? Why did the first cases of microcephaly multiply in the North-east, even before the outbreak of the virus? Perhaps because, according to the two doctors' associations of Argentina and Brazil, these malformations have affected regions where a pesticide (which destroys the larvae of mosquitoes) has been systematically spilled in the reserves of drinking water.

From whence the attractive idea that at least a part of the epidemic of microcephaly was caused by a chemical agent produced by a Japanese partner of Monsanto: Suminoto Chemical's Pyriproxyfen. It has been injected into the networks of drinking water of certain regions of the country, in particular in the North east (where 1,500 cases of microcephaly have been identified), on the recommendation of the WHO, to combat the proliferation of mosquitoes responsible for dengue fever.

However, the period of drought and water rationing (July to December) fostered an abnormal increase in the concentration of this chemical agent in the water consumed, which would explain the large number of cases of congenital malformations observed between October 2015 and January 2016. This hypothesis has not however been confirmed up until now by further investigations.

An opportunity for Big Pharma

In any event, the prevention of Zika is a good case for the pharmaceutical laboratories, in particular since the WHO has taken things in hand dramatically. The pharmaceutical companies are now engaged in a race to discover, test and produce massively a vaccine, to such an extent that Barack Obama has just asked Congress for \$1.6 billion to support US research and win this market. Also a good operation to restore the prestige and defend the presence of the United States in Latin America, in a period where the ruling left wing governments are meeting growing difficulties.

The sorcerer's apprentices are also working on the development of transgenic mosquitoes, able to eliminate and supplant the main current vector of yellow fever, West Nile virus, dengue, chikungunya, the Zika virus and so on: *Aedes aegypti*. This is the case with the Oxitec corporation, which has experimented with this flying GMO in the Cayman Islands, Malaysia, Panama and Brazil (in particular in the North east), while the European authorities have refused such tests under our latitudes because of the hazards involved.

In reality, according to the NGO GeneWatch, it seems that these reconfigured mosquitoes tend to lead to *Aedes aegypti* migrating to neighbouring regions, promoting the proliferation of other vectors which are more difficult to eradicate, such as *Aedes albopictus*. Research on transgenic mosquitoes also envisages more sophisticated and potentially frightening techniques, based in particular on the use of "gene drives" which, by genetically modifying some members of a population, can spread this mutation to the set of individuals.

Such manipulation could for example sterilize a species, and thus contribute to its destruction in a few generations. It could also, why not, transform an insect into a weapon of biological warfare. Denounced as extremely dangerous by many researchers, these technologies have however the wind in their sails again, in the current context of dramatization of the epidemic Zika.

Climate warming and pathogens

Whether Brazil's epidemic of microcephaly is directly caused by Zika, by the unusual concentration of a pesticide in drinking water, or by a combination of factors which are still unknown, it results more fundamentally from the social and related ecological upheavals neoliberal globalization. At the same time, the mosquito vectors of many viruses are extending their field of action in the world.

Very prevalent in Africa, Asia and Latin America, they now begin to reach Europe and North America, which no doubt explains the very strong media coverage of this new danger. But what do we know of the reasons for such expansion? They are certainly explained by the accelerated development of air transport by air, but are also in large part dependent on global warming.

To take the example of mosquitoes, they usually feed on the pollen of flowers, and this is why, when the females lay their eggs, they need blood as a supplementary protein. However, this reproductive cycle is accelerated by heat, as is the time of incubation of the virus in the body of the insects carrying it before they can transmit it by a bite.

The rising temperatures also explain the geographical expansion of pathologies linked to these insects. It is without doubt the cause of the outbreak of malaria in the highlands of East Africa, so far spared. Similarly, Mexico City no longer seems to be protected by its altitude (2500 meters) from yellow fever, dengue or of the chikungunya. The same reasons undoubtedly help explain the dissemination of the Lyme disease (a bacterium transmitted by a tick) in North America or bluetongue (FCO)

among European livestock (*New York Times*, February 20, 2016).

Just like the epidemic of Ebola, that of Zika is not a "natural disaster". The two flow from accelerated social, ecological and climatic changes caused by capitalist globalization, which submits human societies and the environment to an increasingly un-

bearable stress. The destruction of tropical forests by the exploitation of wood, the incessant quest for new mineral resources, the untrammelled growth of big export monocultures and insane urbanization, has not finished causing systemic cataclysms. The dissemination of new pathogens now represents one of the most dangerous and widely underestimated aspects of this race to the abyss.

FRANCE

Nuit Debout: let the gems sparkle.....

DENIS GODARD ·

At this point in time, there is no way of knowing whether the emblematic occupation of the Place de la République in Paris will really be able to continue, nor in what form it might do so.

It is characteristic of movements which contest the dominant order not to have a linear trajectory. On the one hand because even the steps forward that they take confront them with new challenges, new goals, new questions. After two weeks of occupation the movement is thus faced with questions of strategy concerning its attitude to repression, its relationship with movements in struggle, the need for its extension...

On the other hand, because the first effect of surprise has passed, the dominant order is reorganizing. So the government is openly seeking to take back possession of the Place de la République. All the mainstream parties, from the Socialist Party (PS) to the National Front (FN) now demand that the police clear the square.

But the unforeseen is also the result of much deeper reasons, related to the government crisis and the nature of this movement, of which Nuit Debout ("Stay up all night") is one of the forms of expression that are developing widely outside traditional frameworks.

A movement that does not come from nowhere

Nuit Debout is the result of several dynamics: widespread anger, the more or less subterranean development of different struggles, the emergence of a general struggle against an anti-social law (the El Khomri law, from the name of the Minister of Labour, also called the "labour law") and the initiative to occupy the Place de la République on the

evening of March 31, taken outside traditional frameworks.

To understand this is not to act as an archivist of the movement. It enables us to anticipate the depth of the movement and its capacity to react, and it gives us some idea of how it will develop in the future.

The widespread anger against the system and the government has been expressed for months in different ways: disaffection from the government, disaffection from all the mainstream parties. This anger is not necessarily progressive, when it is expressed by the vote for the far right. But it is not unequivocal. It was also expressed by the popularity of Air France workers molesting the director of human resources (by tearing his shirt) last autumn or by the success of a petition to support the Goodyear trade unionists who were sentenced to jail terms.

And over the past year struggles have increased, local and isolated, in the workplaces, a sign of renewed combativeness after years of retreat since the failure of the last great social movement in September 2010. It is in these experiences that combativeness and confidence are being rebuilt and the need for a broad-based movement is being felt.

And then, the last few months have been marked by specific struggles, a movement of solidarity with migrants and resistance of occupied places against the grand projects of the government, especially against the airport project in Notre-Dame-des-Landes. It is not irrelevant to note that in the weeks before the start of the movement against the El Khomri law there were two notable events. One in Calais, for the opening of borders, had a national

echo, even though it was not massive. The other, in Notre-Dame-des-Landes, brought together tens of thousands of demonstrators in support, significantly, of the occupation of the land by peasants and activists.

To this there must be added, after the stunning effect of the attacks of 13 November, the beginning of a counterattack against the draconian policing measures taken by the government.

It is in this context that the government decided to attack workers even harder, with a law dismantling even further the labour code.

A fightback launched outside traditional frameworks

The fightback against this law was launched outside traditional frameworks, while the union leaderships were ready, once again, to retreat. At the start of it a petition demanding the total withdrawal of the law was launched on social networks, and gathered more than a million signatures. Youth organizations then called, on the same basis (the withdrawal of the law) to make March 9 a day of general mobilization. The wide support for a fightback forced the unions to join in and to call for a national day of strikes and demonstrations on Thursday, March 31. But it is among youth in high schools and universities that the movement finds its driving force, with regular days of demonstrations and blockades.

On February 23 there was held in Paris a meeting of convergence of struggles around a newspaper, *Fakir*, which was independent but associated with the radical left, economists (including Frédéric Lordon) and casually employed actors and musicians. Around this time the film *Merçi Patron* ("Thanks, Boss"), supported by the same people, was playing to full houses. The meeting in Paris took place at the "Labour Exchange" (a building belonging to the trade unions in central Paris, near the Place de la République). It was held in a room that was so packed out that people had to be turned away! Following this success the initiators called a meeting for those who wanted to do practical work.

They expected about fifty people, but more than 200 turned up. At that meeting the idea was launched that on March 31, after the event, "we don't go home!" Gradually the idea of occupying a square at the end of the demonstration took root. The result was *Nuit Debout* and the occupation of the Place de la République.

Nuit Debout takes off!

More than a million people demonstrated on March 31 throughout France. Despite the rain hundreds of demonstrators came to the Place de la République. An association for defence of the homeless, *Droit au logement* (DAL, "Right to Housing"), supported the call and decided to stay on the square for several days with its tent, at least until the demonstration that it was organizing the following Saturday. And in the wake of Thursday March 31, the occupation really took off, with more and more people every day. Meetings were held with thousands of people on Saturday and Sunday. Commissions were set up, there were debates where people were free to speak. The Place de la République hit the headlines.

On the Sunday, the initiators decided to call only for a full occupation of the square on the following Tuesday and Saturday, which were days of demonstrations. At night it was really difficult to hold out with only a few dozen diehards, after public transport closed down at 2am. They thought that it would be more difficult during the week when people had to go to work the next day.

But from the afternoon of Monday April 4, hundreds of people gathered again in the square and over a thousand held an assembly that evening. A demonstration, decided on the spot in the afternoon, even started off from the square to protest against a conference being held by Prime Minister Manuel Valls nearby. Delegations arrived at the demonstration, of refugees, casual and precarious workers...

The square held firm. On the Tuesday, at the end of the demonstration, thousands took part in the pop-

ular assembly. From then on that would happen every night.

And from that first week a qualitative leap was taken that would intensify in the course of the second week. Many commissions were organized for different purposes (to write a manifesto, to set up logistical support, to "organize" democracy, to set up actions, an infirmary, a kitchen). Gradually there followed a radio, a television, a garden (!). Every morning the police evacuated the square. Every afternoon, with incredible ingenuity, a village was re-born, made up of tents, canvas covers and wooden pallets, and thousands of people took part for hours in a popular assembly. In parallel, thematic meetings were held and associations, publishing houses and alternative bookshops set up their stands. Those with impaired hearing held assemblies in sign language, open-air popular universities were organized, there were activities for children, poster workshops, legal training, etc.

But above all, on this square, the movement began to avoid potential dead-ends, to avoid being disconnected from the movement against the labour law. It established links with the movement that serves to fuel it. Contacts were established with places where there were struggles underway, with university and high school students, of course, but also with railway workers, postal workers, etc. Broadcasts were organized from the square to the workplaces to mobilize for the demonstration against the labour law that was scheduled for April 9. On top of that, many actions were organized in the framework of the convergence of struggles, actions which set off from the square, in support of casually employed actors and musicians, in solidarity with the refugees, expeditions to repaint the facade of banks or to occupy branches of the Société générale bank, demonstrations of the homeless, etc...

And to cap it all, there developed the practice of spontaneous demonstrations every evening, especially during the night, marching to police stations to get arrested demonstrators released, actions to dismantle the grids that prevent refugees from set-

tle in certain places or, simply going to have "a drink at Valls's place". Whereas the government wanted to ban protests from having any space for action with the proclamation of a state of emergency, the movement reoccupied this space and used it with jubilation.

And the movement spread, with the organization of Nuit Debout and attempts to occupy squares in several other cities especially after the April 9 demonstration. To varying degrees, sixty cities are involved.

Relations with the police

These successes, and the growing repression against the movement (and also, sometimes, fatigue) are now confronting Nuit Debout with several immediate questions concerning its future, which are also strategic issues: those of its extension, of its relationship with the movement and that of its relations with the police and its attitude towards violence.

The government is trying in various ways to put an end to the occupation of squares, and in particular that of the Place de la République, which plays an emblematic role. The media attacks multiply on the theme: this is a place of disorder, where violence is being organized.

The police are trying gradually, a little bit more each day, to regain control of the square. The demonstrations, especially those of youth and the spontaneous demonstrations, are attacked by the police in an increasingly violent way.

Two responses have emerged within the movement.

The first says that we must protest on principled bases, calls for an end to violence and proposes, in various forms, to appeal to the police to join us. This response risks disarming the movement against repression. We must not forget that in the recent (regional) elections National Front won over 50 per cent of the vote in the police and the army: its result was as high as 70 per cent among police

who are actively engaged. The police and the army are at the heart of state power and their direct violence is the practical expression of the violence of the domination of the ruling class. Without a strategy of confrontation with the police, the movement will have to give up its gains, and in the first place the squares that it occupies.

Moreover, spreading the idea that there could be a possible alliance with the police would become an obstacle to the necessary extension of the movement to popular neighborhoods, to migrants, refugees and undocumented workers, to radical trade unionists, all of whom are directly and very concretely affected by police violence.

The second response is that of direct confrontation with the police. This response, coming from various sectors, often called 'autonomous', advocates systematic and violent confrontation with the police, and even seeks to provoke it. An expression of a general radicalization, especially among youth, it is attracting more and more young people within the demonstrations and gets wider and wider, although passive, support. This strategy makes the heart of the state the essential target and tends to deny all the mediations by which a majority of society is drawn into a general confrontation with the ruling class and its state. To organize a systematic confrontation with the police, everywhere, can lead to marginalizing a minority that becomes much easier to suppress and to intimidating the rest of the movement.

But, and this is characteristic of the movement, the ideas and strategies that are dominant are very fluid. An anecdote illustrates this. On Monday, while the popular assembly was discussing in particular these kinds of questions, riot police tried to stop a logistics van from entering the square. Soon, hundreds came together to repel the police, who had to retreat outside the square under the pressure of numbers and determination. Among those who were screaming "Everyone hates the police" and pushing them back, some had argued, a few hours earlier, that we should say "the police with us"!

The question of extension

The second question that immediately comes up is not unconnected with the first. Weakening the ability of the police to directly repress the movement involves its extension, spreading out geographically as well as 'socially' and politically.

Geographic extension involves the proliferation of places where Nuit Debout intervenes. Nuit Debout events are being launched in different cities. Unlike the Place de la République, the initiative seems much more to come this time from organized activists, and in particular from members of the (more or less) radical left, in the broad sense of the term. The future of these initiatives will depend on the ability of these activists to let themselves be outnumbered and not to "channel" the expression of anger.

Social expansion means the development of Nuit Debout among working-class layers and neighbourhoods, which involves the themes and demands that are addressed as much as the place where the movement develops. This preoccupation is present in particular in the Place de la République in Paris, and this is very positive. But it can only be achieved by breaking with any form of paternalism. The neighbourhoods are not "mission lands" for activists, places without politics. The connection with Nuit Debout can only be made through the driving force of those who themselves live in these neighbourhoods and through the networks that exist there. The question is posed in similar terms regarding solidarity with undocumented migrants and refugees.

Lastly, political extension implies the refusal of any "institutionalization" of Nuit Debout and of its objectives. The idea of a new "constitution" to be written, initially launched by Frédéric Lordon, was quickly taken up in the assemblies. The attractive aspect of this approach is the radicalism that underlies it. There is nothing more to be gained from existing institutional frameworks, it is a matter of rebuilding a real democratic legitimacy "from below". But the risks are also great of a new formal-

ism, forgetting that the rules of a new world cannot be written by a minority but suppose the insurrection of the majority. Hence the necessity of political extension to the questions raised in the neighbourhoods, of antiracism, internationalism, struggles against sexism and LGBT-phobia, etc. Hence the need for questions around the role of work, vector of alienation, but also potentially collective place of struggle and social power.

The relationship with the movement

The dynamic of Nuit Debout is closely dependent on the movement of struggle, and very directly on the fight against the labour law. This is its principal and essential fuel. Outside the dynamics of movement, enlargement, collective experiences and radicalization, the Nuit Debout phenomenon is in danger of going round in circles, getting lost in abstract debates and in minority dead-ends and/or falling back, for lack of strength and experience, into forms of institutionalization. The risk is there. More than ever the future of Nuit Debout lies in its ability to link up with the fight against the labour law, to contribute to building a general strike.

Some people are already talking of the movement running out of steam and predicting failure, after the demonstrations of April 9 were between five and two times smaller than those of March 31, while high schools and universities are closed for the school holidays.

But these analyses themselves suffer from the lack of a dialectic between the movement and Nuit Debout. It is significant that it is in Paris, where Nuit Debout is the most rooted, that the demonstration against the labour law on April 9 had not significantly weakened since March 31.

On the one hand because Nuit Debout is beginning potentially to represent an alternative "leadership" to the union leaderships, who recoil at the prospect of a movement that is beginning to escape them and of a total confrontation with the government. After April 9, the union leaders called for a mobilization ... on April 28. The leadership of the CGT

rail workers' union, considered to be "left", is now betraying the movement, counterposing to it a different corporate agenda. The student union UNEF, which up to now has played a leading role, no longer calls for intermediate days of mobilization dates and welcomes the concessions won from the government.

On the other hand because the movement against the labour law crystallizes an anger that is much broader than just resistance to the attacks on the Labour Code and any attempt to limit this movement to the sole objective of the withdrawal of the law and to channel it will curb its potential and its fighting spirit. If Nuit Debout is dependent on the movement of struggle against the El Khomri law, this movement is dependent on the expression of a global revolt that Nuit Debout crystallizes.

The movement started outside the usual frameworks. Nuit Debout has considerably expanded the possible scope of this "outside the frameworks". Provided that it can link up even more with the most militant sectors in the unions and among high school and university students, it could contribute to a new step forward in the fight against the labour law, to a strike that would then become a political strike.

The future is not written

While this movement moves forward and asks itself questions, the dominant trajectories of state power continue to operate in the direction of strengthening the police state, in the sense of racism and nationalism, in the sense of social attacks. The monsters are not lurking in the shadows, they are quite definitely out there. One of their forms is the far right. This is also why the trajectory of the movement necessarily puts it in radical confrontation with the policies of the ruling class and with the state.

Once again, this confrontation will not progress in a linear fashion. The movement will no doubt experience partial setbacks and seem to be ebbing. No doubt it will change its form more than once. It will

sometimes have to know how to let itself be engulfed by massive and spontaneous forward rushes, even banging against a wall in order to learn how to demolish it or jump over it. Sometimes it will depend on initiatives taken by a minority, but which make sense for larger numbers.

What is certain is that after years of apparent listlessness and of the progression of all the reactionary tendencies in French society, something

has changed that makes hope rise again. Gems buried in the hardened lava of the last movement have returned to the surface with the lava, reddened and brighter still.

The coming times will be no less hard. But now we are no longer condemned to lie back and endure them.

Tuesday, April 12, 2016

MIGRATION

Europe's shame

CINZIA ARRIZZA ·

As Marie Elisabeth Ingres, the MSF head of mission in Greece, said,

We made the extremely difficult decision to end our activities in Moria because continuing to work inside would make us complicit in a system we consider to be both unfair and inhuman.

We will not allow our assistance to be instrumentalized for a mass expulsion operation, and we refuse to be part of a system that has no regard for the humanitarian or protection needs of asylum seekers and migrants.

On the very same day, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) published a statement announcing its intention to scale back its activities in the "hot spots" on the Greek islands, as a response to the new agreement between the EU and Turkey:

UNHCR has till now been supporting the authorities in the so-called "hot spots" on the Greek islands, where refugees and migrants were received, assisted, and registered. Under the new provisions, these sites have now become detention facilities. Accordingly, and in line with our policy on opposing mandatory detention, we have suspended some of our activities at all closed centres on the islands.

Externalization of European Borders

The new agreement was passed on March 18 and will cost the EU up to six billion euros to fund facilities for refugees in Turkey. It entails three key provisions:

1. All migrants and refugees illegally crossing from Turkey to Greece will be returned to Turkey.
2. For every Syrian refugee deported back to Turkey, another Syrian refugee will be resettled from Turkey to a European country.

3. Turkey will actively prevent illegal crossings by land and sea.

Activists and UN officials have openly denounced the illegality of the agreement, which disregards the individual rights of asylum seekers to be protected in the country to which they are deported.

On the one hand, UNHCR has warned that reception centers on the Greek islands are crowded with approximately 52,000 refugees and migrants — who are now being detained in unsafe and inhuman conditions — and that the system for registering asylum seekers is overloaded.

On the other hand, Turkey confers refugee status only to people fleeing from Syria, and not, for example, to asylum seekers from Afghanistan or Iraq; mass deportations of all non-Syrian refugees and migrants to Turkey would violate both international and European law regulating asylum.

To make things even worse, according to Amnesty International, Turkey is currently illegally returning thousands of Syrian refugees to Syria. De facto, through its agreement with Turkey, the EU is about to send thousands of refugees to the slaughterhouse.

Although one may be tempted to interpret this horrifying situation as the outcome of a coherent and univocal EU strategy, in fact such a strategy does not exist. Instead, multiple competing and contradictory strategies are in place, each undergirded by different political and economic interests and by a different vision of what the EU should be.

The agreement with Turkey is part and parcel of the main strategy adopted so far by EU institutions and consisting of an attempt to externalize European borders through bilateral agreements supporting the creation of detention centers outside the politi-

cal borders of the EU, the creation of hot spots in Greece and Italy, militarization of external borders into fronts, redefinition of the tasks and powers of Frontex, and an intention to create a European border guard.

This strategy, however, is currently at an impasse: though it has failed to keep the flow of migrants and refugees under control, it has created humanitarian chaos, bringing further political discredit to EU institutions.

The extent of the European impasse can be better appraised by considering that in just the past year eighteen different urgent summits on the refugee crisis have taken place, at different times involving various European institutions; the European Council, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, the United Nations, and even NATO.

The results of these summits have been abysmal: to date, after endless discussions and inner fights about the quota for relocating refugees in various European countries, only 660 refugees have actually been relocated.

Yet, if it is to succeed, the agreement between the EU and Turkey will likely need to be militarily backed by NATO. This past February, NATO became directly involved in managing the refugee crisis: they sent military vessels to the Aegean Sea to try to stop migrants crossing from Turkey into Greece.

Though the effectiveness of this agreement is uncertain, one of its first consequences may be an increase in arrivals from Libya to the Italian coast.

Libya was supposed to be a main player in the bilateral agreements aiming to detain refugees outside Europe's political borders. However, it is currently unable to do so, owing to the country's decomposition following US military intervention.

Mass arrivals from Libya to the Sicilian coast are beginning anew, and the hot spots planned in Sicily, some of which were never actually created, are largely insufficient.

Mass arrivals through the Mediterranean also mean an increase in deaths at sea: the International Organization for Migration estimates that 531 refugees and migrants died in the Mediterranean between the beginning of January and the end of March; that is 9 percent more than last year.

Collapse of Schengen

While the strategy to externalize borders meets an impasse, several EU state members are putting forward alternative and reciprocally competing strategies, which are only deepening the crisis of the EU project. The Italian government is contravening the border externalization strategy in two interrelated ways.

First, Frontex vessels in the Mediterranean Sea have been transformed into centers where refugees and migrants rescued at sea are pre-identified and thus their arrival to the coast is delayed and rescue operations are slowed down. Italian military vessels, on the contrary, have been prioritizing rescue operations ahead of pre-identification.

Second, Italian authorities have so far de facto facilitated the transit of migrants and refugees through the country in the direction of the French and Austrian border, in open violation of the Dublin agreements.

This explains last summer's crisis when France suspended the Schengen agreement at the border with Italy, causing hundreds of refugees hoping to cross the border to camp for weeks in desperate conditions at the train station in Milan and in the streets of Ventimiglia.

Although there might be humanitarian considerations behind the Italian authorities' strategy, there certainly are economic and political interests at stake, as the Italian government is using its "mismanagement" of the refugee crisis to pressure the EU — particularly, Germany — to make concessions on the stability pact, especially in relation to Italian debt.

In the meantime, Schengen has also been suspended at the border between France and the United Kingdom, thus creating the conditions for the horrifying situation known as the Calais jungle. In February, in response to this situation, Belgium unilaterally suspended Schengen at its border with France in fear of refugees migrating en masse from Calais in the hope of using Belgian ports as a staging point to cross the border into the United Kingdom.

Already in the month prior, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark had also decided to temporarily suspend Schengen. Austria joined them a week later, in response to the arrival of thousands of migrants sent back from Germany over the Austrian border.

Austria has also re-imposed controls and restrictions on rail and road traffic at its border with Hungary. Hungary, in turn, has built fences at its borders with Serbia (which is not in the EU) as well as Croatia and Slovenia (which are EU members, the latter of which is also a participant in Schengen).

A Somber Future for the EU

As the Schengen agreement is falling apart, several options are currently on the table. First, Schengen could be suspended for two years. In December 2015, EU ministers started considering this option, which would please the rising xenophobic right and appease an increasingly xenophobic public opinion.

However, this option would also be an economic disaster for European capitalism, or at least for a significant part of it. Here is the quibble: Schengen establishes not only the free circulation of EU citizens across borders, but also — and most importantly, from the viewpoint of European capitalism — the free circulation of goods.

This is a key issue, for value chains increasingly operate across the borders between nation-states. From the viewpoint of value chains, the "borders" internal to a nation may be more relevant than the borders among nation-states.

Value chains, for example, organically connect commodity production in northern Italy with production in Austria, Germany, and France, rather than with production in southern Italy. Simply put, there is no correspondence between national borders and the chains of valorization of capital.

Various alarming estimates of the economic loss entailed by suspending Schengen for two or more years have circulated during the past months, and the European Commission has warned that a collapse of Schengen would undermine economic growth for multiple years into the future.

Second, a mini-Schengen could be created. This option is supported in particular by the Dutch government and may be more appealing to Germany, as it either would be restricted to Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg or could also include Sweden and France.

In either case, it would certainly exclude Eastern Europe, Greece, and Italy — the latter two, in particular, are being held responsible for not complying with the Dublin agreements and for not successfully protecting their borders.

On April 1, responding to the pressure of the prospect of a mini-Schengen, the Greek parliament hurriedly passed a law to make legal what was previously illegal, namely the mass deportation of refugees and migrants to Turkey, as demanded by the EU-Turkey agreement: in effect marking the last capitulation by Greece's Syriza government to EU commands.

The mini-Schengen was agitated in large part to put pressure on non-complying EU members; nonetheless, this proposal remains in play. Furthermore, because mass arrivals will very likely increase in the coming months, the possibility that this prospect may be seen as a lesser evil in face of an ever-deepening EU crisis cannot be excluded.

Indeed, another no-less viable possibility would entail an implosion of the EU project tout court, which may be accelerated by a Brexit. Dissolution of the EU may prompt a return to nation-states with full national sovereignty or, alternatively, the

creation of a new system of transnational governance that combines nation-states and European institutions to support increasingly transnational value chains.

Although the future of the EU is uncertain, two facts at least are clear. First, no policy whatsoever will be able to stop the flow of migrants and refugees to Europe.

The disintegration of Syria alone has forced four million refugees into Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey and displaced more than seven million people in Syria.

The instability of situations in Afghanistan and Iraq promises to lead thousands of people to flee from these countries, while climate change refugees will arrive in the thousands from East and Sub-Saharan Africa and from Southeast Asia.

The imbrications of war, climate change, and poverty, moreover, make the very distinction between refugees and economic migrants nonsensical, a matter of bureaucratic opportunism, rather than of substance.

Second, the current EU has proved repeatedly that it is not equipped to grapple with the global transformations — and tragedies — for which it also bears historical and political responsibility. This EU also lacks any political soul beyond the technocratic defense of the interests of European capitalism.

In spite of its alleged universalistic vocation, the EU has so far realized only a single form of universalism: that of the circulation of commodities and money.

As far as the rest are concerned, we are left with increasing economic inequalities and exploitation, the destruction of the welfare state, a rising xenophobic right, and the revolting spectacle of a bunch of European technocrats fighting over the dead and tortured bodies of migrants and refugees.

In the meantime, thousands of migrants and refugees have begun to riot and rebel across Greece: their rebellion is our hope.

Public Seminar

USA

Labour notes conference steps up its game

DAVID MOBERG ·

They are the sort of people that bosses everywhere—and a few union officials—might call "troublemakers," and they have adopted the moniker as a badge of honor (including holding "troublemaker schools" and producing tactical handbooks for do-it-yourself organizers).

Last weekend, around 2,200 labor activists, from diverse age groups, industries, personal experiences and nations (about 150 visitors from 22 countries), gathered in Chicago for a packed line-up of workshops and plenary sessions in the largest of these conferences.

Some workshops focused on learning skills (such as how to figure out the cost of a contract to employers) or tactics (including such oldie-but goodie actions as "salting," that is, getting pro-union workers hired at businesses that are organizing targets). Conference panels also discussed strategies for particular employers or industries, such as the auto industry or postal service, and how to make the best use of different kinds of strikes and resistance inside the workplace, such as "working to rule," which effectively slows down production.

Other discussions examined the promises and perils of unions forming broader alliances or incorporating social goals in their bargaining and other campaigns (such as teacher unionists opposing privatization or high-stakes testing). Other panels examined global labor developments and socio-economic changes shaping the world of work and new challenges for organized labor, such as climate change.

There were opportunities to gain energy, inspiration and a tingle of solidarity with other struggles in even more difficult circumstances than one's

own. Fiery speakers took the stage on behalf of ill-paid (\$6 a 12-hour day), frighteningly abused indigenous workers from the southern part of Mexico, who have migrated to work in Baja California, California and Washington state, picking strawberries that are eventually sold under the Driscoll label. And one of the troublemaker awards went to hunger strikers from the community and teachers' union who went on a hunger strike to prevent the closing of their neighborhood-based Dyett High School.

Although the Labor Notes conferences rarely discuss union political strategies, this year more than 100 conference-goers attended each of two meetings discussing the "Labor for Bernie" organizing that is independent of the official Bernie Sanders for president campaign. The Sanders candidacy has generated hope and energy among many unionists, even though many more unions have officially endorsed his Democratic rival, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Labor for Bernie tries to maximize grass-roots support from union members, regardless of the official position of their unions, and to block moves that would increase union support for Clinton.

For example, the electrical workers union (IBEW, or International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) has remained neutral, largely as a result of pro-Bernie advocacy by Carl Shaffer, a former international union representative who returned to his local union in Indiana to seek elected office. In turn, IBEW's neutrality, according to some labor movement political organizers, played a significant role in blocking an endorsement of Clinton by the AFL-CIO executive council earlier this year.

Sanders stirred enthusiasm not only because of his longtime ardent support for unions but also be-

cause most of the people in attendance would probably call themselves "socialists" or "democratic socialists," as Sanders does (and roughly 40 percent of voters under 30 years old). Like him, they were mostly not the doctrinaire ideologues who reject a socialist candidate running in one of the two "bosses's" parties, rather than in some wisp of an organization that calls itself a "labor party." (However, the idea of forming a labor party drew significant support in Labor Notes circles until the latest effort died a few years ago.)

Indeed, many in the group of young workers/intellectuals who started Labor Notes came from the International Socialists, one of the many left splinter groups that identified with the legacy of Leon Trotsky. More than many contemporaneous small left group members, IS members were grounded in significant work within unions (including building one of the more successful union reform groups, Teamsters for a Democratic Union), comparatively open to collaborating with others, and both thoughtful and realistic.

Their relative openness made Labor Notes and its gatherings a common ground for independent-minded leftists and workers seeking to be better troublemakers for a boss that was already making trouble for them. Although often shunned or attacked by some union leaders (such as during the 2008 meeting when Michigan Service Employees International Union [SEIU] brought busloads of members to break up the conference awards banquet), other union leaders have worked with them, including the late Tony Mazzocchi; the immediate past president of the Communications Workers, Larry Cohen; and Amalgamated Transit Union president Larry Hanley.

Mark Brenner, the current director of Labor Notes, is both a realist and an enthusiast regarding the prospects for unions.

"We've been on the losing end of the class struggle all my life," the youthful-looking Brenner told the Labor Notes crowd, ruefully noting the spread of right-to-work laws. "Our labor movement can't

keep going the way it's going. We've got to talk about power." Yet, he says, "I'm more optimistic than I've ever been, since a long-time subscriber to Labor Notes is running for president."

Later, as we chatted in the hallway, Brenner expounded: "What I think is that a couple of things are converging. The institutional labor movement recognizes their misplaced confidence in both 'Change To Win' and winning the Employee Free Choice Act, whether the plans came from [former SEIU and Change to Win leader Andy] Stern or [former AFL-CIO president John] Sweeney. These grand plans were flawed partly because they were 'hatched in headquarters,' he says, not involving members in their design and execution.

By contrast, he puts hope not only in members who are educated and mobilized but also in the rise of new leaders at various levels in several unions, from the Teamsters and communications workers to teachers' and nurses' unions. Many more people have been coming to their schools, and he is especially pleased that "people who have been coming to Labor Notes are running for office and taking over unions," such as many leaders in the Chicago Teachers Union.

"Our focus," Brenner continues, "is that we want to build powerful movements" where leaders of unions must answer to the members.

Labor Notes has always strongly advocated union democracy, rank-and-file direct action and more progressive leadership of unions. But Brenner says the goal of Labor Notes is transforming the labor movement, not electing top officers.

"If I could, I would spend all of my time with stewards and local officers," he says. "It's hard to transform the labor movement from an elected position." But it's also hard to change it when elected leaders are hostile.

The goals Labor Notes sets for itself are admirable and necessary for the labor movement. But they are interrelated in ways that often generate tensions that are difficult to resolve (and Labor Notes does

not always acknowledge). For example, sometimes members are less progressive than leaders, who may in some cases want to educate the members to be more assertive and militant (even if the opposite situation is more common).

And even though conditions for elections in unions often offer less than laboratory-perfect democracy, union members sometimes do elect conservative leaders or are reluctant to take direct actions against employers. Also, unions are both institutions and movements, or at least ideally part of both the labor movement and progressive social and political movements. But tensions easily arise among different needs that reflect these varied roles of unions.

Likewise, union staff are often pulled between obligations to the union's president and to its members, and within all organizations there are different degrees of access to information. For example, Bill Parker, a Labor Notes stalwart and former Chrysler union local president, described how union staff had much more access to crucial information and discussions between management and union officials than the local elected officials on the bargaining committee that he chaired during national contract negotiations. That imbalance, he said, helped to make it possible for a two-tier wage agreement to be included in a contract even though he and the bargaining committee opposed the two-tier arrangement (which will finally be phased out under the current contract).

The history of unions suggests that organizers with the democratic ambitions of Labor Notes often persevere for long periods with little progress, then surge forwards episodically. But that's not very helpful as a guide to what to do in the interim. It's much like the answer Kim Moody, one of the founder of Labor Notes who decamped to England to teach labor history, gave to the question posed

for his workshop about how general strikes can be started: "When they start, they start," he says.

Since he last visited the United States two years ago, he thinks that "the difference is recognizable, more a feeling of desperation, polarization." He takes heart from the support for Sen. Bernie Sanders, even the apparent lack of voter discomfort with his defining himself as a socialist, and is appalled at the rise of Donald Trump.

"Trump is almost as much a fascist as we've seen here, without the funny uniforms," he says. "The guy's a thug." America is beginning to look more like some European countries with political clashes between an anti-immigrant right and populist left movements, like Podemos in Spain or Syriza in Greece, he suggests. And Bernie is America's counterpart to the new Labour Party leader in the United Kingdom, Jeremy Corbyn. Yet much more is happening in a "subterranean" form in labor and other movements.

"This is the time to do things like [that subterranean organizing]," he says. "We are not on the verge of a major move to the left, but things are changing, and unions have a role to play in it. ... We have to deal with race up front. It's a problem for U.S. labor because of deep-seated racism in American society as a whole."

Like the Highlander Folk School (now Research and Education Center), founded in the South by Myles Horton in 1932, or the Brookwood Labor College, founded in 1921 in New York state under the leadership of A. J. Muste, Labor Notes and its conferences are part of a small, almost subterranean effort to educate workers to create a militant and democratic unionism. The labor movement can only benefit from its work and, one can hope, from others taking up the same cause.

In these times

| BRAZIL

A complicated situation for the radical left

BEA (NANÁ) WHITAKER ·

Such a situation is contributing to produce great chaos in the institutions, with a judiciary divided at all levels. To this is added an intense crisis of credibility of the traditional institutions and of the modus operandi of bourgeois democracy, of which the first signs were expressed in the streets in 2013 [4].

Brazil is therefore experiencing a full-scale political crisis, on top of the serious economic, social and environmental crisis. This is resulting in growing unemployment, inflation, a wage freeze, the collapse of public services and the disasters and crimes against the environment, symbolizing the failure of a development model. The exhaustion of the model of "growth", adopted during the Lula "periods", with now the implementation of a policy of neoliberal adjustment and recession, has produced a scenario of long-term stagnation. Whatever the outcome in the short term, an accumulation of medium-term crises can be expected to continue, bringing with it social and political tensions.

The "lulopetista" cycle is dying. The possibilities of maintaining the export-based "neo-extrativista" model of growth are becoming exhausted. Even if there is political survival through the recent polarization between the two camps in the institutional war, the strategy established by Lulaism, which consisted of encouraging entrepreneurs, agribusiness and financial capital and, simultaneously, making some concessions to the poorest layers, no longer has any political and ethical possibility of appearing as a shift to the left. Even after putting more than 100,000 people in the streets of Sao Paulo, Lula continues to encourage the representatives of capital to trust him to be the guarantor of the social pact. In this context, he is reediting, in

more humiliating terms, the "Letter to the Brazilian People" of 2002. This is the end of a long cycle of the Brazilian left.

In the midst of the political polarization that has developed during the two years of the Dilma government, in Brazilian society right-wing ideas and sentiments are developing, with a will to impose criminal punishment and the search for a Saviour, in other words a Bonaparte, capable of stopping corruption.

The anti-petismo spectrum is divided into two parts: one more liberal and the other more conservative, with many points of intersection between them. Some movements of a liberal character, such as the Free Brazil Movement (MBL) and "Come and demonstrate" (Vem Para Rua) and other more reactionary ones, including some religious leaders and some advocates of a return to military dictatorship, such as Bolsonaro, have seen their ability to exert influence grow.

In this context, violent attitudes and hate-filled speeches have been made against the left in general. Furthermore, the media is playing a role of incitement to hatred and of manipulation of information, sometimes directly or indirectly contributing to more or less serious episodes of violence.

The crisis of the old left in power, which has implemented unpopular and repressive policies (particularly in the big urban peripheries, against young people and blacks), and the offensive of the intolerant right and its incitement to hatred, rebound against left-wing and socialist ideas as a whole. There must be the opening of a period of reorganization of the mass movement and the possibility of a new cycle for the reconstruction of a left project.

Young people are today experiencing the reality of unemployment, violence, of the lack of public services and democratic rights. Moreover, they identify with neither of the two main poles that are at war today, which explains their low participation in the mobilizations in March. We should also note the presence of more progressive sectors of society and of the "working-class bases" of the former historic bloc, who demonstrated massively to defend democratic freedoms, with many criticisms of the government, either because of its unpopular economic policies or because of obvious corruption.

The present scenario in Brazil is very difficult to manage for the anti-capitalist and socialist left. A government that came from the working-class and people's movement is in the process of being overthrown by the right, whose principal agents are the judiciary, the opposition in Parliament and the media, orchestrated by the Globe Group, which is hegemonic there.

This government, in free fall, is not a progressive government, but a government that is implementing a neoliberal adjustment policy and which, when it is under pressure, moves further to the right: the anti terrorist law, the announcement of wage cuts, attacks on civil servants and pension reform, the perspective of suspending adjustments to the minimum wage.

Despite the measures clearly favouring the interests of capital, the employers' organizations, the representatives of finance and of the media are in agreement on the inability of Dilma Rousseff to implement the adjustment plans so as to ensure their stability. They therefore consider it necessary to replace her.

The massive mobilizations on March 13 (for the destitution of Dilma), and on March 18 and 31 (against the destitution of Dilma) were quite heterogeneous in different cities and regions. The last one, involving some 700,000 people throughout the country, witnessed demonstrations that were globally against the destitution of Dilma, for democracy and against the anti-social policies of

the government. Nevertheless, a large majority of the population is for the departure of the president and the government has lost its majority popular base.

The possibility of a new coup d'état, as in 1964, is not on the agenda. Nevertheless, the weight of religious fundamentalist institutions, the influence of oligarchic sectors, as well as of sectors related to the arms industry and the various police forces, are defending retrograde projects and trying to liquidate past gains.

At the beginning of the investigations into corruption, businessmen and right-wing personalities, belonging to the government or not, were imprisoned. But the prolonged institutional crisis has created an atmosphere where everything-is-permitted, thanks to Operation Lava Jato, by aberrant and undemocratic judicial operations against those accused who are identified with the government; this is coordinated with all the major media and the right-wing opposition. The general indignation against corruption and the PT is helping the majority of the forces representing capital to work for a change of government without any democratic change in the political regime.

The period that has opened up presents a difficult transition because of the absence of a socialist left with sufficient influence to become the protagonist of an alternative to the crisis. The Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL) is respected in social struggles, intervenes in sectors of youth and of various sectors of the oppressed and gathers several million votes in elections. It is the main party of the socialist left. However, it is not yet able to present a real alternative to the crisis, even though it situates itself as a left opposition, against the government's concessions to capital, against the privileges of the ruling class, against corruption. And it is clear that it absolutely does not defend the manoeuvres of the right to bring down Rousseff.

In fact, the impeachment process of the President by Parliament is led by its president, who is himself implicated in the investigations into Petrobras and

in a series of crimes. At the same time, many efforts are being made (by the media and the judiciary) not to highlight the involvement of personalities of the right opposition in Operation Lava Jato, including members of the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB), which has just left the government and of which Temer, the Vice-President, is a member.

If the impeachment of Dilma proceeded through "normal" or legal channels, it would be necessary to prevent Temer from taking over the leadership of the country. Moreover, even some of the mainstream media, which are now, generally speaking, in the anti-PT camp, say that Temer has no support to govern. They demand the destitution of both

Dilma and Temer. Polls say that if elections were held today, Temer would only get one per cent of the vote.

The way out of such a crisis lies in calling presidential and legislative elections.

Concrete campaigns against the attacks of the conservatives on social rights, against police violence, against fiscal adjustment, among others, must continue to be expressed by real movements with concrete demands that strengthen the social organization of the socialist left. At this stage of a reorganization that is still poorly defined, transitional initiatives should be carried out in order to build new unitary instruments of the left opposition that are independent of the government.

BELGIUM

The impotence of security policies and the search for a solution

DANIEL TANURO ·

The poor functioning of the security services in the case of Ibrahim Barkhaoui (the suicide bomber at the airport who with his brother who was involved in the Metro attack) was flagrant, and makes you think of the Dutroux case. [1] But Dutroux acted (almost) alone while Daesh has no shortage of aspiring suicide bombers, including people who are not from the Muslim milieu, thus less likely to be in the spotlight like Barkhaoui. The attacks in Verviers were stopped [2], but that did not prevent the other attacks.

Had Ibrahim Barkhaoui been arrested after his return from Turkey, he would have been able to recruit other jihadists in prison, and sooner or later he would have been released from prison too. So we should not lose sight of the wood for the trees.

It is an illusion to think that we can put an end to the scourge of terrorism through "better police", "better information", "targeted surveillance", etc. [3]

Suicide bombings

The problem is indeed this: nothing can stop a fanatical would-be suicide bomber from blowing themselves up in the middle of an innocent crowd of people. Once everyone is in the firing line, the number of potential targets is so high that it is no longer possible to even try to protect everyone. Even a police state à la Big Brother cannot stop jihadi terrorism. Such a state wouldn't even be able to prevent a suicide attack on for example one of our already very unsafe nuclear power plants. And do we want to live in such a state?

The all out emphasis on security policy to stop terrorism is clearly a dead end. It should be obvious that those responsible for the security services are at their wits' end. The threat level was increased to level 4 – the highest level– after the attacks. So what now?

Imposing a new generalized lockdown, like the one that paralysed Brussels after the attacks in Paris in November? Certainly businesses don't want to hear of this, it cost the economy too much money last time. The government has therefore excluded this "solution" in advance. In any event, a lockdown can only last a few days; it would be enough for terrorists to just wait a while until it is lifted...

What else is still possible? Have more soldiers patrolling the streets? It is clear that this doesn't achieve anything.

There were soldiers at Zaventem airport. Even tanks in the streets and a submarine in the Brussels canal are completely meaningless compared with suicide bombers. The authorities know this all too well. The deployment of the army was for them a way to keep the population calm, to show that the state is protecting them at great cost.

The decision to close the entrances and exits of Brussels train stations and frisk passengers clearly shows the impotence of the security policy. Probably this decision came as an alternative to a lockdown, to reassure the population. But it did anything but that –the opposite in fact. After all, a terrorist can perfectly well take the train with their explosives from a station anywhere in the country and blow themselves up in the middle of passengers in Brussels who are queuing to be allowed in

or out. You wonder who thought of such absurd measures...

Total war?

We can continue imagining what measures the government will probably take. None of them offer fundamental solutions.

Launching a total war to wipe Daesh from the map in Iraq and Syria emerges as the "solution" that the more or less extreme elements of the right wing dream of. But consider: that's just the kind of approach which Bush went for in Afghanistan (and used as the excuse for the war against Iraq), and we know the result... Not only was Al Qaeda not destroyed (as opposed to the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians), but Ben Laden's organisation gave life to another, even worse organisation: Daesh. Are they going to make the same mistake again? Can they not see how 'crusades' from the west against the Arab and Muslim world are part of a mechanism that only increases the hate-filled desire for revenge, which lead a number of people into murderous insanity?

We say clearly: this is part of the mechanism. There are a number of factors: complicity with the crimes of the Zionist regime against the Palestinian people, arms sales to fundamentalist dictatorships, relentlessly pushing back asylum seekers, the abandonment and ghettoization of poor neighbourhoods in our cities, where many people of immigrant origin live; racism, Islamophobia, police checks based on appearance, discrimination in recruitment, the hate campaign against women wearing headscarves, stigmatisation by the media. Not to mention the cowardly "realpolitik" concerning crimes of the self-styled secular regime of Bashar Al Assad, the executioner of the Syrian people. What is amazing is not that this evokes hatred, but that some are still surprised that it does.

A sectarian mechanism

We will not get into a discussion about the reasons that could explain why this hatred takes the form of

such a destructive ultra-violence, and an ideological form that comes straight out of a different era: pseudo-religious, ultra-macho, authoritarian and reactionary. Everything indicates that the uprooted young people who leave our neighbourhoods to join the jihad do so not so much on the basis of a radicalisation of their experience of Islam, but rather a pseudo-Islamisation of their radicalism. It is this "radicalisation" of their hatred without any real perspective that drives some, at particular moments to enter into a fantasy world: radical Islamism gives meaning to your life, the Islamic state offers you a kingdom of fraternity and your death as a martyr (in fact, as a murderer) opens the gates to paradise.

In short, the mechanism is sectarian, not religious. In this sect the exaltation of suicide is so effective that every time a "martyr" blows himself up, there are dozens of other candidates who step forward to take his place. There is no way for police to handle such a situation, even less is there any military solution. The only permanent solution is political, to ensure that the source of the hatred dries up.

This calls for a coherent and radical change of course in all areas we described earlier. A combined change of course, both in terms of domestic and foreign policy.

To start with: Belgian troops should withdraw from the regions where they are present today. The army should be sent back to barracks, in expectation of its pure and simple abolition. We should support the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for their rights. We should unilaterally put an end to arms sales to Saudi Arabia and other dictatorships, pending the cessation of arms production, with conversion measures for those working in the sector. We should support popular movements for democratic rights in Syria and elsewhere. We should accept refugees and asylum seekers and treat them with dignity. Let's free up resources for a policy of urban renewal that is worthy of the name in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Let's put an end to provocations and violence from the police. Create high-quality jobs and invest in public in-

frastructure. Open the media to everyone. Let's set up a real participatory democracy, where neighbourhood committees, social movements etc. can make decisions. These are just a few suggestions that can reasonably be explored.

A wave of emotion

There is no simple solution to a complicated problem, and we certainly do not have a complete program to combat terrorism. The development of such a program can only be done in consultation with the social actors themselves. This takes time, and meanwhile the danger remains. But one thing is certain, in our opinion, a solution cannot be

found if we dare not break with the current logic of a society based on injustice, violence and exclusion. We should go for a generous social policy, based on solidarity, democratic rights and freedoms, sharing of resources and the fight against inequality, at home and elsewhere in the world. As we said in our statement after the attacks: "Only through living can we fight the politics of death." This really is a question of life and death. It summons up a wave of emotion. Let's hope that this legitimate emotion helps us to think rationally about how we can stop barbarism.

Translated by Sean Collins

March 31, 2016

OBITUARY

Claude Jacquin (Gabriel) — an internationalist commitment to the end

PIERRE ROUSSET ·

A member of the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) in France, he was a member of the of the Fourth International leadership in the 1980s-90s. He is fixed in our memories above all for the links he forged in sub-Saharan Africa and the launch of the publication *Afrique en Lutte*. He, however, during this period, also followed the youth organisations and the activities of the FI sections in Western Europe - and contributed to the educational sessions organized in the Amsterdam Institute (IIRE), where activists from various continents gathered for three-month long sessions.

Boasting a versatile experience, Claude is one of our members of our generation who have maintained their initial commitments while seeking constantly to rethink the changing conditions for action. Without losing sight of Africa, he "refocused" on France and Europe through integrating the Apex-ISAST Group, "at the service of elected officials, business committees and health, safety and working conditions committees (CHSCT)" His professional activity allowed him to gain in-depth knowledge of the evolution of our societies, and particularly the industrial fabric in the era of globalization. Claude's constant preoccupation was to share this knowledge, especially with radical currents involved in the trade union field, discussing slogans and prospects; he unfortunately received fewer responses to his proposals to debate these issues than they merited.

Claude participated in the founding of the NPA, then left with the Anti-capitalist Left (Gauche Anti-capitaliste) when it joined the Left Front. Always a "Fourth Internationalist" he was a member of Ensemble!, the "third component" of the Front de Gauche.

In recent years in particular, Claude, without wanting to impose himself, sought to help — through discussions but also by creating moments for the coming together of different movements and people. We had over the years rather lost sight of each other - when we met up again, it was from the outset as friends.

Claude made many and very close friends, as evidenced by the first messages from South Africa, shortly after his death. Mercia recalled that she first waited at Cape Town airport for him 34 years ago. She feels "devastated" by the news of his death, as he was not only close to the family (including the dog Sandy), but "deeply marked" her "consciousness and political activism." For Brian, Mercia's companion, Claude was "the greatest political influence in [his] life." "He has given so much without expecting anything for himself. He just wanted to help."

In one day already, expressions of solidarity and sadness came from South Africa, Senegal, India, Poland, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, Belgium ... Claude was an internationalist. The tribute to him and his commitment can only be international.

With a thought for his companion, Sylvie, who accompanied him during his illness.

USA

The Roots of the Modern Housing Crisis

SEAN POSEY ·

Following the end of World War II, a combination of forces made the largest housing boom in American history possible: generous federal housing policies, real increasing wages, and a concerted effort on the part of the government and developers further enshrined the ideal of homeownership in the American mind. Homeownership rates increased nearly 20 percent from 1945 to 1960. Suburban tract housing spread throughout the newly built cul-de sacs around the country, and professionals, blue-collar workers, and middle managers joined the exodus to the land of cookie-cutter Cape Cods and white picket fences.

Not everyone was welcomed, however. African Americans were quite purposely excluded. But the new programming did grow the economy, and the expansion of housing provided a convenient bulwark against communism during the height of the Cold War. ("No man who has a house and a lot can be a communist," famed developer William Levitt once declared. "He has too much to do.")

Decades later, President Bill Clinton unveiled his "National Homeownership Strategy," which sought to dramatically increase the number of homeowners in a short period of time. Among other things, Clinton's initiative helped relax lending standards in order to achieve the stated goals. George W. Bush largely followed suit, promoting owning a home as a key element of his ideal "ownership society." By 2004, the homeownership rate approached 70 percent.

All of that changed in 2007. The spectacular subprime mortgage crisis and the recession put an end,

probably permanently, to the American Dream of overwhelming homeownership. Today, homeownership rates are back to where they were in 1994. Now we face a housing crisis of new proportions: Both homes and rental units are becoming increasingly unaffordable for a large percentage of the working class and the *déclassé*. Despite efforts by the Federal Housing Finance Agency to keep down payments to a bare minimum, the "dream" of homeownership remains out of reach for an increasing segment of the population. The reasons are straightforward: declining and stagnant wages for the majority of Americans, large amounts of student-loan debt, rising rents, and the growth of non-white families facing more extreme problems of access and inequality.

Wage growth today is largely concentrated in the managerial classes at the top fifth of the income distribution; wages for the vast majority of workers are barely keeping pace with inflation.¹ Between 1979 and 2015, most workers witnessed an outright decline in hourly pay.² With more and more people unable to get ahead financially, the prospect of increasing numbers of families putting money away for the down payment on a house seems remote, no matter how low down payments go.

The decline in homeownership and the rise of the rental market is also exacerbated by the problem of inadequate wage growth for young professionals. Only 19 percent of available rentals in the top 25 largest markets are considered affordable for recent college graduates.³ Once considered a problem mainly in "global cities" like San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York, the lack of affordable rental units for young college graduates is spreading from the coasts to inland cities. In places like Atlanta, once seen as a safe market for middle-in-

come families, the rise in rents is affecting a greater share of wage earners. The same goes for housing: "Many cities are exhibiting decreasing housing affordability, period," writes Professor Todd Sinai. "It doesn't matter whether the houses are owned or rented; in those cities, households of all stripes pay increasing shares of their incomes for housing."⁴ Student-loan debt makes it even more difficult for college grads to find suitable affordable rentals (and to save for the down payment on a home). Graduates from the class of 2015 carry an average of \$35,000 in debt.

The situation is even worse for low-income renters. Over 80 percent of renters making under \$20,000 in 2011 paid more than 30 percent of their income in rent. According to the Economic Policy Institute, the average cost of living for a family of four is \$50,000 higher than the average salary of a worker making minimum wage.⁵ A full 30 percent of American workers are making near the minimum wage. The hourly wage needed to afford a two-bedroom rental is higher than the median hourly wage of the average American worker, and it's nearly three times higher than the federal minimum wage.⁶

Dramatic income inequality between white, black, and Latino families fully reveals how the housing and rental crisis is affecting people of color. The median net worth for white households in 2009 was over \$113,000, but only \$6,325 for Hispanic households and \$5,677 for black households.⁷ Unlike during the postwar housing boom, both the Clinton and George W. Bush housing initiatives sought to bring black and Latino families into the tainted-dream of American homeownership. Yet the subprime debacle—which disproportionately targeted (and eventually devastated) black and brown neighborhoods—wiped out most of the gains in wealth previously made by these communities. And with a rapidly growing number of "minority" households, the rental and housing crisis will surely only worsen.

A variety of "remedies" have been advanced by mainstream housing experts and economists in re-

sponse to what U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Shaun Donovan calls "the worst rental affordability crisis that this country has ever known." Some experts have argued for policies aimed at increasing housing density in cities, especially in so-called "superstar cities" such as San Francisco and Portland. However, high land costs are leading developers to build units geared to those at the top of the income distribution. According to the Wall Street Journal, over 80 percent of new apartments built between 2012 and 2014 were targeted at the luxury market.⁸

Economist Ryan Avent, blogger Aaron M. Renn, and others argue that density is indeed the key, and that new laws for zoning, historic districts, and floor-area-ratio limits will allow more workers to congregate in "superstar cities," and therefore allow a broader spectrum of wage earners to enjoy the benefits of access to better neighborhoods—which will supposedly buoy low-income and lower-"middle class" families.⁹

But these arguments represent a mindset deeply grounded in mainstream economic orthodoxy. Nowhere do they address why economic networks are clustering in a few cities (usually on the coasts) while wide swaths of the country are hollowed out. They fail to consider the importance of communities rooted in place and the impact of forced economic migration on less wealthy cities. These types of "solutions" merely tinker at the edges of a dying economic system, one that is unable to deliver a meaningful standard of living for larger and larger percentages of the population.

While policy paralysis reigns at the federal level, local solutions for tackling the rental and housing crisis are slowly spreading. In particular, community development corporations are leading the way. In Newark, New Jersey, the New Community Corporation not only manages two thousand housing units, it also employs well over 1,000 local residents and uses the proceeds to operate a shopping center and grocery store. Community land trusts—which are non-profit corporations that operate and manage housing, developments, and commercial

enterprises for place-based communities—are also proving to be powerful local tools for stopping gentrification and providing affordable housing.

If we are truly to deal with the new crisis in housing in a structural manner, then we must discard the flawed perceptions we use to analyze the situation in the first place. The postwar American Dream is part of the problem, not the solution. It's time to discard discredited notions that situate housing at the center of consumer utopias and speculative

frenzy, which always brings us back to another crisis. Instead, it's time to bring the conversation around to systems change—starting at the local level with tools such as land trusts and community development corporations. Affordable housing should be viewed as a basic right, one enshrined at the center of an American reality—not an American Dream.

New Politics

SPANISH STATE

The "crisis" of Podemos

BRAIS FERNÁNDEZ ·

At this time of accelerated rhythms, the legitimacies like the certainties are more volatile and are more numerous than ever. The "Prince" of the twenty-first century, the organized party, must live in a creative tension with the movement, with this overall intellect, plural, dispersed and changing. In addition, it is more important than ever to count on a leading group, firm on its principles, but always at the service of popular classes.

What is called the "crisis of Podemos" can only be explained in these terms. A party which has more than five million voters, but which is very weak in its rank and file organization. A plural party without pluralism. A party where democratic debate has tended too often to give way to the politics of rumours. A party where there is talk of "families", "clans", instead of "positions" and "currents". A party which is not yet a "prince" because it has not been able to generate a creative tension with the movement, but rather a tension which has not been very constructive and, sometimes, even destructive. A young and vibrant party which falls sick every month. A party filled with agreements and disagreements.

There has of course consensus on many of the basic questions: the need to finish with the old parties, the urgency of transcending the cultural constraints and the politics of the old left, the need to be a tool for a lot of people and not for a few. There is agreement on other matters which should not be fundamental, but who have their importance, such as the recognition of the ability of Pablo Iglesias as a popular leader, who many, beyond the differences, consider as a leader of great intellectual value, able to connect as a person with the people. And, as at the

time of Marx, when everybody claimed to be Hegelian, some of the right and others of the left, we all claim to be Gramscians, even if some are "right Gramscians" and other "left Gramscians".

But there is no agreement on many other issues. There has not been agreement on the creation of democratic rank and file structures which function and form a counterweight, to be the basic structures from which the leaderships originate. On the contrary, what has been chosen is a plebiscitary model, where there are no debates, a model of consensus, where we could only ratify. There was no agreement to build a party-movement which, rather than to soliciting unconditional memberships, re-appropriates all the rich heritage of the forms of action which emerged with the movement of 15M. What has been chosen is an election war machine. There is no agreement to renounce the major programmatic orientations of rupture and constituent processes, to renounce the democratization of the economy by the socialization of the financial structures and strategic production, or again to renounce radical measures in the face of the crisis and the attacks on wages or the basic income. We were not in agreement that the program be watered down, in a Keynesian framework that places the axis of exit from the crisis in palliative measures to be taken by a future government, instead of relying in this confrontation on class and popular self-organization. There have been a lot of differences, we always think what we think and nothing happened. We defend our positions openly and we are trying to convince people that they are the best to ensure change.

But as Podemos is a party of paradoxes, the model which prevailed, curiously, turned against those who designed it. The dismissal of Sergio Pascual

was made in accordance with the statutes and respecting the party model of party adopted at Vistalegre. [2] Pablo Iglesias has used his powers as Secretary General to dismiss one of the main persons responsible for the implementation of the model of Vistalegre, based on a vertical and authoritarian structure, on the famous political re-centring, and on a plebiscitary populist model which was copied in too many aspects from the Communist parties of the 20th century, but without their roots in living social forces. The deputies who resigned from the Citizen's Council of the autonomous region of Madrid and Sergio Pascual himself belonged to the sector which had conceived, defended and implemented Vistalegre.

This has happened, whether by chance or not, at a time when Pablo Iglesias is deepening the idea of building a differentiated, non-subordinate popular camp antagonistic to the elites and their representation, recalling that of Anguita [3], becoming the target where the bullets of the regime are focused. We find ourselves, let us say it in the words of Gramsci, before a case of "progressive Caesarism": "Caesarism is progressive when its intervention helps the progressive force to triumph, albeit with its victory tempered by certain compromises and limitations". In other words, Pablo Iglesias seems to be moving (curiously, advancing and retreating) toward "fresher" positions which recall this Podemos of struggle and of government, whose

meetings gave one goose bumps, but it is done within the framework that has produced Vistalegre, a framework of limitations, bureaucratic traps and shortcomings.

What matters now is to go forward in two respects. Tactically, it is incumbent upon us to avoid new irresponsible actions, which feed the idea of a crisis, while we should be in the process of preparing ourselves, by debate and unity in plurality, to face the two options which are emerging: either a grand coalition, or new elections.

Strategically, what has happened these past few days should lead to a great reflection on the party-movement which the popular classes need. And for this it is not enough to have an opinion, it is necessary to rely on the support of concrete examples. For the Citizen's Council of the autonomous region of Madrid a new stage has opened. It must open everywhere in Podemos. This must be the point of departure: to again address all those people who have been at a given time in a base circle and have not remained, even if they voted for Podemos. To extend the hand of friendship to activists, to social movements, trade unionists, while respecting their autonomy, so that they know that Podemos is their party. We must be the only thing that we can be to win: plural, democratic, radical without falling into identity politics. There is no crisis: there is a world, there, outside, that we must conquer.

MIGRATION

Women, Work & Migration

JACKIE ESMUNDS ·

After years of violence, Margaret made the difficult decision ten years ago to leave her four children with family and seek refuge in Toronto. She obtained work in a sector where workers without "landed immigrant" status [the equivalent of legal residency and right to work in the USA] can find employment fairly easily: caregiving.

She has worked as a nanny to six children and as a caregiver for the elderly. She works under the table in extremely precarious situations. She does not have access to pension plans, health care or drug benefits and does not contribute to the unemployment insurance plan. She earns minimum wage. If she is subject to abuse from her employer, she cannot go to police because she fears deportation.

Margaret may be safe from her abusive husband, but she has traded one vulnerable situation for another.

Margaret's story can help us expand our understanding of some patterns of migration. When we talk about migrant workers, there is a tendency to think of those who leave their "poor" countries of origin to seek work and opportunity in "rich" countries. But immigrant workers are more likely to come from a middle-income country. They often bring a level of education, a set of skills, and a work record that indicates they held relatively good jobs in their country of origin.

It is more likely that trade liberalization, rather than outright poverty, caused their situation to deteriorate to the point that they decided to migrate. In addition, some women migrate because they demand more egalitarian relationships, and frustrated by their inability to realize them, migrate to find

a better life. Margaret demonstrates the situation of a migrant worker who came to Canada not so much to answer labour market needs, but to escape the violence in her own life.

Feminization of Migration

It is very difficult to generalize about global patterns of migration. In most cases migrants travel to the closest comparatively wealthier country, preferably one characterized by a similar religion, culture and language.

By 2000 the United Nations estimated that about 140 million people — roughly 2% of the world's population — reside in a country in which they were not born. It used to be that young males were the most mobile group, but over the last 15-20 years, there has been a significant increase in the number of women migrating, a phenomenon that some observers have described as the "feminization of migration."

In the European Union, for example, women immigrants now account for approximately 54% of immigrants. Between 1950 and 1970 men predominated in labor migration to northern Europe from Turkey, Greece, and North Africa. Since then, women have been replacing men. In 1946, women were fewer than 3% of the Algerians and Moroccans living in France; by 1990 they were more than 40%.

Half of the world's immigrants are now believed to be women. In 1984 women migrant workers from outside the European Union were only 6% of all domestic workers. By 1987, they had grown to 52% of all EU domestic workers, with most coming from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Argentina, Colombia, Brazil, El Salvador and Peru.

Throughout the 1990s women outnumbered men among migrants to the United States, Canada, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Argentina and Israel. In Canada, migrants tend to come largely from the Caribbean, Mexico, Central and South America as well as from the Philippines and Sri Lanka. On the west coast of Canada, Chinese migrants are in the majority.

Regardless of their level of education, women migrants are overwhelmingly funneled into domestic work where there is little social status, little social protection and low pay. They have little bargaining power because they are on temporary work permits, or have no status at all. Mothers who migrate, even when they are able to send remittances back home, are unable to arrange for their children to join them.

Social reproductive labor — caring for children, feeding families, taking care of the household — has traditionally been women's work. It still is women's work, but some women now have enough privilege to be able to pay immigrant women to replace them.

Women migrant workers, whether with or without status, make up the majority of workers involved in caregiving. Yet I doubt this is what the women's movement had in mind when they demanded recognition of their reproductive labor in the home and payment for that work. Hiring other women to carry out reproductive labor in such a devalued and exploitative manner only reinforces gender oppression.

While women in the wealthier countries have gone out of the home to find employment, the gender of those who have replaced them and the working conditions have not changed. Celebrity gossip magazines discuss a so-called "mannie" trend, citing the case of Britney Spears hiring a male nanny. With the greatest of respect to People magazine, this does not qualify as a trend!

"Pull" and "Push" Factors

There are many complex reasons for migration, some of which are individual. But there are systemic factors behind both the push to migrate and the pull to bring more women to Canada. Capitalism creates several reasons for women to leave their home countries and at the same time produces the circumstances in which women are needed in the "receiving" countries. But this does not herald a new era of independence and equality for women around the world.

In many ways the migration of women reinforces gender inequality — the fight for gender equality requires that this work be valued, and decoupled from gender constraints.

Over the last several decades, women in Western countries have increasingly taken on paid work. With falling relative wages, most families require at least a double income. Women (and men) are working longer hours and therefore have less time for housework, childcare, and providing care to aging parents. Added to this time crunch is the reality that despite the progress made by the women's movement, men have not taken a significantly greater responsibility for housework and childcare.

Without universal daycare and flexible workplaces, it is difficult to juggle the obligations in the workplace with family responsibilities. In Canada the policies of Steven Harper's Conservative government have only worsened the problem by cancelling a plan to increase funding for daycare.

As a result, there is a greater need for assistance in the home. Hiring maids and nannies is no longer limited to the very wealthy, but are services increasingly sought by the urban middle class. Traditionally "women's work," these positions continue to be "women's work," and, not surprisingly, filled by those most vulnerable and devalued themselves: immigrant women of color.

But why would women travel thousands of kilometers to do this work? Although some migrate as part of a family reunification program, most would prefer to remain in their home countries, with their family and familiar surroundings. People do not

migrate on a whim. Over the last 30 years, two factors have stimulated pushing people from their homes, and have had a particularly gendered impact.

First, a series of interlocking economic policies have increased inequality between the richer and poorer nations. Under currently enforced trade treaties "free trade" has come to dominate the global economy. Countries at every stage of economic development are supposed to be "open" to trading with every other country. This, of course, gives the more economically powerful countries a head start to produce and sell their agricultural and industrial products at a cheaper price, and thus reinforce their ability to control the world market.

In addition the IMF and World Bank, controlled by the United States and other G7 countries, finance large infrastructural projects such as roads and dams supposedly to "develop" the country. These put the "developing" country in debt, forcing it onto an economic treadmill of generating foreign exchange in order to repay the ever-expanding debt.

The loans are often laced with conditions, including agreeing to Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) that devalue their currencies, turning them into "straw" while the hard currencies of the wealthier countries remain gold. The SAPs also demand cutting public services, including health care, education and food subsidies, as well as privatizing "non-competitive industries" such as state electric power.

Both urban and rural women are among the hardest hit by structural adjustment programs, not only as individuals, but even more so as the family member with the traditional responsibility for the children. Free trade and the policies of the IMF and World Bank shift agricultural production from growing food for local consumption to food for export.

Without subsidies for growing corn, beans, sugar and other crops, peasants have been forced to leave their land. Jamaica and Mexico are two examples where this has happened, and where the closest wealthier nations — Canada and the United States

— have been impacted. "Development" projects, from dams to mining, have also displaced hundreds of thousands of peasants throughout Latin America and Asia.

The greatest beneficiaries of these economic programs are the multinational corporations and the countries where they based (although the citizens of those countries don't necessarily benefit). The direct impact of such policies is obvious for women in Margaret's situation. Without any social resources to offer them protection, or to assist them to build financially independent and safe lives apart from their abusive partners, they have little option but to flee.

Second, insecurity and armed conflict in many of the world's most economically marginalized countries have displaced millions of people. This factor arises from the problem of economic inequality and growing ecological disaster. However the overwhelming majority of these refugees don't make it beyond their own internal borders, or into neighboring countries.

Experiences of Oppression

Upon their arrival in Canada, immigrant women become invisible. Given the individualized nature of their work, they rarely have coworkers with whom they can talk, and this hinders their ability to organize into a union. They are particularly vulnerable because most lack status, and there are always other non-status women available to replace them.

(Given the lack of concern for the impact that their development programs have on women, it is not surprising that some of the high-profile examples of exploitation of women workers have been by senior staff working for the World Bank, the IMF and the United Nations. For example, the media recently reported a senior UN worker who was forcing her non-status maid to work 14-hour days without regular pay and whose only accommodation was a pull-out bed in her employer's living room.).

Two aspects of this dynamic of vulnerability can be directly tied to explicit and purposeful government

policy: employment and immigration policies.

In Ontario, workers in classes that are almost exclusively filled by migrant workers, such as live-in caregivers and migrant farmworkers, are excluded from basic employment protections provided in the Employment Standards Act, the legislation that sets out employment rights related to wages, work hours, overtime and vacations.

In order to migrate to Canada to work lawfully as a permanent resident, you can buy your way in as a business immigrant or qualify as a "skilled worker." To be a skilled worker, an applicant must attain a certain number of points in a system that awards them for English or French language skill, educational attainment, and work experience.

The assessment of these points is skewed in favor of men, who are more likely to have the types of education and work experience that the point system rewards. Women are far more likely to come as the "dependent" of a male than on their own.

The only exception is the one program that is geared towards women: the Live in Caregiver Program, which is specifically designed to bring women into the country as live-in domestics. This program has been highly criticized for the vulnerable position it places women in — but that cannot be any surprise. With a system that requires women to live 24-7 in their employer's home, it is

entirely predictable that women live in circumstances akin to indentured servitude, at extreme risk of employer abuse.

Solidarity

The issues raised by the migration of women are both international and local in scope. Unfortunately, for the media and the politicians these pressing social issues are as invisible as the women themselves.

The World Bank and IMF are not solely responsible, of course, for the conditions that force women to leave their homes. Canada is implicated in the process. The Canadian government and Canadian corporations, often in the extracting industries that are pushing people off the land in countries such as Ecuador and Indonesia, contribute to the conditions that force women to leave their homes and children behind.

The Canadian government and Canadian corporations also create the demand for women workers. Canadian government policy reinforces the inequality and vulnerability of migrant women workers once they are here. This indicates that the fight for gender equality demands that as feminists and socialists, we have a global outlook that is in solidarity with women wherever they may live or work.

Against the Current

Pope Francis in Mexico: The Last Come First

DAN LA BOTZ ·

The Pope also criticized Donald Trump and other Republicans who call for building a wall between Mexico and the United States calling their views "not Christian." Said the Pope: "A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not of building bridges, is not Christian. This is not the gospel."

Without mentioning the term, the Pope revived the language and ideas of the Theology of Liberation of the 1960s and 1970s, while he also embraced the indigenous people and implicitly their social movements in Mexico. He was, however, criticized by the left for his failure to discuss the issues of priests' sexual abuse of children, the issue of femicide (the murder of women), and the 43 Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers College students who were disappeared in September 2014.

The Catholics remain the largest religious group in Mexico, some 83 percent, despite the growth in recent decades of Evangelical churches and other Protestant sects. While the Mexican state is officially secular and historically anti-clerical, in fact the government often favors the Catholic Church. During the Pope's visit some officials, rather than shaking hands, even knelt and kissed the Pope's ring, a Catholic obeisance.

Criticizing the Government and the Catholic Hierarchy

At a formal reception by Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto, the Pope criticized Mexico's economic elite and political leaders for the country's economic inequality, lack of justice, and for creating the conditions that have brought about "corruption, drug dealing, the exclusion of different cultures, violence, human trafficking, kidnapping

and death, causing suffering and impeding development."

Speaking to the country's Catholic hierarchy—bishops, archbishops, and cardinals, often called the "princes" of the Church—the Pope criticized religious "fundamentalism" and "triumphalism" and called upon the religious leaders to instead emphasize personal relationship to Christ. Many interpreted him as criticizing the hierarchy when he said, "We do not need 'princes,' but rather a community of the Lord's witnesses. Christ is the only light; he is the well-spring of living water; from his breath comes forth the Spirit, who fills the sails of the ecclesial ship." Speaking in Morelia, Michoacán, he told parish priests that they must not become "bureaucrats of the divine," must "not become comfortable in the sacristy," and must not "resign themselves to an apparently unchangeable system."

The Pope held mass and spoke to crowds at several cities in Mexico, from the working class city of Ecatepec in central Mexico where he addressed a million people, to Chiapas in the South, one of the country's most indigenous states, to Ciudad Juárez in the north (across from El Paso, Texas) where he spoke to audiences that included maquiladora workers. In all of his talks the Pope put special emphasis on the exploited, oppressed, and marginalized, whether the indigenous, factory workers, the poor, or migrants. He also spoke out everywhere against drug trafficking, corruption, and violence, as well as on the environmental threat of climate change.

Speaking in Juárez to several thousand, including many factory workers, he said:

"The dominant mentality puts the movement of people at the service of capital, leading in many

cases to the exploitation of employees who are treated as if they are objects to be used and thrown away. And we have to do everything possible to make sure that these situations don't happen any more. The movement of capital cannot determine the movement and the life of people.

"What does Mexico want to leave to its children? Does it want to leave them the memory of exploitation, of inadequate wages? Of bullying in the workplace? Or does it want to leave them a culture of work with dignity, of a decent home, and land to work?"

In Chiapas, Mexico, the Pope asked the indigenous people for forgiveness. "How good it would be for all of us," said the Pope, "to examine our consciences and to learn to say, forgive us. Today the world, despoiled by the throwaway culture, needs you." He began his mass in Chiapas with a short reading of a Psalm in the Tzotzil language, spoken by many Mayan people in the region, and he also made mention of the Popol Vuh, of "Book of the Community" of the ancient Mayan Quiché people. While in Chiapas, Pope Francis also signed a decree authorizing the saying of mass in Náhuatl, the most widely spoken indigenous language in Mexico.

Reviving the Theology of Liberation

While in Chiapas, the Pope said a prayer at the tomb of Bishop Samuel Ruiz García (pictured below), a believer in the Theology of Liberation and best known for his role as a mediator during the Chiapas Rebellion of 1994 led by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN).

Many conservatives accused him of encouraging and supporting the Zapatistas. The Theology of Liberation, with its "preferential option for the poor," helped to inspire many progressive social movements in Latin America in the late twentieth century. Former Pope John Paul II and his right-hand man Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict) worked systematically to eradicate the Theology of Liberation by firing professors, punishing priests, and closing down organizations inspired by that emancipatory philosophy.

Still, *La Jornada*, the Mexico City leftist daily newspaper, editorialized

"Without denying the force and the relevance of the Popes speeches, it's necessary nevertheless to add that Francis avoided at all costs referring to three tragedies that are emblematic of the national reality today: the sexual abuses committed by a number of Catholic priests against minors, the scandalous persistence of femicide in the country, and the exasperating failure of the government to clear up the aggression carried out the year before last against the teachers college student from Ayotzinapa where 43 of them were disappeared and whose fate remains unknown to today."

Despite these critical limitations, the Pope's visit represented a condemnation of the Mexican political and economic order, a call for greater justice, and a demand that the working people, the poor, migrants, and the indigenous, who are today the last, should come first.

New Politics

ECONOMY

What is to be Done with the Banks? Radical Proposals for Radical Changes

ALFREDO SAAD FILHO ·

Since 2012 alone, the list of bailouts includes: Dexia in Belgium and in France (2012, the third bailout), Bankia in Spain (2012), Espírito Santo (2014) and Banif (2015) in Portugal, Laiki and Bank of Cyprus in Cyprus (2013), Monte dei Paschi, Banca delle Marche, Banca Popolare dell'Etruria e del Lazio and Carife in Italy (2014-2015), NKBM in Slovenia (2012), SNS Reaal in Holland (2013) and Hypo Alpe Adria in Austria (2014-2015), and those are only a few examples. The most intolerable thing is that the public authorities have decided to pay ransom to these banks by having the citizens bear the consequences of the low dealings of their directors and shareholders. A separation or "ring-fencing" between commercial banks and investment banks remains no more than wishful thinking. The so-called banking reform undertaken in France in 2012 by Pierre Moscovici, the French Finance and Economy minister, turned out to be a sham. As for bankers' remunerations, the ceiling on the variable compensation adopted by the European Parliament on 16 April, 2013 had as its immediate consequence... an increase in the fixed compensation and recourse to an exemption clause provided for in the law.

No measures designed to avoid further crises have been imposed on the private finance system. Governments and the various authorities meant to ensure that the regulations are respected and im-

proved have either shelved or significantly attenuated the paltry measures announced in 2008-2009. The concentration of banks has remained unchanged, as have their high-risk activities. There have been more scandals implicating the fifteen to twenty biggest private banks in Europe and the United States— involving toxic loans, fraudulent *mortgage credits*, manipulation of currency exchange markets, of *interest rates* (notably, the *LIBOR*) and of energy markets, massive tax evasion, money-laundering for organised crime, and so on. The scandal of the Panama papers shows how banks are using the tax heavens. The *Financial Times* reported that the British prime minister, David Cameron, had intervened personally to prevent offshore trusts from being dragged into an EU-wide crackdown on tax avoidance.

The authorities have merely imposed fines, usually negligible when compared to the crimes committed. These crimes have a negative impact not only on public finance but on the living-conditions of millions of people all over the world. People in charge of regulatory bodies, such as Martin Wheatley, former director of the Financial Conduct Authority in London, have been sacked for trying to do their job properly and being too critical of the behaviour of banks. George Osborne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, dismissed Martin Wheatley in July 2015, nine months before the end of his five-year contract.

Although obviously to blame, no bank director in the United States or Europe (with the exception of Iceland) has been convicted, while traders, who are mere underlings, are prosecuted and sentenced to between five and fourteen years behind bars.

As was the case for the Royal Bank of Scotland in 2015, banks that were nationalised at great public expense to protect the interests of major private shareholders have been sold back to the private sector for a fraction of their value. Salvaging the RBS cost £45 billion of public money, while its reprivatisation will probably mean the loss of a further £14 billion.

Lastly, as to whether banks are now financing the real economy, the efforts deployed by the central banks have failed to spark, as yet, even the beginnings of a real recovery of the economy.

Because we feel, in particular in the light of Greece's experience, that banks are an essential element of any project for social change, we propose that immediate measures be taken to attain the following six goals:

- 1. Restructure the banking sector
- 2. Eradicate speculation
- 3. End banking secrecy
- 4. Regulate the banking sector
- 5. Find an alternate means of financing public expenditures
- 6. Strengthen public banks

In a second part, we will develop our arguments in favour of socialising the banking sector.

I. IMMEDIATE MEASURES

1. Restructure the banking sector

Radically reduce the size of banks in order to eliminate the "too big to fail" risk systemic banks [1] represent.

Separate commercial banks from investment banks. Commercial banks will be the only financial institutions authorised to take in savers' deposits and to receive public support (public underwriting of savings deposits and access to cash from the central bank). These commercial banks will be authorised to grant loans only to private individuals and local and national companies and public entities. They will be prohibited from conducting activities on the financial markets. What that means is that

they will not be allowed to engage in securitisation: loans will not be able to be turned into tradable securities and commercial banks must keep the loans they grant on their books until full repayment is made. The bank that has granted a loan must bear the risk for that loan.

Investment banks must not be entitled to public underwriting; in case of failure of a bank, all losses will be borne by the private sector, beginning with the shareholders (on the totality of their assets; see below).

Prohibit credit relations between commercial banks and investment banks. Following Frédéric Lordon's principle of imposing a real "apartheid" between commercial banks and investment banks, under no circumstances will a commercial bank be allowed to be involved in a credit relation with an investment bank. [2]

2. Eradicate speculation

Prohibit speculation. As Paul Jorion proposes, speculation must be prohibited. "In France speculation was authorised in 1885, and in Belgium in 1867. As a matter of fact speculation was defined very clearly by the law aimed at 'prohibiting wagering on the upward or downward movement of financial securities.' With such a prohibition, anyone who practices speculation would be guilty of an infraction; whether they're in Bank X or Bank Y would make no difference." [3] That could include sanctions on banks that speculate on their own account or on the behalf of their clients.

Acquisition of tangible property (raw materials, commodities, land, buildings, etc.) or securities (shares, bonds or any other security) by a bank or other financial institution with the intention of speculating on its price will be prohibited.

Prohibit derivatives. This means that banks and other financial institutions who want to cover themselves against various types of risks (associated with exchange rates, interest rates, payment defaults, etc.) will have to go back to using traditional insurance contracts.

Require banks to request authorisation before placing financial products on the market. Investment banks will have to submit any new financial instrument to the oversight authorities (this does not apply to derivatives since they will have been outlawed) for authorisation before they are placed on the market.

Separate consulting activities from market activities. We are also in agreement with the Belgian economist Eric de Keuleneer, who proposes separating consulting activities from market activities: "It is not right for banks to take on risky debt whilst advising their customers about the quality of these debts, or that they are currently able to speculate on gold, whilst 'selflessly' advising their customers to purchase gold." For that, he proposes re-creating brokerage activities.

Prohibit high-frequency trading and shadow banking. Strictly limit what can be included in off-balance-sheet entries. [4] Prohibit short sales and naked shorting.

3. End banking secrecy

Prohibit over-the-counter financial markets. All transactions on financial markets must be recorded, traceable, regulated and controlled. Until now, the main financial markets have been over-the-counter – that is, they are subject to no oversight whatsoever. This is true of the FOREX market (5,300 billion dollars each day), [5] the derivatives market, the markets for raw materials and agricultural products, [6] etc.

End banking secrecy. Banks must be required to communicate all information regarding their directors, their various entities, their customers, the activities they conduct and the transactions they carry out for their customers and on their own account. Similarly, banks' accounting must also be legible and comprehensible. Lifting bank secrecy must become a basic democratic imperative for all countries. Concretely, that means that banks must make available to the tax authorities: - a list of names of beneficiaries of interest, dividends, capital gains and other financial revenues; - information on the

opening, modification and closure of bank accounts in order to establish a national directory of bank accounts; - all information on movements of capital into and out of the country, including in particular identification of the order giver.

Prohibit transactions with tax havens. Banks must be prohibited from engaging in any transaction with a tax haven. Failure to comply with the prohibition must be subject to very heavy sanctions (including the possible revocation of the banking license) and heavy fines.

4. Regulate the banking sector

Require banks to radically increase the volume of their own funds (equity) in relation to their total assets. [7]

Whereas equity is generally less than 5% of a bank's assets, we believe that the legal minimum should be raised to 20%.

Prohibit socialisation of the losses of banks and other private financial institutions. This means prohibiting public authorities from guaranteeing private debt with public funds.

Restore unlimited liability of major shareholders in case of bank failure. The cost of a failure must be recoverable from the total assets of the major shareholders (be they individuals or corporations).

In case of bank failure, the deposits of clients of the commercial bank must continue to be guaranteed by the State, up to the limit of a reasonable amount of savings for an upper-middle household (estimated today at 150,000 euros – and subject to democratic debate).

Tax banks heavily. Banks' profits must be strictly subject to legal provisions regarding taxation of companies. In fact, the rate banks currently pay is very significantly below the legal rate, which itself is far too low. Banking transactions involving currency [8] and financial securities must be taxed. Short-term bank debt must be taxed in order to promote long-term financing.

Systematically prosecute bank directors who are guilty of financial crimes and misdemeanours and revoke the banking licences of institutions which do not comply with the prohibitions and are guilty of misappropriation.

Find another way to save banks. In addition to the measures mentioned above – unlimited liability for major shareholders (covering all their assets), guarantees on deposits up to 150,000 euros and prohibition of guaranteeing private debt against public funds –, a mechanism needs to be created for orderly failure of banks, consisting of two structures: A private bad bank (owned by private shareholders and incurring no cost for the public authorities) and a public bank to which deposits, as well as safe assets, are transferred. Certain recent experiments can serve as inspiration – in particular the measures taken in Iceland since 2008. [9]

5. Find other ways of financing public debt

Require private banks to hold a quota of public-debt securities.

The central banks should again grant loans at zero interest to public authorities. Unlike the current practice of the ECB as a result of the European treaties, the central bank would be able to provide zero-interest financing to the State and all public entities (towns, hospitals, social-housing entities, etc.) in order to conduct socially equitable policies in the context of the environmental transition.

6. Strengthen existing public banks

and re-create them in countries where they have been privatised (they would of course be subject, like all other banks, to the concrete measures discussed above). In France, in 2012 a collective called "Pour un Pôle Public Financier au service des Droits !" ("Toward a public financial institution to protect our rights!" [10] that supports the creation of a public banking structure. The serious disadvantage of this project is that it fails to get to the root of the problem in that alongside an insignificant public banking sector, private banks and a co-operative sector which is cooperative in name only

would continue to exist. In Belgium, where the government privatised the last public banks in the 1990s, in 2011 the State bought back the bank "part" of Dexia, of which it is 100% owner. Dexia Bank has become Belfius and still has private status. Belfius needs to become a true public bank and the concrete measures formulated above need to be applied. The State paid 4 billion euros – an amount the European Commission itself considered quite unreasonable. What should have been done is this: Belfius should have been created at no cost to the public finances as a public banking institution funded by the deposits of the Dexia Bank's customers and all the safe assets. The bank should have been placed under citizen control. The working conditions, jobs and income of the personnel should have been guaranteed while the remuneration paid to the directors should have been sharply reduced. The board members and directors should have been barred from holding a position in a private institution. Charges should have been pressed against the directors of Dexia by the ministry for the criminal wrongdoings they committed. Report No. 58 filed by the French Senate on the Société de financement local (SFIL) evaluates the cost of Dexia's failure at approximately 20 billion euros (13 billion for France, including 6.6 billion earmarked for recapitalisation, and the rest to cover part of the early repayment penalties on toxic loans; 6.9 billion euros for Belgium, corresponding to the nationalisation of Dexia Bank Belgium and the recapitalisation of Dexia) as of the date of the report. On 1 February, 2013, France created a 100%-public structure (with the State owning 75%, the CDC 20% and the Banque Postale 5%) in order to acquire 100% of the Dexia Municipal Agency (a subsidiary of Dexia Crédit Local), which became the Caisse Française de Financement Local (CAFFIL).

II. SOCIALISE THE BANKING SECTOR

Putting the concrete measures we have mentioned above into practice would constitute progress in resolving the crisis in the banking sector, but the pri-

vate sector would continue to occupy a dominant position.

Perennial long term measures are also needed.

If the experience of the last few years demonstrates anything, it's that banks must not be left in the hands of capitalists. If, through popular mobilisation, we can see to it that the measures discussed above (which are open to further discussion in order to improve and complement them) are applied, capital will do everything possible to recover part of the ground it will have lost, finding multiple ways of getting around the regulations, using its powerful financial resources to buy the support of lawmakers and government leaders in order to deregulate, once again, and increase profits to the maximum without regard for the interests of the majority of the population.

Socialising the banking sector under citizen control is necessary

Because capitalists have demonstrated just how far they are willing to go, taking risks (risks whose consequences they refuse to be held accountable for) and committing crimes for the sole purpose of increasing their profits, because their activities regularly result in heavy costs borne by society as a whole, because the society we want to build must be guided by the pursuit of the common good, social justice and the reconstitution of balanced relations between human beings and the other components of nature, the banking sector must be socialised. As Frédéric Lordon proposes, a "total deprivatisation of the banking sector" [11] needs to be carried out. Socialisation of the banking sector in its entirety is recommended by the labour federation Sud BPCE in France. [12]

Socialising the banking sector means:

- expropriation, without compensation (or compensated by one symbolic euro), of large shareholders (small shareholders will be fully compensated);
- granting a monopoly of banking activities to the public sector, with one single exception: the existence of a small cooperative banking sector (subject to the same fundamental rules as the public sector).

– creating a public service for savings, credit and investment, with a twofold structure: a network of small 'high street' branches, on the one hand, and on the other, specialized agencies in charge of funds management and financing of investments not handled by the ministries in charge public health, education, energy, public transport, retirement, the environmental transition, etc. These ministries will be provided with the budgets necessary to assure their investments and efficient functioning. The specialized agencies will intervene in areas and activities that are beyond the competence and spheres of action of the ministries in order to ensure that all needs are covered.

– defining, with citizen participation, a charter covering the goals to be attained and the missions to be carried out and which places the public savings, credit and investment entities at the service of the priorities defined by a democratic planning process;

– transparency in the financial statements, which must be shown to the public in understandable form.

The word "socialisation" is used in preference to "nationalisation" or "state ownership" to make clear the essential role of citizen oversight, with decision-making shared between directors, personnel representatives, clients, non-profit associations, local officials and representatives of the national and regional public banking entities. Therefore, how that active citizen oversight will be exercised will need to be defined by democratic means. Similarly, the exercise of oversight over the banks' activities by workers in the banking sector and their active participation in the organisation of the work must be encouraged. Bank directors must issue an annual public report on their stewardship. Preference must be given to local, quality service, breaking with the policies of externalisation currently being pursued. The personnel of financial establishments must be encouraged to provide authentic counselling to the clientele and to break with current aggressive sales policies.

Socialising the banking sector and making it a public service will make it possible:

- for citizens and public authorities to escape the influence of the financial markets;
- to finance citizens' and public authorities' projects;
- to dedicate the activity of banking to the common good, with among its missions that of facilitating the transition from a capitalist, production intensive economy to a social and environmental economy.

Because savings, credit, security of deposits and the preservation of the integrity of payment systems are matters of general interest, we recommend that a public banking service be created by socialising the totality of the firms in the banking and insurance sectors.

Because banks are today an essential tool of the capitalist system and of a mode of production that is devastating our planet and grabbing its resources, creating wars and impoverishment, eroding, little by little, social rights and attacking democratic institutions and practices, it is essential to take control of them so that they become tools placed at the service of the greater number of people.

Socialising the banking sector cannot be conceived of as a mere slogan or demand, sufficient unto itself and which decision makers would put into practice because they understand why it makes sense. It must be seen as a political goal to be reached through a process driven by a movement of citizens. Not only is it necessary for existing organised social movements (including trade unions) to make it a priority of their agenda and for the different sectors (local governmental bodies, small and medium companies, consumer associations, etc.) to adopt the position, but also – and above all – for bank employees to be brought to an awareness of

the role played by their profession and the fact that it would be in their interest for banks to be socialised; and for bank users to be informed at the point of use (for example, through occupations of bank branches everywhere on the same day) so that they can participate directly in defining exactly what a bank should be.

Only large-scale mobilisation can guarantee that socialisation of the banking sector can actually be achieved in practice, because it is a measure that strikes at the very heart of the capitalist system. If a government of the Left does not take such a measure, its action will not be able to truly bring about the radical change needed to break with the logic of the system and bring about a new process of emancipation.

Socialising the banking and insurance sector must be part of a much broader program of further measures which would trigger the adoption of a transition to a new, post-capitalist and post-productive model. Such a program, which needs to be European-wide but which may first be put into practice in one or several countries, would include abandonment of austerity policies, cancellation of illegitimate debt, implementation of an overall tax reform with heavy taxation of capital, an overall reduction in working hours with compensatory hiring and maintaining of wage levels, socialisation of the energy sector, measures for ensuring gender parity, development of public services and social benefits and the implementation of a strongly determined environmental transition policy.

At this point in history, socialisation of the entirety of the banking system is an urgent economic, social, political and democratic necessity.

Translated by Snake Arbusto and Mike Krolkowski.

CADTM

PAKISTAN

AWP Multi-Party Conference on "A Collective Response of the Left to the Reaction of Obscurantist Forces on the Recent Legislation for Protection of Women against Violence"

PENELOPE DUGGAN ·

Over 50 political parties and social movements participated in the one day conference.

A joint declaration passed at the end of the conference condemned the religious parties for preventing the recognition of the right to women of protection against domestic violence and stressed the need for mobilization of the public in support of a progressive agenda for social change in the country. Speakers stressed the need for an alliance of left-leaning and secular forces to confront the right-wing extremism in all its manifestations, including economic exploitation of working people.

Speaking at the outset, AWP president Abid Hasan Minto said that the laws passed by the provincial assemblies were not adequate to guarantee recognition of women's constitutionally guaranteed rights and protection of women from domestic violence. However, he said it was important for all progressive political parties, social movements, trade union activists and civil society organizations to get together in support of the law and to resist religious parties' opposition to the domestic violence and other pro-women laws. He said that the AWP would continue to play a role to unite progressive forces across the country and would organize these dialogues in other provinces as well. Minto also condemned the provincial government for starting negotiations with the religious parties to address their concerns over the law. He said the progressive forces should not let the government submit to pressure from religious parties and weaken the in-

stitutional framework proposed under the law to provide redress to victims of domestic violence. In this regard, he said the government had already agreed to include family members of couples involved in domestic violence cases into the proceedings of the district-level women protection councils. He said this should be resisted. He said that the AWP will lead the process of uniting the left in Pakistan and will extend this dialogue to all provinces.

The conference was jointly chaired by Abid Hasan Minto, president AWP and Farooq Tariq general secretary AWP.

Women Action Forum's Hina Jillani said that the state could not be allowed to shy away from its responsibility to protect its women citizens from acts of violence. She said all crimes that affect women should be recognized as crimes against the state rather than against individuals. She stressed the need for collaboration between all progressive forces to wage a joint struggle against the religious right-wing's political activism. On the tendency to equate support for the law to opposition for the family system, Jillani said the family system that condoned gender violence and placed men in position of unaccountable authority could not be defended. She said progressive forces wanted a family system that promoted egalitarian relationships between its individual members and protected all of them from acts of violence.

Among the shortcomings of the women protection law that needed to be fixed, Jillani mentioned delay

in enforcement and the possibility of implementation in selective regions which she said was against the Constitution.

Supreme Court Bar Association president Ali Zafar said that alongside street agitation against religious parties an intellectual battle was also needed to discredit their propaganda on pro-women laws. Among his suggestions for improvements in the law were need for interim protection, gender sensitization of the police force, improved prosecution of cases registered under pro-women laws and reform of family courts to enhance their efficiency.

In his statement in support of the conference, Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) president Mahmood Khan Achakzai extended support of his party for the declaration passed at the conference and said that his party's activists would join progressive forces in their struggle against the religious right-wing.

Representing the Awami National Party, Mian Iftikhar Hussain (Central General Secretary) extended support for the declaration and urged the gathering to seek allies without the parliamentary parties and state institutions. He said the struggle for a society free of gender-based violence needed to be waged in collaboration with all like-minded forces. He further said that the gathering today reminded him of NAP, the leading progressive force in Pakistan's political history. He said that NAP was the leading progressive force in Pakistan's political history. Left unity must be revived, and the left unity dialogue should be taken by AWP to all provinces.

More than 50 progressive political parties, trade union federations, professional associations, women's rights groups, and students federations attended the conference. These included Awami National Party, National Party, Balochistan National Party (Mengal), Jeay Sindh Mahaz, Sindh United Party, Hazara Siyasi Karkunan, Pakistan Peoples Party -Shaheed Bhutto and Workers, Supreme Court and Lahore High Court Bar Associations, Punjab and Pakistan Federal Union

of Journalists, Pakistan Trade Union Federation and Pakistan Bhatta Mazdoor Union (Punjab), Anjuman Mazareen Punjab, Pakistan Medical Association, The Struggle, Pakistan Trade Union Defence Campaign, National Students Federation and Democratic Students Alliance and Feminist Collective, Rawadari Tehreek, and others. Solidarity messages were sent to endorse the joint declaration including Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party, Pakistan Seraiki Party, Balochistan National Party, Samoraj Movement, and Vision.

The following declaration was passed at the end of the conference:

A Collective Response of the Left to the Reaction of Obscurantist Forces on the Recent Legislation for Protection of Women against Violence

1. The multi-party conference of Leftwing, secular, democratic, nationalist and non-violent movements, called upon by Awami Workers Party, expresses its deep concern with the statements of religious-political parties and state institutions, many of whom are openly opposing the right of women to be protected from violence i.e. to live a life of dignity.
2. We understand that women face systemic oppression in Pakistan. This situation is exacerbated for women belonging to working classes, oppressed nations and religious minorities. With the growth of productive forces in the shape of capitalism, the living standards of women may have slightly improved but they still experience the worst forms of socio-economic and political inequalities, humiliations, violence and powerlessness, often driven by patriarchal backlash against any limited advances made by women. Even today, women restricted to domestic and familial responsibilities and her identity is reduced to only that of daughter, wife and mother. This situation has its origin in our history and existing feudal and patriarchal structures, which are reinforced by the theocratic and neo-imperialist nature of the state.
3. We therefore welcome any legislative, political, economic and social measures taken for the protec-

tion and advancement of women that aims to improve the status of women in society.. We support the recently passed provincial legislation on domestic violence by the Sindh, Balochistan and Punjab assemblies. While the Protection of Women against Violence Act 2016 is insufficient (in that, for instance, it does not criminalize domestic violence), it is a necessary step forward towards a more just social order.

4. We declare that we condemn all those – within and outside the state – who attempt to dismiss or undermine legislation for protection of women against violence, and we will collectively resist them with full force. We therefore strongly reject the regressive role of the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) and the Federal Shariat Court (FSC) in state affairs. We call upon the National Assembly and the Senate to immediately disband the theocratic and patriarchal CII and the FSC. Both of these institutions represent feudal and patriarchal forces and hence remain an obstacle to democracy, and the struggle for radical equality for all,

5. We strongly condemn the religio-political parties opposing the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act, 2016 and other similar legislation by provincial and federal governments. They represent

the epitome of feudal brutality and obscurantism that legitimizes a whole range of dreadful customs promoting women's oppression – the monster that the state has fed and fattened for decades at the cost of people's basic rights.

6. We understand that the state and government patronage given to religio-political parties and outfits is at the root of their increasing influence in social and state affairs. The recent attack on democracy by these forces in Islamabad and the hypocritical reaction of the government has reinforced their strength. We believe that until and unless the state and the government do not completely abandon these forces, they will continue to keep hostage the democratic system and the masses in Pakistan.

7. We reject the two committees formed by the Punjab government to address religious parties' concerns over the law. We will not let the government make amendments to the law in accordance with the wishes of the religious extremists and against those of the women's rights activists.

8. We affirm our commitment to collectively exposing, resisting and eliminating the inequities that color women's existence and defeat all forms of patriarchal oppression and violence

TAX HAVENS

Neoliberalism's world of corruption

PHIL HEARSE ·

The revelations in the Panama Papers that hundreds of companies and thousands of individuals, including 72 (!) present or former heads of state, hid their fortunes offshore. The names so far revealed include associates of Russian President Putin, and numerous members of the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party

The 'Lux leaks' revelations about how the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg conspires with big business conspires to launder its profits through tax minimal Luxemburg and how major companies like Amazon and Starbucks shift their British profits to Luxemburg and pay little or no tax.

Revelations that bankers in Britain conspired to fix the 'Libor' rate – the inter-bank lending rate – so their banks could profit from trades or the impression they were worth more than they actually were.

Repeated allegations of corruption in sport – including athletics, tennis and cricket, either in terms of result fixing or unfairly influencing results through drug use.

Accusations against prominent politicians, including South African President Jacob Zuma and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, that they used vast amounts of public money to build huge residences.

British bank HSBC was in 2012 discovered to have received at least \$880 billion in investments from the Mexican Sinaloa drug cartel.

A lot more things could be added to this list. The world seems to be awash with corruption. So what is it really all about?

The highly sanitised versions on the BBC would give you the impression that there's a few bad apples out there who are giving the international business and finance communities a bad name by some sharp practice. Nothing could be further from the truth. Corruption is endemic in neoliberal capitalism. It is fundamental to the whole way the system works, and it is the method by which trillions is stolen from the poor and given to the rich. Here's why and how.

Effects of Neoliberalism: kleptocracy

Of course corruption has always existed in capitalism. But neoliberalism, the 'free market' system that started in the 1980s, promoted it on a vast scale for two reasons.

Neoliberal deregulation and privatisation promoted the dominance of financial capital and the expense of industry and the state. Financialisation and low capital gains taxes have turned big companies and utilities into cash cows, virtual banks with huge wealth, looking to maximise the interest on their money and minimise their tax. Finance capital is, after all, basically about swindling. In the middle ages they called it usury.

The shift to the right crashed 'socialist' command economies and undermined nationalist governments in the third world, replacing both with corrupt and usually highly authoritarian neoliberal regimes. Getting hold of the state apparatus has become a royal road to mega-wealth for dozens of dictators and their cronies through simple theft.

The core of it is the banking system. European and American banks receive (read: launder) billions of dollars every year from international mafias, and in particular from drug dealers. Sometimes by accident some of this comes to light. In 2006 Mexican

soldiers intercepted a drug shipment in Ciudad del Carmen and found a cache of documents showing the Sinaloa drugs cartel had made payments of \$378 billion to the American bank Wachovia, a subsidiary of the financial giant Welles Fargo.

Roberto Saviano, the author of the best-selling *Gomorra* which exposed the workings of the Neapolitan crime organisation Camorra, claims that London is the centre of money laundering for Latin American drug money. Even the British National Crime Agency says:

""We assess that hundreds of billions of US dollars of criminal money almost certainly continue to be laundered through UK banks, including their subsidiaries, each year."

Saviano says that Mexico is the 'heart' of the drugs trade and London its 'head'. Antonio Maria Costa, head of the UN Crime and Drugs Agency, says drug dealers invested \$352 billion in Western banks in 2008, and this was key in keeping some major banks from collapse.

So corruption – receiving money from crime and drug cartels – is deeply ingrained in the culture of US and European banks. And this is not going to stop, given the vast profits involved.

Controlling the state – and looting its assets

The kleptocratic state is an old story. It's reckoned that no Mexican president leaves offices with less than \$100m. Key Western allies from the 60s and 70s, like Mobutu, president of Zaire (DRC) from 1965-97 and Suharto, president of Indonesia from 1967-98, both established murderous regimes and systematically looted their respective peoples of billions of dollars.

But these were, in the 1960s and 70s, stand out, atypical, cases. Now looting the state by right wing regimes, often military-controlled regime, is an epidemic. Nigeria is a classic example today. A PWC report reckoned that \$100 billion of public money, much of it oil revenues, had been stolen by corrupt politicians and officials in 2014. The result of this

massive theft is that in a rich country, 62% of the population live in absolute poverty.

That's the problem with the Peter Mandelson view of being comfortable about some people being 'filthy rich'. Some people are filthy rich because millions are dirt poor. Nigeria is an example of something even more corrosive. Corruption at the top, backed by the army, creates corruption throughout society. Nothing happens at all without the payment of a bribe to some official or other. People who have no money to pay bribes stay at the bottom of the heap.

Corrupt Nigerian state officials have no problems finding a bank to launder their money, but if in doubt, the London property market is a good option. James Ibori, a state governor in his homeland, stole \$250m from Nigeria, and much of the money was laundered through the UK to fund a luxurious lifestyle. He acquired a string of high-end properties in prime central London (see below on real estate corruption).

Mexico is an example of the synergy between crime proceeds, state corruption and international banks. Nearly all the drugs produced in Latin America have to go through, around or over Mexico to get to the US.

Except in the case of drug cartel turf wars, drug shipments are protected by the police and the army, and officials of the Mexican states and top politicians in the national government are all paid off. The Mexican national state is corrupted with drug money from top to bottom: it is a narco-state pure and simple. The result is that even prosecutors have to look the other way. Border guards and junior police and army personnel have a stark choice: which do you prefer – a small bribe to look the other way, or torture followed by a bullet in the head? When everyone at the top is corrupted, local and junior officials are powerless.

The British media have been keen to highlight evidence from the Panama papers of offshore investments by people close to Russian President Vladimir Putin and relatives of top Chinese leaders

President, Xi Jinping, and two other members of China's elite Standing Committee, Zhang Gaoli and Liu Yunshan. Despite the West wanting to divert attention to ex-Communist rivals in a one-sided way, nonetheless these regimes of course are deeply corrupt.

Corruption in Russia goes right up to the Kremlin and the oligarchs who lead that country are linked to organised crime. Loyalty to the Putin state apparatus is ensured by the carrot and the stick. The carrot is the reward of state contracts to those who keep tight with Putin: the stick is the fear of violence at the hands of state-linked mafias.

In China there has been a major 'anti-corruption' drive since the Communist Party congress in 2012, launched by Xi Jinping and endorsed by his predecessor Hu Jintao. In fact over the last decade there have been repeated calls to fight corruption. But given the naming of top Standing Committee members as controllers of offshore accounts, it seems hardly likely that this campaign is really inspired by a desire to 'fight corruption'. More likely it is a mechanism for purging factional opponents – like the 2012 show trial of former minister and mayor of Chongqing Bo Xilai, accused of fomenting 'egalitarianism' and other pro-worker attitudes. It seems likely the campaign is also aimed installing fear and loyalty to the present leadership into the Communist Party's 90 million members: that's why more than 300,000 party members have been sanctioned so far.

Outdistancing these super authoritarian/corrupt states are the 'patrimonial states', countries where the state is virtually owned by a single family. Examples of this were Libya under Gaddafi and of course Syria under the Assad family. Turkey's Erdogan is trying hard to build that kind of state.

Influencing the State

Direct corruption by the state is one thing, influence is something else. In western democracies influence is stacked in favour of the rich and powerful. In the United States and increasingly in Britain

it is professional lobbyists who fight their corner. The Atlantic magazine in the US points out:

"Corporations now spend about \$2.6 billion a year on reported lobbying expenditures—more than the \$2 billion we spend to fund the House (\$1.18 billion) and Senate (\$860 million). It's a gap that has been widening since corporate lobbying began to regularly exceed the combined House-Senate budget in the early 2000s.

"Today, the biggest companies have upwards of 100 lobbyists representing them, allowing them to be everywhere, all the time. For every dollar spent on lobbying by labour unions and public-interest groups together, large corporations and their associations now spend \$34. Of the 100 organizations that spend the most on lobbying, 95 consistently represent business."

(<http://www.theatlantic.com/business...>)

The above account doesn't include the direct payments and other gifts given to members of Congress by big companies, not least the health insurance and healthcare companies who have fought so long and so successfully against a universal US healthcare system.

Britain is going in the same direction. As in the United States, business and politics are often revolving doors with former minister joining the boards of companies they dealt with when in power. Seumas Milne says:

"...lobbying doesn't begin to cover the extent of corporate influence. More than ever the Tory party is in thrall to the City, with over half its income from bankers and hedge fund and private equity financiers. Peers who have made six-figure donations have been rewarded with government jobs.

"But the real corruption that has eaten into the heart of British public life is the tightening corporate grip on government and public institutions – not just by lobbyists, but by the politicians, civil servants, bankers and corporate advisers who increasingly swap jobs, favours and insider information, and inevitably come to see their interests as mutual and interchangeable. The doors are no

longer just revolving but spinning, and the people charged with protecting the public interest are bought and sold with barely a fig leaf of regulation." (<http://www.theguardian.com/comment...>)

Legalised corruption?

Corruption everywhere has the effect of transferring huge amounts of wealth from the poor to the rich. If poor individuals are not directly robbed, then their economic situation, their public services, their health service, their transport, their education – all these are robbed when taxes are avoided and government revenues robbed.

You can't analyse corruption today by looking for illegal activity alone. Many of the practices that happen in rich and poor countries are legal or in a grey area where it's difficult to tell criminal from the lawful.

For example, property dealing in Britain is profoundly corrupt. House prices in London (and thus in the whole country indirectly) are pressured by the huge amount of hot money from corrupt Russian oligarchs and assorted gangsters of various nationalities invested in the expensive end of the market. But nothing here is illegal, as far as the house purchases in Britain are concerned. It's just that they are bought with corrupt money and force up the living costs of millions of ordinary British people.

Look at the purchase of rare earth minerals from the Congo, essential for computers and mobile phones. Much of this mineral wealth is controlled by war lord armies, guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The companies who buy the mineral products they control – the moral equivalent of blood diamonds – have no contact with them at all. Dealers act as a buffer and through their transactions – perfectly legal – wealth based on rape and murder is miraculously washed clean.

Finance capital is by definition corrupt. The investment banks typically do not disclose their fees to investors in advance (they call their charges 'consideration') by deduct self-decided amounts as they

go along. Free charging professionals like lawyers, and in many countries doctors and dentists, make up their own huge fees. Isn't this corrupt? But there's nothing illegal about it.

The tax dodges by major companies like Amazon, Facebook and Starbucks, are perfectly legal. They pay all the tax they are required by law – or by agreement – in countries like Ireland and Luxemburg where they are registered. Whether these practices are illegal in the UK for example is a very grey area. But corruption it certainly is.

All these examples have the same effect: robbing the poor to further enrich the wealthy.

Corruption in Sport

So why do we have this rash of allegations and disclosures about corruption in sport? The money poured into sport by television and sponsorship deals is truly vast. Corruption in sport, including taking banned drugs, is about the division of the money coming into the game, or about gambling on the results.

Corruption around the edges of rich sports has always existed. For example, think of the exotic fees charged to some football clubs by the agents of players being transferred, some of whom it later emerges have close links to club managers.

But today the profits from winning at sports are mind-boggling. Take Maria Sharapova. What she has won on the tennis court pales into insignificance to the sponsorship deals she's gained from Porsche, TAG Heuer, Nike and Evian. Performance enhancing drugs are definitely worth it if they get you into the top earning bracket. Each athlete and their coaches and managers want to maximise their share of the cash coming into sport.

Fifa and Sepp Blatter is something else. World soccer is the richest sport. Fifa had the ability to make people very rich by its allocation of contracts and competitions and was therefore always a prime target for bribery.

But the bigger question is why all this corruption became a widely accepted or tolerated part of sport. Why would the South African cricket team under Hansie Cronje throw a match for a few hundred dollars per player?

The answer comes down to the zeitgeist, the spirit of the times. We live in a world where wealth and luxury are worshipped, where to have money is to be someone important, where to be a celebrity or a major sports star is to be worshipped. A world in which competition for wealth and celebrity is universal and where the rich are almost always keen to

become even richer. And where not to be rich is to be a nobody.

Nothing exemplifies this more than the gift lounges and gift bags organised for Oscar nominees by big companies. Stars worth tens of millions of dollars stagger under the weight of free cameras, watches, jewellery, electronic goods picked up at these events. When being rich, being one of the 'lords of humankind', is all that matters, then how you gain your wealth and keep it doesn't matter. Whoever it hurts or impoverishes.

Left Unity

GERMANY

What die Linke should do

BERND RIEXINGER ·

For years now, studies have identified a potential voting base for parties of the far right ranging from 15 to 20 percent of the electorate. Germany's rising right-populist force, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), has now managed to capture and concentrate this potential. But knowing this is not cause to breathe a sigh of relief — if anything, it's quite the opposite, because the AfD is really just the tip of the iceberg.

Germany is currently experiencing a dangerous rise in right-wing violence against refugees, which in turn is part of a broader right-wing Kulturkampf characterized by the anti-Muslim racism of figures like Thilo Sarrazin and growing reactionary mobilizations against the achievements of the women's movement.

The "grand coalition" has gradually adopted more right-wing positions, mediated by the racist public outbursts of Horst Seehofer and the Green Party's support for further restrictions to asylum law. In other words, the AfD is getting exactly what it wants: political discourse as a whole is drifting steadily to the right.

A Warning Sign

Many people whose social situations have not improved or who harbor fears of downward mobility voted for the Right. They did so to send a message to the established parties and the parties of the grand coalition in particular.

For all social and democratic forces, the warning sign from Sunday's election that we should be most concerned about is that the AfD was the top vote-getter among the unemployed and working classes

in Saxony-Anhalt and Baden-Württemberg, while many trade union-oriented wage earners voted for them as well.

Both we, as well as the trade unions themselves, should be deeply alarmed that 15 percent of union members in Baden-Württemberg and 24 percent in Saxony-Anhalt voted for the AfD, despite the explicitly anti-union nature of the party's program.

Not all of these people are racist or nationalist, but they are strengthening a racist and right-populist party. We have failed to adequately demonstrate the antisocial nature of the AfD and prevent the unemployed, underemployed, and downwardly mobile middle classes from being played against each other and against the refugees.

Saxon state chair Rico Gebhardt recently summarized the challenge we face well: "The greatest contribution that we on the Left can make to countering the rightward trend is to win back the working classes and the unemployed. That is a social challenge with a high antifascist effect."

Competition and Insecurity

The rise of right-populist parties in Europe can only be understood against the backdrop of precarization, unbridled competition, and social insecurity that so many people experience in their everyday lives.

The Union parties (CDU/CSU), the Social Democratic Party (SPD), and the Greens shoulder most of the blame for these developments. The gap between rich and poor continues to grow, not least because the Christian Democrats, SPD, and Greens still implement policies for the 1 percent. Meanwhile, millions of people in Germany are

threatened with poverty in old age by so-called pension reforms.

Since its founding, the particular function and responsibility of Die Linke has been to provide a public and a parliamentary voice to experiences of oppression and exploitation, and to fight together with other social groups to improve their conditions. It should concern us greatly that we have failed to become increasingly successful in these roles.

It is true that we require a solidary, critical, and constructive discussion about what lessons to draw from the three elections. But there is one thing we certainly will not do: respond with a shift in our refugee policy or a betrayal of principles like human rights and democracy. The fundamental right to asylum knows no caps or limits. Period.

As the left opposition we will continue to push for our "social guarantees": a sanctions-free basic social security instead of Hartz IV; a decent minimum pension; higher wages and good, secure, dignified work instead of constant stress and existential fear; gender justice; and the strengthening of social infrastructure with affordable housing, better health care, and education.

"Solidarity in One's Own Interest"

We want to do this together with many others who are concerned about the rightward shift in society and want to get active. And this, in turn, is what should give us a bit of hope.

Recent movements like the Refugees Welcome campaign and the fight against racism and right-wing violence, as well as protests against TTIP, armaments exports, and an increasingly authoritarian capitalism, have politicized a lot of people, particularly young people, in recent months. Many young people have joined the party in the last weeks and months. In big cities with milieus of young leftists, Die Linke is growing.

But the neoliberal unfettering of competition has led to a situation in which solidarity is alien to the

everyday experiences of many people, who instead discriminate "downwards" rather than defend themselves against antisocial politics and enrichment by the bosses and the ultra-rich. As Die Linke, our primary responsibility is to formulate a message of "solidarity in one's own interest" and make our opposition to neoliberalism and the 1 percent clear and understandable in the way we speak.

Our society stands at a crossroads: either growing sections of the unemployed, precarious, low-wage, and downwardly mobile middle classes will join the right-populists and prepare the ground for further antisocial, authoritarian, and antidemocratic developments; or we will succeed in building a solidary social coalition of the unemployed, precariously employed, and wage-earning middle classes capable of beating back competition and social de-solidarization.

A Contemporary Class Politics

Katja Kipping and I have oriented towards this sort of coalition since we were elected party co-chairs. But developing a contemporary emancipatory — antiracist and feminist — class politics that promotes self-empowerment and solidarity, that brings together the unemployed, workers, single parents, the precariously employed, and the downwardly mobile middle classes for solidary organization and left-wing protest is a huge challenge.

The party has developed struggles against precarious working and living conditions; for the expansion of public housing, education, health care, and nursing for all; and for a radical redistribution of wealth as a strategic anchor that can also help to prevent the downwardly mobile middle classes from discriminating downwards.

We have also begun to concertedly approach the growing numbers of workers, disproportionately women, in the social services sector. These workers are impacted by the neoliberal drive towards higher profits and competition the most, while at the same time their labor is undervalued by society as a whole.

Together, our party should make greater efforts to get involved in the lives of these social groups while continuing to develop our own reform alternatives. In doing so, we will have to take the question of wealth distribution more seriously and, ultimately, declare war on the ultra-rich 1 percent and Angela Merkel, who loses a lot more sleep over the concerns of the wealthy than she ever has over the refugee crisis.

Left politics is more than just a list of demands. What the Right promises is empowerment: both in their blind lashing out at the "established parties" and blanket denunciations of the media as the "lying press," as well as in their distorted version of popular referendums.

The experience of powerlessness that reduces so many individuals to feeling like the playthings of various "foreign powers" must be countered with the experience that, rather than turning to racism and discrimination, it is actually the common struggle against neoliberalism that can improve one's personal situation.

A "Caring Party 2.0"

A politics that is palpable in localities, in workplaces, neighborhoods, and families, and that generates hope for change: we find many examples of a solidary politics of the everyday in our organization, such as actions supporting strikes and renters' struggles, as well as the many initiatives to offer everyday community support under the banner of

"Die Linke helps," but they have not yet grown into a new political culture in our party.

We need a "Caring Party 2.0" (the former Party of Democratic Socialism, half of what is now Die Linke, was often referred to as the "Caring Party" of the east). We spend too much time speaking to people instead of with them, we make too many promises to do something for others instead of inviting them to get active themselves, to fight and organize with us.

This does not mean we have to discard everything we have done up to now. Rather, we should build on existing practices as well as learn from the positive experiences of others — both our own party, as well as allied left parties and organizations in other countries.

During the elections in Stuttgart we successfully tried out "recruiting campaigning" in a socially deprived area: in direct, door-to-door visits we talked to people about their experiences and their concerns, explained our demand for affordable housing, and invited them to a free breakfast we sponsored in the neighborhood. Before a single vote was counted last Sunday, we had already developed test projects to organize social protest in these areas later this year.

The core of our strategy is party building at the local level and thus the development of a new political culture and language. We can counter right-wing drift and social indifference with a politics of hope, solidarity, and democracy.

Jacobin

FRANCE

France rises up in the night

FRANÇOIS SABADO ·

This change in the political climate comes after a whole period when momentum was with the right. The left and unions have been on the defensive in recent years as the Socialist Party government, led by President François Hollande, has adopted neoliberal policies that exacerbated economic stagnation. Unemployment has remained above 9 percent since 2009—in January, it stood at 10.2 percent. Following the Charlie Hebdo killings and the November terrorist attacks in Paris, mainstream parties, from the ruling Socialists to the far-right National Front party, have whipped up a wave of anti-immigrant racism and Islamophobia, leading to unprecedented levels of vigilante violence and police sweeps, all under the guise of a virtually permanent state of emergency. Most worrying of all, the National Front won more than 27 percent of the total vote in regional elections in November, taking in 6.8 million votes.

ON MARCH 31, 1 million people took to the streets to demonstrate their opposition to a new labor reform law proposed by French President François Hollande of the ruling Socialist Party. Previously, on March 9, around 500,000 people protested in more than 250 towns and cities across the country. This represents a national popular mobilization comprised of youth, retirees, workers, high school and university students, truck drivers and more. The most important feature is the emergence of a new generation participating not only in school and

campus protests and strikes, but also in workplace and union actions.

Make no mistake, even if the movement expresses itself differently in each country, there is a commonality between the millions of young people who occupied the centers of Spain's biggest cities under the banner of the Indignados, those participating in the new left-wing Podemos party, and the youth who took part in the Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States. This new round of youth radicalization was also expressed in the anti-climate change protests [which had to defy governmental bans imposed in the wake of the November terrorist attacks] at the international COP 21 conference in Paris last December.

What unites and brings together all of these struggles is that they constitute the first rejection of the government's labor reform law, which represents a threat on the scale of an "atomic bomb" to a wide range of rights and social gains. The governmental left is daring to carry out what the most reactionary right never had the nerve to try: Namely, the destruction of the Labor Code—laws, decrees, regulations—won over the course of dozens of struggles and social conflicts to protect workers from capitalist exploitation.

Until now, the provisions of the Labor Code have taken precedence over corporate agreements, individual employment contracts, waivers and even the new Labor Law—sometimes called El Khomri's Law after the Socialist Party Minister of Labor, Myriam El Khomri. The proposed changes would reverse the hierarchy of social norms, subordinating social rights to the "proper functioning of the company."

Thus, based on the bosses' goodwill and blackmailed by unemployment, local agreements be-

tween management and workers will set the length of the workday, wages and layoffs without reference to some existing regulations. The end of the 35-hour workweek will force employees to work longer for less. And if profits fall, the boss can increase hours while holding wages down over the course of a year. In other words, the new reform means making every aspect of work precarious. Taking all this into account, the powerful reactions of the labor movement and youth are easy to understand.

The government should take heed when polls show that 70 per cent of the French population opposes the bill, and a petition on social media has already gathered more than 1.2 million signatures. Since then, the movement has taken off because people are not only angry about the labor reform, but are also rising up against the long-term impact of the capitalist crisis: the explosion of inequality, social injustice, austerity policies, basing economic life on capitalist profitability and competition, and production's blind destruction of the environment.

These socioeconomic grievances have merged with demands in defense of democracy and against a now-failed constitutional amendment proposed by Hollande that threatened to strip citizenship from those accused of terrorism — a proposal that would only serve to stigmatize a whole section of the immigrant population. More austerity, discrimination and racism—enough is enough. The dam is breaking, and the people are in the streets!

Nuit Debout!

And new forms of struggles are being developed, such as occupations of symbolic locations after big protests. Thousands of youth are taking part in an initiative called "Rise Up at Night" ("Nuit debout" in French) in the Place de la République — the central square in Paris. In response to a call launched by a collective of journalists, intellectuals and activists, thousands of people without any union or political affiliation have joined in, occupying the squares and discussing politics for many hours. Now these thousands of youth have decided to keep going.

All in all, this movement may take on a new dimension as it is embedded in a new conjunction of social and political crisis. This movement of the youth and the labor movement comes at a time when Hollande and the government are as weak as they have ever been. Hollande was forced to retreat and cancel his proposed constitutional amendment regarding citizenship. But suddenly, for thousands of young people and workers, this retreat may lead to demands for more instead of demobilization.

In effect, this is developing into a showdown between the government and the youth, workers and unions who reject the bill. For its part, the government has succeeded in partially dividing labor by securing the support of the CFDT (the French Confederation of Democratic Labor). But a majority of the trade unions—the CGT (General Confederation of Workers), FO (Workers Force), FSU (United Union Federation) and Solidaires (or SUD—United Democratic Solidarity) — continues to demand the withdrawal of the labor reform law, emboldened by widespread support among workers. In the meantime, parliamentary debate on the bill will go on until June, and some sort of legislative "accident" cannot be excluded whereby the government fails to even support its own proposal, thus opening up a national political crisis.

More protests are scheduled for the coming weeks. This movement is going to continue, deepen and harden, raising the potential for a showdown with the government. It poses the question of how to articulate the links between a generalized movement that mobilizes the majority of the population with these new forms of struggle — in particular, the occupation of public places and specific areas, and blockades that disrupt business as usual. How can united trade union action and forms of self-organization of the youth and workers be combined? How can we restore the strength and credibility, not only of the national strike days, but also put forward a perspective for prolonged strikes if the government does not withdraw the draft labor reform? These are the questions we must now face.

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EUROPEAN UNION

When the Plan B is the Plan A

JOSEP MARÍA ANTENTAS ·

The movements that erupted in 2011 constituted a wave of global protests, formed of national movements with specific characteristics, although they strongly influenced each other and came together, in their ideas and symbolically. The framework of the contestation of the last five years has been that of the state and/or nation (where the two do not coincide), marked as much by opposition to state and regional governments as to the Troika (rather towards the former in the Spanish case, towards the latter in the Greek and Portuguese cases).

Absorbed by the scale of their respective national-state crises, the movements, organizations and campaigns of the countries of the European periphery have not generated a dynamic of intense international collaboration, and there have not been many successful major initiatives aiming at cross-border articulation. There have been meetings and projects, but all with limited impact and few practical consequences. Some of them were driven by the new social movements that emerged in the wake of 15M, such as the Agora 99 meetings in Madrid (in November 2012) and Rome (in November 2013). Whereas others involved collaboration between new "indignant" networks and the remains of the global justice movement, such as Firenze 10 + 10 (in November 2012) or the Altersummit in Athens (in June 2013). Until now, the main coordinated mobilization against the effects of the crisis remains the United for Global Change day of action on October 15, 2011, under the leadership of the 15M of the Spanish state, but there was no real continuity.

In parallel, there was the traditional inability of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) to offer a response to the austerity imposed by the European integration project on which the ETUC has always been heavily dependent, on the ideological, organizational and economic levels. Abstract and unilateral Europeanism on the one hand, and on the other, collaboration through a European pseudo-"social dialogue" prevents the ETUC from articulating an alternative to the Europe of capital. The institutionalization of trade-union action thus has its European corollary in the form of an integration that is subject to the logic of the project of the European Union, which leads to the impotence and paralysis of combative trade-union action on a continental scale.

The weakness of coordinated international action contrasts with the "global justice years", from the birth of this movement in 1999 at the WTO summit in Seattle until 2003-2004, during which time the global justice movement was a defined and visible actor, able to act in an articulated manner at the international level as well as being a shared symbolic reference. The global justice wave was much more "epidermal" than the indignation against austerity that began in 2011 and it only scratched the surface of the social structure, but it projected itself by definition in the international arena, demonstrating an unprecedented, albeit fleeting, dynamic on this level. From 2005, the global justice movement ceased to be a reference and a catalyst for social resistance. International campaigns and mobilizations lost their centrality and their ability to mobilize people. The axis of the protests shifted to the national/state and local level. The main structures of the global justice movement, such as the Social Forums, have lost touch with national realities, becoming distant from the real processes. The legacy of the "global

justice years" has not however disappeared, because it is found in many thematic and sectoral international initiatives (campaigns, days of global action ...), but with a moderate impact and limited activist base. The exception was the birth of the movement in favor of 'climate justice' following the COP15 summit in Copenhagen in 2009, which benefited from high visibility and met a certain echo (which continued, in an uneven way, during subsequent summits), with however the underlying problem of disconnection with national and local resistance against neoliberal austerity, where the state of social emergency has overshadowed the ecological reformulation of the present economic model.

At the present time, the national/state and international levels are dislocated: on the one hand movements and organizations with a narrow social base which aim at international action, disconnected from concrete national/state and local mobilizations, while on the other fighting movements are focused on national and local emergencies in the face of the bulldozer of budget cuts. From this flows a dual challenge: to give international activism territorial roots and to propel national struggles beyond borders. In other words, to articulate the national/local with the international and European - and vice versa.

All this does not detract from the importance of certain experiences of international protest in the heart of the Europe of austerity, such as the Blockupy days of action since 2012; forms of coordination that are not very visible but which are useful for the exchange of experiences; organizations that push for citizen debt audits as part of the International Network for Citizen Audit (ICAN in English). And especially the growing and persistent international campaign against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), the biggest and most global ongoing initiative, which somehow combines the heritage of the global justice movement with that of the phase that began with the crisis of 2008 and the popular explosion of 2011.

Nor has the geopolitics of socio-political resistance contributed to an international articulation, because its epicentre is in the peripheral countries, with Greece, the Spanish State and Portugal at the forefront, with a relatively low degree of internationalization of its movements and social organizations and a limited real and symbolic capacity to impel a dynamic of Europeanisation of the struggle. This contrasts with the global justice period, in which there was France (from the strikes of November-December 1995 against the "reform" of social security to the popular explosion against the First Employment Contract - CPE - which aimed to push young people into precarious work, in 2006); and there was Italy (from the counter-summit in Genoa in July 2001 to the movement against the war in 2003, through the demonstration of the CGIL in March 2002 against the amendment to Article 18 of the Workers' Statute, an article that restricted the right of employers to dismiss workers). These two countries are currently in a situation of low levels of social resistance, of decomposition of the political left and a rise of the far right in France and of demagogic alternatives without content in Italy. France and Italy play an important role not only in European geopolitics, but also within the left itself. There can be no doubt that to Europeanize the struggle from the Iberian and Hellenic Mediterranean periphery is more difficult than to do so from the Franco-Italian axis.

Thinking about the rupture after Syriza

Plan B was born from the shock of the capitulation of Tsipras before the Troïka, which really threw a bucket of cold water on the hopes for change but which was also a source of strategic lessons ... so as to avoid tripping twice over the same rock, even if the rock on question is on another path or in another country.

During the global justice period, social resistance did not consider the necessary "political question". It was not directed towards the formation of new political instruments, remaining in a logic of self-sufficiency and social movementism. The global

justice currents placed themselves either in a perspective of influencing the institutions (by the moderate method of lobbying or by mobilizing in the streets) or in a logic of "changing the world without taking power" (as in the title of the famous book by John Holloway), oriented towards exodus or a permanent counter-power. Despite this, the global justice radicalization also shifted the political-electoral space and created more favourable conditions for the left opposed to neoliberalism, favouring the emergence of political parties and initiatives which, with different kinds of programmatic and organizational crystallization, expressed electorally the discontent of a minority fringe of society. But the attempts to articulate them at EU level did not go beyond formal links or simple frameworks for discussion.

In the field of forces that was evolving in the milieu of the communist (or post-communist) parties, with the exception of the orthodox KKE and PCP in Greece and Portugal, the Party of the European Left (EL) was constituted, under the political and moral authority, first of Rifondazione Comunista (the reference of this political field from the counter-summit in Genoa in July 2001 until its self-immolation when it entered the Prodi government in 2006) and then of Die Linke in 2007. But the EL has not gone beyond the stage of being a space for summit meetings of national/state political forces, with little European visibility, a low capacity for joint action, enormous contradictions and strategic limitations as well as a dependency on the needs and tactical turns of the flagship party of the moment.

In the anti-capitalist field, from the early 2000s, there arose the Conferences of the European Anti-capitalist left (EACL). With a considerable influence of the French LCR (in the European Parliament since 1999 and whose presidential candidate, Olivier Besancenot, won 4.25 per cent in 2002), and the participation of the Scottish Socialist Party, the Portuguese Left Bloc, the Danish Red-Green Alliance (the latter two also members of the EL), Rifondazione in the early stages and various minor forces from other coun-

tries, the Conference held regular meetings with a limited format for several years, but they did not lead to anything more. In 2008, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of May 1968 and in the midst of the process of the launching of the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) by the LCR in France, new meetings of radical forces were convened. But the subsequent crisis and decline of the NPA, as well as the loss of the centrality of France in social struggles following the outbreak of the financial crash, put an end to this second attempt.

The pressures of the specific conditions in each country, the immediate emergencies, were not always concordant for each political force, the national/state logic of electoral competition (with the partial exception of the European elections), the disconnect between the political and the social of the previous period, as well as crises, the flux and reflux corresponding to a historic moment of transition, from which a number of parties that served as points of reference for various parts of the left (Rifondazione, Die Linke, the NPA and more recently Syriza) suffered, explain the very limited balance sheet of cross-border European coordination on the level of political parties since the beginning of the new millennium.

Plan B now appears as a socio-political initiative in which political forces and social organizations co-exist, and where political and strategic discussions take place, in a format that mixes party political thinking and social activism and which combines the echoes of the social forums and those of the occupation of squares and other places. However, it is faced with a scenario where the forces in favour of a break with austerity show a very unequal development at European level, taking shape in very diverse experiences and evolving in a global context where, in most countries of the continent, with the exception of those which have seen unfold decisive processes of struggle, the social malaise is channeled by the far right. Few political forces can today push towards a Europeanisation of strategic thinking about a rupture, even more so since the main experiences are at the geopolitical periphery, not

only of the EU, but also of the European left itself. "The Syriza hope" evaporated in record time, and Popular Unity in Greece failed in its attempt to articulate a defensive alternative to Tsipras. The Portuguese Left Bloc lacks sufficient outreach in Europe and Podemos has not had, since its foundation, beyond its relationship with Syriza and some public figures of the international left, an active policy on the European terrain. As for the Labourism of Corbyn or the Scottish independentist left represented by RISE (Respect, Independence, Socialism and Environmentalism - Scotland's Left Alliance, established in August 2015) they are partially situated outside the perimeters of the continental dynamics, too far away to pull the wagon.

The challenges

After the Madrid conference, Plan B faces two major challenges in the context of the absence of political forces and social movements which have so far been able to act as levers or as international motor forces of resistance and alternatives. The first consists of developing a consistent critique of austerity policies and the EU, not limited to too superficial approximations. It is a question of knowing how to manage a huge variety of approaches on key issues (the euro, the analysis of the EU, conceptions of political and social change ...) whose fundamental agreement lies in the rejection of a "Tsipras path" of capitulation to the power of finance. But this is only the beginning, the starting point. The arrival point should be the formulation of shared plural strategic horizons that traces an alternative path of rupture. A rupture which is the precondition for positive change.

The second is to formulate practical tasks that go beyond simply organizing new meetings. We must strengthen international campaigns or global days of mobilization that offer a concrete perspective for a new internationalism from below. This is where the process of European Social Forums began to mark time, being incapable, beyond launching the day of action on February 15, 2003 against the war

in Iraq, of moving on from conferences and their preparation to a phase of launching campaigns and joint actions. For that, the convening of an international day of action for May 28, 2016 is an excellent initiative which synthesizes both the significance of the social struggles of the last five years and the attempts to build new political instruments. The challenge is as simple as it is ambitious: to synchronize hopes and efforts across borders.

Barcelona, February 22, 2016

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Plan B for Europe: Appeal to build a European area of work in order to end austerity and build a true democracy

In July 2015, we witnessed a financial coup d'état carried out by the European Union and its institutions against the Greek Government, condemning the Greek population to continue suffering the austerity policies that had been rejected on two occasions in the polls. This coup has intensified the debate over the power of the EU, and by extension it's institutions, its incompatibility with democracy, and its role as guarantor of the basic human rights demanded by European citizens.

We know that there are alternatives to austerity. Manifestos such as "For a Plan B in Europe", "Austerexit" or DiEM25 (Democracy in Europe Movement 2025) denounce the blackmail of the third memorandum of understanding imposed against Greece, the catastrophe that it would cause and the antidemocratic nature of the EU. The President of the European Commission no less, Jean -Claude Juncker, said : " There can be no democratic decision against European treaties ".

We are also witnesses to the unsupportive, and at times xenophobic, response from members of the EU, and its institutions, to the arrival of refugees from the Middle East and Africa and to the human drama that entails. Underlining the hypocrisy of the debate within the EU with respect to the humanitarian disasters is the indirect way in which,

through the sale of arms or by pushing its trade policies, the EU has been a key player in the conflicts which have in turn provoked the recent humanitarian crises.

The EU's solution to the crisis, started eight years ago and based on austerity, privatizes common goods and destroys social and labour rights instead of addressing the root causes of the crisis; deregulation of the financial system and the corporate takeover of EU institutions through the employment of powerful lobbies and revolving door policies. The EU promotes false solutions by negotiating trade and investment treaties, with hardly any transparency or democratic oversight, such as the TTIP, CETA, or TISA, that eliminate what are considered to be barriers to trade: the rights and regulations that protect the citizens, workers, or environment. It's the final blow to our democracies and rule of law, especially regarding the procedures put in place for so called investor protection

The current EU is governed by a de facto technocracy serving the interests of a small, but powerful, minority of economic and financial powers. This has provoked a resurgence of rhetoric from the far right as well as from xenophobic and nationalist factions in many European countries. We have the responsibility to react against this threat and stop fascists from capitalize on the pain and unhappiness of the citizens, who in spite of everything have shown solidarity towards the hundreds of thousands of refugees that are suffering this humanitarian tragedy.

Society has now started to work towards a radical change in the policies of the EU. Social movements, such as Blockupy, the current campaign against the TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Agreement between the European Union and the United States), the Alter Summit, the European general strike in 2012, the Euromarches, or the massive amount of work carried out by numerous citizen groups and NGO's make up valuable human, intellectual, and ideological capital in the defense of human rights, the respect of The Earth, and of the dignity of people over

and above political and economic interests. However, we believe that better coordination and cooperation is needed in order to mobilize at a European level. **There are many proposals on the table that could do away with austerity:** a fair tax policy and the closure of tax havens, complementary exchange systems, the re-municipalization of public services, the equal distribution of all jobs with a and enshrining fair conditions. commitment to a production model based on renewable energies and reform or abolish the EU tax treaties – formally known as the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union. The example of Greece has shown us that in order to face the current circumstances we must join forces, all the Member States and from all their spheres: political, intellectual and the civil society. Our vision is all-inclusive and international. For these reasons we want to generate a To carry out all these proposals in order to redefine and re-establish political and European institutions and treaties, civil society must be organized, we must think our common strategies and see how to articulate them. We know that these transformations cannot be done in isolation from each of the European countries. Our vision is of solidarity and internationalist.

For this reason we want to create a convergence of all the people, movements, and organizations that oppose the current model of the EU and agree to a common agenda of objectives, projects, and actions, **with the aim of breaking the EU wide system of austerity and to radically democratize the European Institutions, putting them to work for the citizens.**

With this idea in mind we propose to set up a European conference on 19th, 20th and 21st February in Madrid and we invite you to participate in the debates, workshops and discussions that will take place.

First Signatures

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	Zbigniew Marcin Kowalewski Chercheur et Editeur, Pologne
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Leap Manifesto unites broad forces, builds climate justice campaigns

JOHN RIDDELL ·

Five hundred Toronto-area supporters crowded into a west-end school auditorium March 29 to support the Leap Manifesto [1], launched early this year in support of a rapid, "justice-based" energy transition to a renewable economy.

The movement was launched in January 2016 to popularize the ideas of Naomi Klein's influential book on climate change, *This Changes Everything*. Klein pointed to the need for a mass social movement addressing both the urgent need for climate action and an agenda for social justice.

Participants at the rally represented a wide range of social movements, particularly in the city's West End. Featured speakers included three members of parliament (two New Democratic Party, one Liberal), union leaders (postal and public sector workers), environmental groups (Greenpeace and 350.org), and Indigenous groups (Idle No More).

The Leap Manifesto, with more than 34,000 signatories, calls for varied measures toward the goal of a society "caring for one another and caring for the planet." The list is headed by respect for Indigenous people's "inherent rights and title" to the land; immediate action for a 100% clean economy by 2050; and a halt to "infrastructure projects that lock us into increased extraction decades into the future."

Other points highlight longstanding goals of the workers' movement, such as investment in public infrastructure, "an end to all trade deals that interfere with our attempts to rebuild local economies," a national childcare program, and expanded and affordable public transit.

The Manifesto's diverse goals are interlocking and mutually supportive, its supporters explain. Thus at the March 27 meeting, lead-off speaker Bianca Mugenyi described achieving the target of 100% renewable electricity generation in 20 years as "a healing process from colonization."

Our calendar's leap year itself is "a recognition that it's easier to change our human systems than to alter the cycles of nature," Mugenyi said. Shifting her metaphor, she pointed out that bringing climate change under control requires "thinking big": "Small steps are no longer enough. 2016 is our year to leap."

Mugenyi stressed the need to hold Canada's Liberal government, headed by Justin Trudeau, to the sweeping promises made when it was elected to act on climate change. "They are not connecting with our sense of the urgency of the moment," she said. For example, the Liberals have promised \$3.4 billion over three years for mass public transit, "which won't even meet the outstanding transit repair budget in Toronto alone."

Mugenyi noted that the Leap Manifesto has sparked interest in the social-democratic New Democratic Party. More than 20 NDP local constituency groups have called on the party to adopt the Manifesto.

Megan Whitfield, president of Toronto's postal workers, presented a program worked out together by her national union and Leap to convert the threatened Canadian postal service's unequalled network of 6,800 retail outlets into centres of community service and community action on climate issues, as for example through the introduction of postal banking. When the government acts on its

decision to cease sending cheques through the mail, she said, "this will provide a way to receive pension payments for all those who can't get an account in a conventional bank."

Leap's March 29 meeting in Toronto – the most effective held here on climate justice issues in several years – embraced an impressive range of activist forces that could lend support to the Leap/postal worker program and similar projects. Inevitably, a text aimed at encompassing such diverse viewpoints must be more limited in scope than the bold measures presented in Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything*. But to focus on the manifesto's omissions would miss the point.

The manifesto has proved its capacity to unite a broad range of social forces and to pose the challenge of climate justice within the mainstream organizations of Canadian working people. It is an eloquent contribution to the debate the Trudeau government is initiating on a national climate action plan.

Moreover, public attitudes in Canada to climate-related issues are radicalizing, encouraging us to elaborate key issues that the Leap Manifesto touches on only briefly. For example, the Manifesto's third point states, "There is no longer an excuse for building new infrastructure projects that lock us into increased extraction decades into the future...." Prime examples of such projects are the oil indus-

try's unpopular projects to build pipelines across the country.

Pipeline opponents include the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation. They are taking their legal suit against Line 9, which runs from Sarnia to Montreal, to the Supreme Court. At the Toronto rally, climate activist Jesse McClaren appealed for donations to meet their legal costs.

In response, Avi Lewis, a co-founder of the Leap effort and facilitator of the Toronto meeting, saluted the positive work of coalitions against pipelines and the importance of the Chippewa case. Referring to Naomi Klein's chapter on pipeline activism, entitled "Blockadia," Lewis continued, "It is super clear that we have to stop the veins and arteries of the fossil-fuel economy."

Lewis called for an end to subsidies for the fossil fuels industry and highlighted a new Alberta-based website, "Iron and Earth," established by tar sands workers committed "to incorporating more renewable energy projects into our work scope." "The workers should be supported, not the corporations," Lewis said.

The March 27 Toronto rally shows that the Leap Manifesto has become an effective organizing tool that deserves support from all sectors of Canada's climate justice movement. The pending debate on national climate policy should enable us to greatly expand support for the Manifesto and its goals.

ROMANIA

The Roma Business 160 years since the end of Roma slavery in Romania

LEFT EAST ·

A couple weeks ago Nicolae P?un and M?d?lin Voicu – two Social-Democrat MPs of Roma origin – were accused of money laundering and embezzlement. In a nutshell, the two allegedly misappropriated large sums of money from EU-funded projects aimed at Roma integration. The money was supposed to reach the more disadvantaged segments of the Roma population, the target group of the project. Instead, it found its way into the MPs pockets by way of fictive contracts and false papers.

This is the first high-profile corruption case linked with embezzlement of funds for Roma integration. Also, it is the first case of corruption that has at its center protagonists of Roma origins. What is surprising is that it took so long for such details to emerge since it was something of an open secret: everybody knew or at least suspected that Roma funds –either provided by the state or by the EU – must disappear into thin air. The more money was poured in order to deal with Roma issues, the more the misery of the Roma population deepened. The more politicians and NGOs were in charge of running programs for integration and for dealing with the rampant poverty and social insecurity of the Roma communities, the more these communities became poorer, marginalized and discriminated against.

Even before Romania's EU accessions there had been political pressure and sizeable funds available for dealing with Roma issues. The need deepened particularly around the end of the 2000s when Roma people were expelled –usually violently –

from western countries, especially Great Britain, France and Italy, following allegations of illegal migration, petty thefts and beggary. Roma migration was considered to be an issue that the Romanian state failed to deal with, therefore a series of EU projects and budget lines were made available to local communities and NGOs. As such, Roma business became good business, a healthy source of revenue in an otherwise very competitive, project-based and generally precarious NGO sector. As a result, many NGOs introduced Roma integration among their activities in order to be able to secure at least some parts of this stream. Academics followed suit and Roma studies and preoccupations – already a very established niche in the global academia for the past two decades – simply burgeoned, to the level that there are now professional MA and PhD degrees in Roma studies on offer in the universities of Bucharest.

However, such project-based, NGO-driven and academic-backed projects largely failed to achieve their overall goals. Roma population constitutes the poorest segment of the population; it is marginalized, ghettoized, harassed and held in contempt by the ethnic Romanian majority. Some inroads made by particular people cannot hide the fact that Roma population is structurally excluded, socially very vulnerable and with virtually no chances of social mobility. This is not some leftist conclusion, but the results of a World Bank report from 2014. According to it, the rate of poverty risk for Roma population (estimated at around 2 and a half million people) is 84% (three times higher than that of the Romanians) and 90% of Roma households are below the poverty line. Only 0,4% of Roma people ever get to the university and only 10% ever get to

finish high-school. About 60% of Roma people live in crowded places in marginalized communities. And the statistical data only get worse once we reach chapters related to health, life expectancy, and so on.

Moreover, institutional racism and popular prejudice portray Roma as inferior and feral, which in turn call for nationalistic and quasi-fascist responses. Roma population function as the perfect scapegoat for Romanians' own discrimination and humiliation abroad: it is because of Roma that Romanians have a negative image in the eyes of the westerners.

Some particular projects and interventions did manage to alleviate and respond to specific situations. For example, activists and academics mobilized against the evictions and subsequent ghettoization planned in Pata Rat by the Cluj municipality. In Bucharest, the Common Front for Housing Rights opposed the eviction of 50 families, some of them Roma. The brutal ghettoization of the Roma population in Baia Mare sparked the ire of activists that managed to bring the case to national attention. Scores of activists, NGOs and academics, in their own ways or together, work hard in many concrete situations and manage to substitute at times the lack of state involvement by providing housing, schooling, training and general support for various segments of Roma population.

While such efforts should not be easily dismissed – since in many cases they make the difference between a modicum of integration and total abandonment – they should not blind us to the fact that NGO logic and practices cannot replace structural changes. In fact, NGO logic seems to be more part of the problem, than a truly viable solution. By linking Roma integration to the logic of projects this issue is just being reproduced. After all, NGO people are people who get their salaries precisely because there are some more things that need to be done.

Another, even more problematic, outcome of this NGOization of the Roma issue is the creation of what anthropologist Gergo Pulay rightfully called a

Roma middle class – the poster image of Roma integration. The Roma middle class is formed by people from the discriminated community who learned how to speak the language of the majority. Then they use this language –and the practices associated with it– to discipline their own people but also to make claims in their name in relation to the majority. Their function is basically double: on the one hand to demonstrate that Roma integration works, that there is mobility and acceptance; on the other to give voice and make claims in the name of the community as ethnic organic intellectuals. This leads to an ambiguous status: they embody the legitimate, "proper" Roma person with whom the majority is able to interact with, but at the same time they lack any sort of meaningful link with the Roma community as such. A creation of the majority's fantasy about what a proper Roma should look and act like, the Roma middle class is unable to represent anything else except itself. While they are called to stand for the entire community, as an example of what can be achieved, the representatives of Roma middle class can only represent themselves. This is why, for example, all the middle class Roma art that has been produced in the past half a decade is strictly autobiographical and auto-referential. Roma middle class has only one story to tell: its own.

Nicolae Păun and Mădălin Voicu, the two MPs mentioned above, represented the upper reaches of this Roma middle class, an older generation that emerged during socialism and was able to link up with mainstream party politics after 1989. Both were high profile figures of Partida Romilor (the Roma Party), a political vehicle aimed at offering political representation to Roma people but which in practice functioned as a way to secure political representation for its leaders. But the strength of the Roma middle class as such, largely a product of the transition period, especially after the 2000s, is palpable and its interests are now quite antagonistic to those of the older generation. This was visible during the official celebrations marking the abolition of slavery when groups of Roma NGO repre-

sentatives and activists openly spoke out against against people like P?un and Voicu and the type of political representation they are able to offer. Basically, the celebration offered the opportunity for the Roma middle class to assert its existence and autonomy and to demand a new form of political and public representation.

Ciprian Necula, a secretary of state in charge of Roma affairs in the Ministry for European Funds and himself the embodiment of post-communist Roma middle class, was quick to take distance from the corruption affair involving the two MPs. He pointed out that the irregularities discovered by the prosecutors is rather an exception than the rule regarding the usage of European funds for Roma. However, not very late after his statement, some journalists wrote about gross irregularities at the Ministry of European Funds regarding the organization of events for the February 20 anniversary. While these allegations must be properly substantiated, it becomes increasingly clear that the level of public scrutiny directed towards the spending of money for Roma purposes is now very high. In a twisted way, the anti-corruption discourse overlaps with a racist prejudice that portray Roma as serial thieves and untrustworthy. Only that now it is the Roma middle class and its representative that are being suspected.

All in all, it seems that Roma business is good business for many, with the notable exception of the actual Roma population itself. The creation of a Roma middle class in postsocialism is the outcome of a particular ideology of integration. It comes after the demise of the integration philosophy promoted by the socialist state with its explicit goals and unex-

pected outcomes and consequences. While the history of the successive attempts of Roma integration (and its obverse forms of exclusions) since the above-mentioned abolition of slavery is yet to be properly grasped (a surprising omission given the amount of Roma studies available), it must be noted that anti-Roma prejudice was central to the formation of Romanian state and its subsequent project of nation building. In different forms, it still is. One of the most interesting recent Romanian movies – *Aferim!* – managed to capture this relationship perfectly. The movie tells the story of a local sheriff and his son trying to catch and bring back to his owner a fugitive Roma slave in 1830s Wallachia. What is striking in this story is the "naturalness" of the Roma slavery itself. While the main protagonists might entertain some views that would cast slavery as morally wrong, the end of the movie leaves no room for ambiguity: the Roma are treated worse even than the animals.

Sam Beck noted that the ethnic character of Roma slavery in Romania paralleled similar conceptions in the capitalist west about naturally inferior races and populations. This allowed Romanians to imagine themselves as superior and civilized in contradiction with the Roma slaves and constituted the cornerstone of the national identity of the new state, formed three years after the official Roma liberation. This umbilical connection explains the fear and fascination exerted by the Roma people on the Romanian population. Today, 160 years after Roma liberation, Romanians continue to remain the slaves of their own fantasy.

LeftEast

FRANCE

March 31: a new step towards a general mobilization against the labour law

LÉON CRÉMIEUX ·

In most cities, the contingents were much more numerous than on March 9, even in Paris, despite the pouring rain. The police themselves, with their own figures, acknowledged that the number of demonstrators on March 31 was twice as many as on 9 March.

Many new sectors were on strike, in both the public and private sectors. At the SNCF, more than 40 per cent of railway workers were on strike, against the El Khomri law but also against a decree defining the basis for further deregulation of the status of railway workers.

The mobilization of youth had also broadened since March 9. In the intervening period, on March 17 and 24 March, school and university students had organized two mobilizations, with in many demonstrations the presence of workplace contingents.

On March 31 250 high schools were blockaded, compared to 120 on March 9 and 200 on March 17. The student mobilization is taking longer to develop, but mobilization committees are being formed in dozens of universities.

Many young people from working-class neighbourhoods, more than on March 9, were present in the demonstrations.

Police intervened in several cities with multiple provocations and acts of violence against young people, following the violent attack on a young student on March 24 in the nineteenth arrondissement of Paris.

The movement is therefore extending, with in its sights the start of the parliamentary debate on the

law, planned for May 9.

This mobilization is already the most massive faced by a government since 2010, when strikes, demonstrations and blockades did not manage to block a new attack against the pension system. But what everyone has in mind now is 2006, with the victorious movement against the CPE, the "first employment contract" of De Villepin, which the government had to withdraw in the face of a massive mobilization of youth, supported by workers.

The context is not the same, in particular as regards one key parameter: the last big social mobilizations in France (1995, 2003, 2006, 2010) have always taken place against a right-wing government.

Thus many activists are sniffing a "smell" of 2003 or 2010. But for now, unlike in 2003, the strike movement in the schools and universities has not reached the level of 2006, neither in its extent nor in the degree of self-organization: and among workers no sector appears poised to play a leading role, as the railway workers, refuse collectors, and lorry drivers did in 2010, or the postal workers and teachers in other movements.

Obviously the El Khomri law has hit hardest workers in the private sector, who are subject to the Labour Code, collective agreements and company agreements. But contingents of public sector workers were as numerous in the March 31 demonstration, since they know that the anti-social policies of the government strike indiscriminately at all sectors, even though the contingents of the teachers' union, the FSU, were not as big as in other mobilizations.

Moreover, everyone understands that this movement is taking on a different dimension. Its particular characteristics influence it both positively and negatively.

In the first place this movement is taking place in a strange political situation. Up until March 9, it was marked by the November attacks, the frenzied security policies of the government and the perpetuation of the state of emergency. It was also marked by the political polarization exercised by the National Front, the undisputed winner of the regional elections of December 2015.

Holland and Valls hoped to take advantage of the attacks to asphyxiate the right (the Republicans, whose president is Nicolas Sarkozy) and for both of them to drape themselves in the attire of solid statesmen, as Bush managed to do after September 11, 2001, thereby ensuring his re-election.

This plan succeeded on one point: the crisis of the right is more profound than ever. The Republicans are split, Sarkozy has totally failed in his comeback, Alain Juppé is far more popular than him and candidates for the candidacy for 2017 are multiplying in his party.

The centrists of the UDI have announced that they will not participate in a joint primary with the Republicans. The traditional right is a field of ruins

But on the other side, the credit of Hollande and Valls as war leaders and statesmen has also melted away like snow in the sun.

The El Khomri law is only the second thorn in the government's side that is deeply wounding it. The first is the political boomerang of the constitutional reform, which has just hit them head-on. Hollande and Valls hoped to set a trap for the right by forcing them to vote for the perpetuation of a state of emergency and the deprivation of nationality for acts of terrorism, something which can create stateless persons, trampling underfoot international norms.

The discredit of the executive within the Socialist Party on both security issues and social issues turned the trap against them, and the government

became hostage to the right on the constitutional issue. In the end, in the Senate the Republicans refused to make an agreement with the PS, forcing Hollande and Valls to throw in the towel on the eve of 31 March.

Hollande is more discredited than any president of the Fifth Republic has ever been, with 15 per cent of favourable opinions. Valls is going down the same road. They are of course discredited in the eyes of the left outside the PS, so much has the reactionary policy of the government been rejected by a large part of the "people of the left." To the security policy of the state of emergency must obviously be added the social destruction of the Macron and Rebsamen laws but also the ignoble policies against migrants and the obstinacy in sticking to "useless projects", the airport of Notre Dame des Landes being the latest example. All this is also affecting the PS, strengthening the "dissidents", who are reinforced by the former Minister of Employment, Martine Aubry.

Even Benjamin Lucas, president of the youth organization of the Socialist Party, is calling for the withdrawal of the El Khomri law, and the leadership of UNEF, the student union that is close to the PS, is keeping its place in the student mobilization.

The repression against trade-union activists is also an important element of the situation, like those of Good Year, who have been prosecuted and convicted for having sequestered the management in order to resist the closure of their workplace.

Lastly, the establishment of the state of emergency and the unleashing of a campaign of Islamophobic state racism have led in recent months to thousands of house searches in neighbourhoods. And many young people from these neighbourhoods are present in the mobilization, also in reaction against these attacks.

This whole social context is blurring our references, because at the moment no trade-union, social or political force is able to give meaning and coherence to the exasperation, to the demands for social justice and democracy.

In this situation, moreover, the trade union leaderships appear even more ineffective than usual. The reaction against the El Khomri project was made possible by the mobilization of young people, through the activity of social networks, collecting in twenty days more than a million signatures and setting the date of March 9. To these networks was added, of course, the determined action of teams of union activists, bringing their whole social dynamic to the mobilization. Obviously, even more than in 2010, the union leaders fear a social movement that would pose directly the political question of an alternative to austerity. All the more so, in that for the first time this demand would be put forward faced with a government of the left. So these bureaucracies are brandishing the threat of the National Front lying in ambush as an excuse for not pushing for a global confrontation against the policies of the government.

In this context, there is however a real ferment of social networks, posing all the essential questions of solidarity, social justice, climate justice, democratic control over decisions and over choices of society. This ferment gives a stimulating character to political and social life in France today;

Thus, on the eve of March 31, 400 undocumented workers won a stunning victory. After having occu-

pied the offices of the General Department of Labour, with the support of the Inter-union coordination and the association *Droits Devant*, they imposed the opening of a negotiating framework that made it possible to change the rules and obtain their regularization.

In many cities, committees are being formed around the Good Year unionists who have been tried and sentenced by the courts.

On the evening of March 31, several thousand young people gathered in the Place de la République in Paris around the networks *#leur-fairepeur*, *#nuitdebout* and *#nuitrouge*, to launch a dynamic of the occupation of squares. The association Right to Housing (DAL) joined up with this initiative of the night of March 31.

All these scattered phenomena are proof of an effervescence and of the search for a social dynamic, such as the appeal by several hundred trade unionists from the CGT, *Solidaires*, and the FSU to build a united mobilization.

The coming weeks will tell us whether all these potential dynamics manage to converge, unite, amplify and build a force powerful enough to make Hollande and Valls retreat.

MIGRATION

"And We Go Willingly, Like a Lamb to the Slaughter": Migrant Labor in the EU

This interview was conducted by Laura Avram and published in Romanian in Gazeta de Artă Politică (GAP) #12 December 2015. The special issue "In the Name of the Periphery. Decolonial theory and intervention in the Romanian context" was coordinated by Veda Popovici and Ovidiu Pop. It was translated by Raluca Parvu for LeftEast.

Hello Bodgan. Could you start by telling us how you ended up working in Germany?

I left for Germany from England, to work at the construction of the Mall of Berlin. We were assured that we will work with a work contract and will be provided with accommodation, but not everything we were promised materialised: we only got work. We were not given a contract to sign, nor decent accommodation. At the beginning we even had to sleep in the street, and the accommodation they found us subsequently was exceedingly expensive. Initially, we were being promised week after week that we will be given a work contract to sign, but then a million excuses were found for not doing it: the accountant is not here, the lady in charge of the contracts is not available, etc. They found excuses, they led us on, and finally we understood: there will be no work contracts to sign.

How do immigrant workers end up in such precarious situations, in your opinion? Do you believe such a situation could have been avoided?

The borders that opened to us, towards the West, are foggy and dubious, and one needs to work like a slave off the books in order to make some paltry money. There is nobody to protect us when we have

problems. Romania's gates are wide open towards Europe, but Europe, for Romanians, is a modern slavery zone, and there we go, willingly, like a lamb to the slaughter. Nobody puts a gun to our heads to force us to work abroad, they only tell us that over there a wage is about 1500 Euro, and when one hears '1500 Euro wage', one would go anywhere to work, even to China, even at the end of the world. But our authorities do not inform us about things that we should do before arriving there, or upon arrival. There are very few cases of Romanians living a good life while working abroad.

Do you think the Romanian or German authorities are aware of these realities? Could they do a better job at informing their citizens?

In my opinion, at the level of European governing, the leaders of this Union, are well aware of what the situation of the immigrant workers will be, before 'opening the doors'. They know what kind of people these workers will have to deal with, the way one knows what goes on in their own backyard. For example, if you have a dog that likes to run away, you keep it on a leash, because if you let it free, it might get hit by a car, something bad can happen to it. I mean you can predict what will happen, but you are fed up with that dog, you are fed up with having to feed it, you want to get rid of it, and you let it free, you undo the leash. You do not open wide the gate for it to leave, you know it has its own little opening for getting out. This is how they have created this opening, this little gateway towards Europe, and the rumor that you'll be working for 1500 Euro, for 2000 Euro plus food and accommodation. This is the little hole in the fence through which the dog sees a big bone, but as it comes out to get the bone,

the passing car runs it over. This is what the authorities have done, this is what the leaders of the European Union have done. They know what will become of us once we leave our country, but they are annoyed at having to feed us and take care of us, so they let us leave. Romanian workers are like dogs going to Europe for a bone, and the car running them over is the foreign company that mocks these people. In conclusion, in my experience and that of my colleagues working abroad, we have doors open wide towards slavery, and only a few very lucky ones have a well paid job and are doing well. But I did not know that before leaving because it is not in the media: only very seldom will the media show Romanians in a harsh situation abroad. We are being lied to, told that it is easy to make hundreds and thousands of Euro, and in this way the state can shed its responsibilities towards its citizens. It is in the interest of the Romanian state that workers like myself continue to leave. I left in order to save some money and return to Romania and manage on this money here.

We still have this idea that Western countries, especially Germany, represent models of correctness and respect. Do you think this is true, or is this just a facade meant to maintain the post-colonial illusion of a developed West?

There is the idea that Germany is very developed and civilised, but at the same time, once you arrive there as a foreigner, a poor worker, you discover that this is not quite the case, because there are lots of things hidden behind this curtain of development and civilisation. How is it possible that we post clips online and on the TV, newspapers interview us, and we declare that we've been working off the books, that we did not receive our pay, that we were not given work contracts to sign, and nobody takes a position? See what I mean, you are told to your face that this mall is being built with illegal, non-declared work and you, as a state representative, take no action? Isn't it clear that you are smeared too, that you have advantages you want to protect? Well, we were there for three months

protesting, we went to the Zoll (abbreviation for the Federal Customs Service in Germany) and filed a complaint, we went to the police, we did everything in our power, but nobody thought of investigating the companies, nobody asked questions. It is clear that this German government benefits from illegal, off the books work, otherwise they would pay more attention to the fate of the migrant workers that come here to develop their country. It is clearly in their interest that people work, without pay, and leave. In this way they are left with development, they have a mall all built up, they have apartments, buildings, they have highways, streets, development at no cost, and of course this suits them. But this isn't ethical, it should not be allowed to happen. It is in their interest to have this type of exploitative, illegal work, and they facilitate it as much as possible. And they also propagate this myth that things are good and the wages high. Open borders suit them, it suits them that poor workers from Eastern Europe come, work, and leave. But at the same time they make it as hard as possible for us: had we had the possibility of a legal recourse against these companies, they couldn't have gotten away so easily. But as long as our position is precarious, this cycle of unpaid or very poorly paid work can continue.

So you think that Western governments are involved into and want to facilitate this cycle of exploitation?

It is in the power of the government to help migrant workers enter a status of legality. They do not do it because it is in their interest to have people working as much as possible in their country for very little money or no money, to develop while poor countries remain poor, or if possible even poorer than before. This way, Western governments will always have at their disposal an ever cheaper workforce from Eastern countries, and they will lend these countries funds – these countries, if sinking into poverty, will automatically need more funds. If poor countries will need more money, Western Europe will help 'openheartedly', in order to collect even more money down the road,

as a result of compounded interest. "You're in a difficult situation, we can help you, like a relative would. Here, a loan on 20 years, with an interest rate of x, that you will not be able to repay. Super, cool, if you cannot repay it, you will need to privatise this or that, and you will have to buy from us, how great is that? And our products will be very expensive, isn't that cool? We will develop together, like brothers, except that you will be our slaves. But we won't tell you that to your faces, we will manipulate you into a position of slavery". At the same time, this cycle is benefiting Eastern European governments as well, including the case of Romania, which can wash their hands of the responsibility towards their citizens. Now that you have the possibility of working in the West, the state is absolved from the duty to ensure a decent standard of living for all. This responsibility becomes an individual one: if you want money, if you want to make a living, go and work in the West. If you don't do it, it means you're lazy, and in this case why should the Romanian state help you?

What do you wish you had known before taking the step of leaving to work abroad? Do you think this experience could have been avoided had you been better informed?

I wish I knew there was a high risk of not receiving your pay while working in a different country, and I wish I knew my rights there were nil; even if they exist on paper, no one respects them, because I, as a Romanian citizen, am inferior to a German citizen. The economical hierarchy between our countries is reflected at the level of individuals. Also, I wish I knew whom I am dealing with; I have no means of knowing about these issues but from the experience of other people and from authorities that have received complaints. If you, as an authority, receive hundreds, thousands of complaints, it is clear that there is a phenomenon unfolding that affects people, and the lack of interest on the part of the authorities is huge, to the extent to which it can become criminal. I imagine both the Romanian and the German authorities were confronted with com-

plaints from people that had experiences similar to ours. Our story became better known only because our protests and our refusal to shut up and swallow it made it more visible in the media. Still, I find it hard to believe we were the only ones (in this situation)... I've heard many similar stories, but, again, I believe it is in their interest that people do not find out about these stories and grievances and keep on coming to work here from abroad.

Indeed, the reason your story is so well known is the fact that you and your colleagues have protested for months on end. Tell me more about it: how did you start, and how did this protest unfold?

We started this protest because we did not receive our pay. I couldn't believe that such thing can happen in Germany. I would have suspected other countries, but not Germany. They used to say that Germans are fair people. My brother had not received his wage for two months, and in my case, approximately one month and a half. But the reason for the protest was not just the money. We protested to get our pay for ten days, maybe two weeks, but after that, it had already transformed into a different protest, because we were treated exactly like slaves. They knew we did not have the resources to fight, that the easiest for us would have been to leave things as they were and go away. Therefore we wanted to pull the alarm, to show what was happening. Romanians are seen as thieves, coming to steal – well, of course! You go there to work, you don't receive your pay, and you have to go hungry – how can one go hungry? Then one goes and steals a piece of salami in the supermarket, gets caught, and they say 'those are from Romania, they are here to steal'. How can one avoid stealing if we came here to work and you, the Germans, refuse to give us our money? Who's the bigger thief: me having worked for you, and having to go and steal in order to eat, or you, a 'businessman', that employs me and then refuses to pay me? What should you be called? A tax evasionist? Oh, I see, an evasionist is not a thief, it's a classier, cleaner version of a thief. Well, I have news for you: you are the greater

thieves and criminals, not the ones among us stealing a piece of salami, and you are fighting hard to keep us in this state of impoverishment. But of course this suits you: you keep us in poverty, you oblige us to steal, and then you argue we do not deserve rights, since we're Romanians and we steal, and for this reason we cannot fight against you, and we cannot obtain our rights and wages. It's a vicious circle: as migrant workers we are treated very badly, which forces us to take extreme measures, which then become reasons for further bad treatment and denial of rights.

What do you think led to this situation? How did Romanians and Eastern European citizens of the EU find themselves constrained to work in the West? Do you perceive the European Union member status of Romania as an advantageous one for the population?

The European Union requires equality and reaching European standards. But what are these European standards? The 800-1000 Euro minimum wage? Is Romania, with 1000 lei (approx 225 Euro), at European standards? Did they remove the street kiosks in Romania because of the European standards? I mean, are those European standards always devised for the exclusive advantage of others? That is not fair. It's only for them, over there, and we are like slaves, modern vassals. We have to follow the word of the emperor. In order for us to have open borders, and to reach your countries in the West, to work in your countries and develop them, we have to respect these European standards that actually burden the population even further. For example, by removing those street kiosks, the street commerce, people were left without means of subsistence, and now they are obliged to go and work in your country in the West. And abroad the wages are not great. If you have left us without work in the name of European standards, we go and work abroad. Now, you pretend you didn't know what we'd face there? You knew, and it suits you. We have no benefits from this integration in the European Union. We suffer more, and are

forced to leave (which we can easily do because the borders are open), and we end up doing unpaid work for you.

Europe is taking the piss out of us. I am talking about the European Union. Yes, Europe is mocking us, because we are leaving a very poor country to find work, and we are ready to accept a degrading treatment, a harsh working schedule, difficult work and living conditions, we are willing to work a lot for very little, compared to workers from richer countries. We are working 10 hour shifts with a boss that tells you: "Work faster! Why did you take a cigarette break?" We have a master behind, watching us. Before, the master could whip you, now we have a boss that is perpetually unsatisfied with us, no matter how well and how much we work. He wants more from us, without respite, we have to produce more, even more, no matter how paltry the pay – because of this dream we have, of saving some money. In the name of this dream, the dream of saving money and living a better life, one will work in any place, in any conditions. We have this big desire to make something, to achieve something, and they see that we go there to work in order to save money, and they mock us because they can. They could respect us in the workplace, could give us work contracts, or decent accommodation. If you knock on the door of state employees for paperwork, they either slam the door shut, or they tell you now is not the right moment, or they ask for other papers, and they keep you waiting in front of their doors till you feel like giving up. Meaning, they force you to go back in the streets, or work off the books, or go stealing, although they could simply get the paperwork done. Because it suits them fine.

This is why we have protested: to shed some light on what is happening in this country to Romanians and to other foreign workers.

The Romanian workers behind the Mall of Shame protest, with the support of the FAU Berlin [1], have brought to court the Mall of Berlin for unpaid wages, and at the moment the results of the lawsuit are pending.

BELGIUM

The Brussels Police Commissioner must be dismissed

LCR-SAP ·

"The arrests were systematic, and often brutal," said one of the LCR activists who was arrested. [1] "In the cell where I was there was at least one person who just happened to be at the Bourse for reasons unrelated to the vigil." We should add that the president of the League of Human Rights, Alexis Deswaef, was the first person arrested, when he had just arrived on the scene. He was arrested "to set an example," according to Police Commissioner Vandersmissen (interview here).

Those arrested at the Bourse were not demonstrating, they were just standing there. There were no banners, no placards, no megaphone, no slogans or anything whatever. Obviously Police Commissioner Vandersmissen took advantage of the police ban on demonstrations to personally direct the arrest of anyone who was there and seemed to possibly be an anti-racist. Therefore what is going on here are arrests based on the based on the (supposed) political opinions of those present, and not arrests of people "breaching the peace."

At the same time in Molenbeek thirty fascist protesters had every opportunity to march with a banner and even get as far as the Atomium! "The anti-Islam protesters assembled in the Westrand Cultural Centre in Dilbeek, a town just outside Brussels in the Province of Brabant. They then went on to Molenbeek, waving a banner and chanting slogans. After a quarter of an hour, the group headed to the Atomium, according to the RTBF TV channel.

Most of those arrested in Molenbeek were local youth. Barely seven people linked to the extreme right were arrested. On Sunday, 27th March, the same Brussels police had left a group of 400 fascists to march to the Bourse making Nazi salutes and violently attacking those present who were commemorating the dead. Barely a dozen of these thugs were arrested. The "political" role played by the Brussels police under the authority of its boss turns out once again, to be more than clear.

Mr. Vandersmissen and his men are actively contributing to breaking up the movement for and the demonstration of multicultural commemoration and reflection that have taken place at the Bourse since the killings of 22nd March. By these actions they are favouring the option put forward by the fascist groupuscules, of withdrawal from communication, of communitarianism, of rejection of the other and Islamophobia. Which is also one of the objectives sought by the terrorists of Daesh.

"It is high time to end the 'Je suis ...', the candles and the White Marches ..." says a fascist group on the internet. This Saturday, 2nd April, it is the Brussels police led by Mr. Vandersmissen who is taking charge of this!

Yvan Mayeur, the PS (Parti Socialiste. French speaking social democratic party) mayor of Brussels, and Rudi Vervoort, the PS Minister President of the Brussels Region, have started to follow the lead of the MR (Mouvement Réformateur, "Reform Movement" French speaking Centre-Right party) mayor of Molenbeek. They have taken heightened and draconian security measures, which are totally useless as a reaction to the call of the extreme right to demonstrate in

Molenbeek, on the other side of the Brussels canal. They are politically responsible for abuses of power committed by the "security forces" whose behaviour is worthy of a state of emergency in itself. This is dangerous and unacceptable in for a regime which claims to be democratic. The LCR expects all political and trade union forces to condemn this situation.

The arrest of bystanders and people who came to commemorate peacefully, and who, moreover,

showed no indication of their participation in a demonstration, is unacceptable. It contrasts with the shameless complicity of the Brussels police last Sunday against fascist activists. In both cases, Commissioner Vandersmissen is clearly responsible. The LCR demands his removal and that light is fully brought to bear on the events of 27 March and 2 April at the Bourse.

National leadership of the LCR, 2nd April, 2016

MIGRANT CRISIS

Migration: break the cycle of death, restore dignity and defend freedom of movement

MAMADOU BA ·

To end the deaths is necessary to do away with borders

In recent decades, some 1.2 million migrants made the journey to Europe by land and by sea. But in 2014 alone, 600,000 people applied for asylum in the EU area and that number almost doubled between 2015 and 2016.

Since the Schengen Agreement was ratified in 1985, Europe, on the pretext that it had eliminated its internal borders, has been developing a huge political, legal, police and military arsenal of surveillance, control and repression against migration. During this period, Europe has continuously developed its means of repression against human movement, a whole series of instruments, both before and after Frontex, designed to consolidate and strengthen this political strategy of closing the door to migrants and hunting them down.

These instruments range from the SIS (integrated Schengen Information), to Europol (European Police Office), and include CRATE (centralised record of surveillance equipment - a real arsenal of war comprising planes, helicopters, ships, satellites and drones), RABIT (rapid reaction force), the FAST TRACK (electronic recording of entry and immigrants outputs), ICONet (an information and coordination network via the Internet of migration flows), ESTA (electronic system of travel authorisation), VIS (integrated system on visas), Frontex, the paramilitary agency for surveillance and border control, and EUROSUR, the latest and most sophisticated migrant surveillance system.

Three decades of bad policy

In 1999, through the Tempere Programme, Europe decided to coordinate its immigration policy to a degree never seen before. From Schengen to The Hague, the strategy of tightening immigration policies developed apace. The Seville Summit in June 2002 reinforced this strategy by creating a network of immigration liaison officers (ILO). In 2003, the Dublin II agreements fixed the rules for the biometric database EURODAC. In 2004, the Hague Programme proposed, in agreement with the UNHCR, to deal with asylum requests, and by extension immigration requests, overseas. Along with this came a Visa Information Service, VIS, introducing an extremely restrictive policy for granting visas at European consulates in the migrant's country of origin, supposedly as a way of strengthening the fight against illegal immigration. This array of surveillance mechanisms and restrictions on movement fuelled the policy of immigration control which led to the creation, on 26 October 2004, of a European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (FRONTEx).

The "European patrol against illegal immigration" - a European Border Control Network - carried out in 2006 in the Canaries, was Frontex's first large-scale operation. Since then, Frontex has conducted several hundred official and clandestine operations, by air, land and sea, hunting for immigrants, mainly on the southern and eastern "borders". These operations have become more and more regular, and are sometimes supported by NATO.

In 2005, Frontex, which is based in Warsaw, had a budget of just over 6 million euros. Now it is sever-

al hundred million euros. The Frontex fleet has more than a hundred ships, about 25 helicopters, more than twenty aeroplanes, including drones and more than four hundred bits of surveillance equipment of various kinds (including satellites, radars, as well as biometric and other kinds of detection devices). It has a staff of 300 employees, in addition to its various operational personnel.

In 2010, Europe decided to increase the strategic role and powers of Frontex, giving it not only the ability to acquire its own equipment (buying or renting its military arsenal) but also to organise charter flights for mass deportations.

With EUROSUR (the border surveillance system), linked to FAST TRACK (the electronic recording of migrants' entry and exit) as well as ESTA (Electronic System for Travel Authorisation), Frontex became the most sophisticated and powerful military-police system invented in Europe since the Second World War, to hunt down people just for being immigrants.

It is a war arsenal superior to that of many countries in the world. The beefing up of Frontex's repressive capacity, and thus of Europe's whole immigration policy, has made it much more difficult and the dangerous for those trying to reach Europe. The more restrictive immigration policy became, the more deadly became the odyssey undertaken by immigrants.

Like Frontex, the detention centres and the administrative detention of immigrants are also parts of a political system to control and restrict mobility, which dehumanise and perpetuate the colonial history of relations between Europe and much of the rest of the world.

The consequence of this policy is that Europe's frontiers have become real open-air cemeteries. The murder of immigrants on Europe's borders is a reality that can no longer be concealed. Immigration has become not only a business, but also a policy of death, deliberately used to deter and blackmail those who want to migrate, as well as their countries of origin and/or transit.

To stop the successive tragedies on Europe's coasts, especially the Mediterranean and the Aegean, which has led to tens of thousands of deaths in recent decades, and dramatically intensified with the war in Syria, it is urgent to develop an alternative policy to current migration policies and their devastating consequences. This must inevitably draw a variety of experiences in the struggle to build resistance and develop a different immigration policy.

Given the current context of political dislocation of the social movement and the programmatic retreat of traditional political and trade union organisations in this area, we really need to start a militant process of building political responses. This process should initiate a movement, that not only shifts the paradigm of migration policy, but above all confronts and breaks with the current political model that underpins the European Union's immigration policies. The defeat of this politics of death inevitably involves the defeat of capitalism.

To respond to the tragedy of these deaths and defend the freedom of movement, we have to oppose Europe as a political mechanism for building exclusive, racist, sexist and macho geographies, for turning human mobility into a commodity, for the closure, outsourcing and militarisation of borders, and for the criminalisation of migrants. We have to demand an end to Frontex. Unfortunately, European immigration policy is part of the historical continuity of imperialism within the capitalist system, which reduces mobility to a business opportunity and a geopolitical chess game.

Universalism and borders

Between Slavery and the Holocaust, between Colonisation and the struggles for National Liberation, the last half of the twentieth century seemed finally to suggest that people could be guaranteed the freedom to come and go, as an undisputed achievement of civilisation. And for a long time we were led to believe that the ability to travel, easily and conveniently, were irreversible signs of progress and civilisation. For this benefits contact, proximity and, above all, could in theory dissolve

the symbolic and real boundaries between people. The ease, convenience and wide availability of such travel without any kind of hindrance are the basic components of freedom of movement. And, in essence, the idea of "modernity" and "progress" had built a kind of consensus around various social, legal and political conventions on freedom of movement.

From all these conventions - both those that resulted from an acknowledged historical trauma, like the Holocaust, as well as those that resulted from hidden or denied historical traumas, like slavery and colonisation - one thing is clear: law and rights are political instruments that depend on the balance of forces in dispute and on the interests that are being defended and protected. And international law, which supposedly is based on the principle of universality, also depends on this reality, where it is the bourgeois state that defines the limits of who belongs to a given political community and the freedoms associated with that.

In fact, contemporary political and legal universalism is part of the problem and leaves much to be desired because, apart from being Eurocentric, imperialist and capitalist, it is more abstract and rhetorical than concrete, because it is born of the arrogance of European civilisation which, when it sought to "civilise", in fact enslaved and colonised in the name of its supposed "moral superiority".

Centuries after millions of people were forced to move en masse, not as people but as commodities, after years in which millions of people, in their own countries across most of the planet, as a result of colonial imperialism which fuelled capitalism, could only move within the limits established by the colonial occupier, and finally after the end of World War II nations to agree on a political settlement that included, among other things, a commitment to freedom of movement through the Universal Declaration of Human rights, inspired by the French revolution, we are now witnessing again the political management of human mobility as if it were a commodity.

In fact, universalism was born deficient, because it was born of a humanity that had deliberately amputated a significant part of itself. For when it was born, the majority of humanity was still considered inferior, or even considered not to be a part of the human community at all. The political and legal universalism that underpins today's system was born racist and remains racist.

The law developed the idea of belonging to a community and saw itself as an instrument for managing relations within the community and between communities. For the legal system of the bourgeois state, the issue of "belonging" always was, and will be, decisive. It's a question of being, or not being, a part of this. Universalism, while recognising people's humanity, divided them into often strict, political categories, for example between nationals and foreigners. And this would forever mark the limits and scope of the management of human mobility.

All policy instruments and mechanisms that emerged under these circumstances subordinated equality to other political categories that had been developed, such as the state and the nation, nationals and foreigners. Identification and separation are another consequence of this policy. Because borders, more than geographical realities, are political constructs. Both the spirit and the letter of Europe's immigration policy embody the racist ideology of "fortress Europe", which turns the persecution of immigrants into a political programme.

The nation-state takes on a central role in managing who belongs to the community and turns the control over borders and human mobility into a key issue within the geopolitical framework of market-driven globalisation, agreed and controlled by anti-democratic, economic and political interests.

The nation-state's borders and the management of these borders are caught in this tension between accepting, in theory, that freedom of movement is "universal" and assuming the power and political legitimacy to control or limit this movement, according to the economic and political interests in dispute.

The brute force of borders

Borders are thus political instruments of social organisation on a national and global level, that define not only who belongs to certain spaces but which define economically and politically who has access to them, on the basis of certain characteristics and realities that result from the political choices available or in dispute.

The economic development that has brought technological and scientific progress and the consequent increase in wealth in the world, has not blurred these boundaries. Rather, in some cases, it has strengthened them.

Such scientific and technological advances are a reflection of the past and present economic and political relations between peoples. These are relations in which one part of humanity, having enslaved, colonised and exploited the rest of the world, accumulated material and scientific wealth and continues to do so, without wanting to share it. So it builds physical and symbolic walls to prevent access to those who were previously robbed.

It is from this unequal relationship that emerge the physical and symbolic boundaries between rich and poor, between those who have everything or dream of acquiring it, and those who have almost nothing and can never dream of having much more, between those who can do anything and those who can aspire to very little. Thus, countries that became rich after fleecing others, decided to close the door and keep everything that used to belong to everyone. That is the story of migration today. And that is how walls go up on all sides against migrants who merely seek to improve their living conditions.

People migrate because they need to, because they aspire to something better than what they have, or at least equal to what people have in the countries that plundered them and continue to exploit them. And they have every right not only to aspire to a better life, but in fact to live better.

According to various NGOs, the number of dead is already more than 40,000 in recent decades.

However, it seems that the real figures could be three times as many, given the circumstances mentioned above. And even if we discount the deaths by asphyxiation during deportations and interrogations in detention centres, those killed by bullets at land borders and in militarised border areas, and those deaths from suicide, hunger, thirst, cold and heat along the various routes taken. We can, in fact, estimate at about 70,000 to 80,000 the number of people drowned trying to reach Europe, which represents a significant proportion of all migrant deaths in the world.

Europe's border policy is murderous. The alternative is freedom of movement, solidarity and the right to human dignity. We have to counterpose to the ideology of containment and closure, an internationalist vision and a socialist project of society that defends all freedoms, including the right to freedom of movement and the freedom to try to build a better life in whatever country people choose - wherever that may be. This battle must be part of the political struggle to defend freedom of movement, the right to come and go, the right to choose and change your place of residence, ensuring that these rights remain among the rights that are inalienable and non-negotiable. To put an end to the deaths on Europe's borders, it is necessary to end the political geography of "fortress Europe". In so far as borders are more a political construct than a geographical reality, a socialist project will argue openly and categorically for an end to all frontiers, physical and symbolic, social and cultural, legal and political.

Combatting border policy as an instrument of economic subjugation

In fact, it is since 1985 that, from summit to summit, Europe's immigration policy has begun little by little to put into practice the criminalisation of migration and the outsourcing of its borders, as foreseen by Schengen. The European Union thus consolidated the militarisation of its immigration policy through a variety of police and military mea-

asures, the most advanced of which is undoubtedly Frontex.

Unfortunately, in recent decades, the pain of departure for innumerable reasons was accompanied by countless tragedies along the routes of migration, almost always ending in deaths and disappearances. Death became the inevitable corollary of immigration.

Everywhere in Europe, along all its borders, both by sea and by land, from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean, from Ceuta and Melilla to Lampedusa and the Greek-Turkish border, passing through the Turkish-Bulgarian and Hungarian-Austrian borders, from the Straights of Gibraltar to the Aegean, European immigration policy is in essence based, in addition to the criminalisation of migrants, on transferring its border controls overseas wherever it can, and a subsequent militarisation of those borders, alongside their commercialisation through bilateral trade relationships.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the number of deaths at the borders has constantly increased. The numbers are hard to verify simply because of the circumstances in which the journeys take place; but also because not only do European officials try to conceal the real tragedy from their own public opinion, but so do the transit countries. The latter are obliged to register the flow of migrants as part of the various cooperation agreements to transfer border controls to the countries of origin, and they need to demonstrate competence in this field to avoid financial penalties in terms of bilateral cooperation.

If you add to the cost of detention facilities in third countries (€ 45.8 million), the technical assistance to nearby dictatorial regimes (€ 74.66 million), the fortifications (walls) in Spain, Greece and Bulgaria (€ 76.6 million), the equipment for border policing (€ 225.71 million), the programmes of "research and development" (€ 230 million), the "European coordination efforts" (€ 954,717,510), Frontex (€ 669.6 million) and deportations (€11.3 billion), the overall total comes to € 12.649.368.000.

These amounts are a measure of the economic and financial stakes of border control in EU immigration policy. The hypocrisy of the discourse on development cooperation which supposedly would be decisive for fixing populations in their countries of origin through economic development policies, is clear. It is revealed by the disparity between the overall value of such development aid, which at present stands at 0.42% of EU GDP, and the more than twelve billion euros (€12.649.368.000) allocated to the EU's border management expenses.

If we then compare the 1.8 billion euros pledged to the African continent at the last summit in Valletta between Europe and Africa, and the more than 3 billion euros promised to Turkey to deal with the "refugee crisis", with the €11.3 billion exclusively earmarked for deportations, it becomes clear that border policy is mainly about closing down and not opening up.

Based on the concept of "circular migration" developed in the first half decade of this century, EU leaders decided at a stroke to legitimise politically two kinds of precariousness faced by migrants, in both the legal and employment areas. They thus shifted definitively the right to movement from the sphere of rights to the sphere of commercial relations.

After decades of imposing structural adjustment policies in collusion with the Bretton Woods institutions like the IMF and the World Bank, and of fomenting conflicts and wars that have impoverished the immigrants' countries of origin and provoked the massive displacement of populations, the European Union has used economic blackmail to oblige the countries of origin and transit to assume responsibility for the process. Human mobility as a commodity has become the political norm. Like any other raw material, it has become a matter of business in the framework of capitalist relations between Europe and the migrants' countries of origin. It becomes pivotal in how the countries of transit and origin are required to manage Europe's external border controls in exchange for a few crumbs of

the money allocated to border surveillance and the repression of those seeking to migrate.

With this policy, the EU both strengthened its internal mechanisms of repression against immigrants, while also delegating to the governments of neighbouring countries the crackdown on immigration, through agreements and programs with "third countries".

From the Europe-Africa summit in Lisbon in 2007, the European Union accentuated this economic blackmail through the famous economic partnership agreements (EPA), using immigration policy as a neocolonial mechanism in its bilateral relations with the migrants' countries of origin.

One of the most urgent tasks is to confront this European project of developing exclusive, racist, sexist and macho geographies, of turning human mobility into a commodity, of closing and militarising its borders, while pushing controls onto the countries of origin. We have to combat the criminalisation of migrants. It is also essential to understand that migrants are more than numbers in a sinister and macabre accounting exercise; they are political actors and the potential protagonists of real changes in immigration policy. Therefore, it is essential to seek to build with migrants, through all the various forms of organisation possible, alternative policy responses that break with the mercantile and utilitarian logic that reduces them to mere statistics. In line with its own political agendas and interests, Europe tends to enclose itself within the limits of a distinction between political space and historical time, and to become not just a closed and exclusive space, but a real political, economic, cultural and geographic fortress against migrants.

Thus, history and the geography (social, cultural, political, etc.) of the past and the present condition hugely the perception of what is meant by the category "citizen" in Europe and who may or may not be a part of it, in a clear intention to exclude foreign nationals. Looking at immigration today forces us to deconstruct the rhetoric about the "Europe of democratic values" and, of course, invites us to de-

nounce this and confront it ideologically. This confrontation over the situation of migrants in Europe necessarily involves deconstructing the various myths that feed the imagination and everyday reality of people's political practice and social relations. This history, always seen through Eurocentric glasses, which over time have become the prevailing view, demands a silencing and masking of a series of events related to (re)production of capitalism in the management of immigration policy. Such dominant narratives omit a whole series of practices that are deeply rooted in real and symbolic contexts of violence, exploitation, expropriation and domination.

Thus, the European border management policy is one component of capitalist domination that it exercises over the migrants' countries of origin.

"Working with uncertainty", to be able to confront difficulties

The growth of nationalism, of populism and especially the extreme right, are the other face of the current crisis of the bourgeois regime and the capitalist system. The present economic and political crises encourage simplistic rhetoric and facile, Manichaeistic divisions between good and bad because, to a large extent, they constitute a crisis of alternatives and disenchantment, not only for the most vulnerable sections of society but also for what has wrongly become known as the "middle class."

To combat nationalism, populism and, more specifically, the extreme right, we have to go beyond the comfort zone of absolute doctrinal certainties and make a radical theoretical and political break! It is an arduous task. The debate is a difficult one. But reality and the challenges that it poses do not lend themselves to easy answers.

At a time when the old Europe raises its head once again through the new ideological configurations of nationalism and fascism, with a series of tragedies at the gates of Europe and within it - a reflection of the politics of death into which the political strate-

gy of "Fortress Europe" and its attendant paranoia over security have turned immigration policy - it is urgent to refocus the debate on migration as such, and put it where it should be located: on an uncompromising struggle for freedom and equality, and against the populist national-fascism that is on the rise in Europe, against rising xenophobia and racism, and against all borders.

The security paranoia and war fever are present in all areas of the language and political strategy used for managing migration flows. Just look at the quantity of belligerent expressions to be found in the political discourse and the legal and administrative rules on immigrants and refugees. You will easily come across phrases like: "war on terrorism", "combating illegal immigration", "fighting organised crime", "the fight against mafias", "enhanced land and sea surveillance", "beefing up the control of airspace to ensure security and the maintenance of public order", "training police forces to confront the new threats from illegal immigration and terrorism and therefore the need for closer police and strategic cooperation", "the need to introduction biometric systems to improve the detection and prevention of organised crime linked to the increase in migration that fuels organised crime and transnational terrorism", etc. From political rhetoric to legal and administrative jargon, everything serves to promote a narrative of fear about immigration and against immigrants, in order to justify their repression and legitimise the emergency laws that stigmatise and discriminate against them.

Respond to the advance of xenophobia in Europe

As we have seen in recent times with the general rise of the extreme right, the fact that the mainstream parties have built a negative consensus on the agenda of diversity and difference, is no longer enough to eclipse the extreme right which is gaining social and political strength, with a growing social base and increasing political legitimacy. That is why, yesterday and today, as opposed to reactionary nationalism, the urgent demand for citizen-

ship based on residence means we have to fight intransigently for an end to borders, for the right of immigrants to vote, and against racism.

There is a proliferation of laws which, on the pretext of defending secularism or the western social and cultural model - supposedly more advanced, but now threatened by the presence of immigrant communities and their cultural practices - are part of a racist ideological doctrine of cultural supremacy which is objectively directed against "non-Europeans", even though many of them were born in Europe.

For decades, thousands upon thousands of citizens have been beating on Europe's door, where there are already more than 20 million foreign citizens to whom Europe, as an idea and a political project, refuses the right of belonging and any possibility of identifying with it. More than twenty million people who live in Europe are excluded from the political community and relegated to the category of "third country nationals". The "Europeans" have so far co-existed relatively comfortably and naturally with the idea that these more than twenty million people are a strange part of their society and body politic. In reality what this shows is that there is an undisguised racism behind the political orientation of Europe and its overcharged production of emergency laws which only express a desire to politically consolidate and socially legitimise the category of "non-European".

If we remember the urban riots in London in 1981 and 2011 and Paris in 2005, the frequent deportations of Romanian Roma from Italy and France, which still continue to some extent throughout Europe, if we also look at the evictions and demolition of homes in social neighbourhoods and nomadic camps in many parts of Europe; if we recall the 20 years since the racist attacks of Rostock (Germany) in August 1992, the 16 years since El Ejido (Spanish State) in February 2000 and then in Rosarno (Italy) in January 2010, we can see that what is currently happening throughout Europe is not a strange or isolated phenomenon.

71 years after the prisoners of the Auschwitz concentration camp were liberated by Soviet soldiers, we see that the political far-right is alive and well in most of Europe. This Europe that defeated militarily and morally Nazism, never overcame politically and ideologically racism. It is this Europe that awoke from the Nazi nightmare and was freed with the invaluable help of the forefathers (African, Asian, North African, etc.) of precisely those migrants and refugees that today it seeks to banish.

In the week that marked the military and moral defeat of Nazism, it is not just its ghost but Nazism itself that hovers over Europe: borders turned into open-air cemeteries with tens of thousands of dead, refugees forced to use shiny, personal identification bracelets in Wales, the likely approval of confiscating refugees' jewellery in many European countries, already approved in Denmark, the inclusion of the loss of French nationality and a state of emergency in the French constitution, immigrants branded with stamps as they are screened on the eastern borders, just like in the times of slavery and Nazism, especially in Hungary, Bulgaria and Macedonia, far-right militias attacking foreigners, states of judicial exception that reduce migrants to numbers and deny them their humanity. It is therefore the celebration of a past that refuses to pass away and is only too present in the everyday life of tens of thousands of foreign citizens in Europe.

In fact, the inclusion of the state of emergency and the loss nationality into the constitution in France, the legalisation of the confiscation of jewellery, property and other valuables from refugees in Denmark and possibly in other European countries, and all the Islamophobic rhetoric of the political debate, are in fact a drift in Europe towards a disturbing and accelerated process of fascism.

The unleashing of hatred and violence against immigrants and ethnic minorities is the natural result of policies inscribed in a return to nationalism, feeding on the racist idea of national and, by extension, European preference. Memory as an instrument of political legitimisation has been the political and legislative rhetorical basis for reintroducing a

set of laws whose main purpose, apart from consolidating socio-racial categorisations, is to legitimise racism - as in the times of colonisation, slavery, indigenous subordination, the Holocaust and Apartheid, among others. Fallaciously, the defence of civilised modernity against the barbarism and cultural backwardness of immigrant communities, and of public spaces against religious proselytising, has served, throughout Europe, as an argument for the creation of such emergency laws, whether in relation to immigration, or in relation to the veil and memory. All the hysteria around a certain Jacobin fundamentalism that poisoned the political debate on diversity in France is symptomatic of this.

In fact, all the emergency laws that have emerged in recent times, whether on the grounds of defending law and order, or under the guise of defending secularism or the current cultural model, are a clear manifestation of the use of racism as an ideological tool. The history of slavery, colonialism and Nazism in Europe hangs over this policy, which sees difference as a justification for closure, in line with the ideological heritage of racial supremacy.

This Europe, whose immigration policy and management of diversity oscillates between the ideology of war and emergency laws, invented Frontex (the most powerful and sophisticated military-police system since World War II), exclusively to hunt people just because they are different and do not belong to the geographical and political space of Europe - immigrants. The semantics and practice of the ideology of war in relation to immigration policies and the political legitimacy of Islamophobia, the Roma-phobia and Black-phobia - i.e. racism - through countless exceptional laws are some of the borders of European geographies that we have to stand up against. Because these imposed barriers, physical and symbolic, have served largely to reinforce the construction of boundaries between a certain "we" and the "others."

Pave the way for a policy of emancipation and free circulation

In effect, since 14 June, 1985, with the Schengen Agreement, through 15 June, 1990, with the Dublin agreements, 7 February, 1992, with the Maastricht Treaty, 2 October, 1997, with the Amsterdam Treaty, 26 February, 2001, with the Nice Treaty and 13 December, 2007, with the Treaty of Lisbon, Europe has been moving towards a schizophrenic political logic of closing its borders to difference, in complete contradiction with the sociological reality of its own ethnic composition, which is undeniably and irrevocably diverse. That is, since the Schengen Agreement in 1985 to the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007, EU leaders have been unable to force a political change to alter this state of affairs and lead Europe not only to accept diversity and difference, but to incorporate them and, above all, respect them. This would culminate, for example, among others, in June 2008, in the adoption of the Return Directive, better known by the Directive of Shame, more like the Gestapo raids. It was a sad sequel that legitimised the infamous Sarkozy Pact on immigration and asylum, in September / October of the same year. From then on, there was no stopping it. Europe exceeded all limits in the production of policies conducive to institutional discrimination and persecution against migrants.

The "respectable" right and social democracy capitulated to the extreme right, turning ethnic minorities into scapegoats for the crisis. The right joined the extreme right in persecuting ethnic minorities while social democracy, on the pretext of fighting it, dusted off its racist and xenophobic rhetoric, thus giving credibility and social and political legitimacy to racism. Given these circumstances, the first responsibility of the left is to wage a relentless fight against fascism and racism, taking this fight into all the struggles and mobilisations much more vigorously than it has done so far.

Faced with this situation, the IC decides at its meeting of 21 February, 2016, to undertake actions and mobilisations whose political orientation includes a political struggle to:

a) Denounce the causes of forced and massive displacement of populations by promoting mobilisa-

tions and street actions against imperialism and war;

b) Promote and participate in all demonstrations of solidarity and for the development of political alternatives against restrictive immigration policies;

c) Demand more funding for the reception of migrants and less for repression, especially the militarisation of border controls;

d) Demand an end to all mechanisms for persecuting immigrants, in particular systems like SIS, CRATE, Rabbit, FAST TRACK, ICONet, VIS, EURODAC and EUROSUR;

e) Demand the repeal of Dublin III and a review of the Geneva Convention to make it more suitable to the present times and circumstances;

f) Argue for the end of Frontex and its conversion into a rescue and humanitarian intervention force;

g) Argue for the opening of special corridors and the granting of special entry visas for refugees who are stuck in hotspots on the borders and in transit countries;

h) Advocate the creation of mechanisms of bilateral cooperation between member states to overcome the EU's institutional blocks in the management of migratory flows;

i) Demand the regularisation of all the undocumented and repeal the Family Reunification Directive;

j) Integrate the fight against racism and fascism into all political actions;

k) Make the political, ideological and cultural struggle against the extreme right a central priority. Confront the rise of the extreme right through an agenda of counter-cultural hegemony against conservatism and through intercultural interventions that seek to retake the public space through combined initiatives and mobilisations with the victims of racism;

l) Fighting for voting rights of immigrants in all elections to make citizenship a reality, because

democracy will only be complete when all men and women participate in it and are represented;

m) Fight for nationality to be based solely on place of birth, abolishing the right of blood as a means of acquiring nationality;

n) Demand an end to the deportations and the closure of detention centres in Europe and its periphery, in the name of respect for the human rights and human dignity of those who are detained only because of their immigration status;

o) Fight for repeal of the Directives on Return and Family Reunification, and for changes to the Labour and "race" directives;

p) Contribute through debate and critical thinking to challenge society in general, and academia in particular, to "decolonize" the production of knowledge and expertise, in particular through post-colonial "decolonial" studies, and above all, to further study and reflection on the semantic forms of

racism, especially Roma-phobia, Afrophobia and Islamophobia;

q) Demand reforms to the school curricula and textbooks, so as to reflect and value cultural diversity, and promote interculturalism and its various contributions in school and academic subjects;

r) Finally, mobilise in favour of bilingual education as one of the instruments, not only of linguistic and cultural preservation, but also as a tool for interaction and the socialisation of differences within school communities.

Revolutionary socialism sees an urgent need for radical anti-racism that respects difference in the fight against fascism in all its forms of expression, and which remains uncompromisingly engaged in the struggle for radical democracy where the equality of all has to be a reality.

Lisbon,

10 February 2016

FEATURES

In-depth analysis from International Viewpoint's Features section



ECONOMY

Alternatives to Neoliberal Capitalism

INGO SCHMIDT · 21 April 2016

Widespread feelings of discomfort found voice in the Zapatistas' "Ya Basta," the World Social Forum's "Another World is Possible" and Occupy's "We Are the 99%." Successive mobilizations around these slogans reinvigorated hope for progressive alternatives, but couldn't be sustained. Short outbursts of protest and rage were followed by longer periods of passivity and resignation.

Sustaining large-scale mobilizations over extended periods of time is impossible, but it should be possible to keep core groups of activists together who reflect on past experiences and strategize for the future. If the goal doesn't go beyond getting protestors out in the street again, a new catchy rallying cry might be good enough. Yet more is needed to build an alternative force to challenge and eventually replace the neoliberal bloc, which is fractured by its own internal contradictions but remains in place.

This doesn't mean that simple slogans should be replaced by baroque theories. What is needed, though, are analyses that help to identify the weak spots in the neoliberal bloc and formulate demands focusing on these spots. These demands, in turn, should appeal to people whose discontent with neoliberalism is coming from different directions, but also allow their convergence towards concrete common goals, part of a longer chain of further demands and goals pointing toward a markedly different vision of an economy and society.

In the history of the left, "The Eight-hour-day," "All Power to the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils," "Land and Freedom" are prominent examples of demands that promised different layers of the popular classes a better life, but couldn't be fulfilled

without substantially challenging the capitalism of the times and places when they were raised.

These were condensed expressions of an understanding of these respective capitalisms and their possible transformations. But this isn't true for the more recent slogans: "Ya Basta," "Another World Is Possible" and "We Are the 99%" are honest expressions of discontent, nothing less yet nothing more.

Luckily, there is also a left tradition of advancing economic alternatives, connected to broader and more specific mobilizations, around which an alternative historical bloc might be developed.

Linking the vision of longer-term economic transformations to current mobilization was actually the plan of civil rights activists in promoting a Freedom Budget for All Americans in the 1960s. In a somewhat different way, the Alternative Economic Strategy in Britain and the Common Program of the French Socialists and Communists from the 1970s to the early 1980s aimed at adopting some of the impulses coming from the various social movements at that time in order to move the electoral politics of the left beyond the Keynesian welfare state.

The neoliberal bloc emerging at that time, which successfully amalgamated popular and ruling class discontents with the Keynesian welfare state, defeated these projects of the left but the ideas around which they had been advanced survived in small circles of dissident academics and scholars affiliated with unions, left parties, NGOs and think tanks.

Engagement with the "alternative globalization" movement and more recent anti-austerity struggles led to conceptual updates of these alternative economic policies. Such collaborations haven't led to a conceptual and organizational merger between theory and practice anywhere near the level

achieved by scholars, organizers and activists in the 1970s.

This is not to suggest that today's leftists should aim at remaking the then existing alternative bloc. The fact that an emergent neoliberal bloc defeated it shows that it had its weaknesses in its day. Moreover, this defeat opened the path towards neoliberal capitalism, confronting today's left with economic, social and political conditions radically different from those prevailing in the 1970s.

Thus, scholars, organizers and activists working today may draw on past experiences but also have to do a lot of adjusting and updating.

Keynesian Traces in Neoliberal Capitalism

The common denominator of alternative economic policies advanced in different countries has been to take the Keynesian welfare state as a starting point, and work towards overcoming discrimination against certain social groups and the extension of democracy from the political to the economic system.

Some versions of these policies also included ecological concerns and sought ways of limiting the rising power of multinational corporations. Some were also presented as pathways towards socialist transformations, while others carefully skated around the question whether the suggested alternatives would be compatible with the imperatives of capital accumulation and acceptable to capitalist ruling classes.

In their most moderate versions, alternative economic policies were presented as promoting the general interests of capitalism more effectively than individual capitalists who, by competing with each other over prices, market access or innovations and branding, inevitably end up in crises.

As it turned out, capitalists weren't interested in anyone from the left telling them what their interests are. Even though crises that did occur did bring losses, unsold merchandise and idle capacities, they preferred not to follow Keynesian advice,

figuring that it sooner or later would squeeze their profits. Rather, they used another symptom of the crises, a swelling reserve army of labor unknown in the post-World War II era, to contain union demands and eventually launch their counter-offensive.

This assault has been so successful that today's advocates of alternative economic policies, rather than suggesting a "Keynes Plus" like their 1970s predecessors, now demand "Back to Keynes" as the immediate alternative to neoliberalism. Other concerns are still on their wish list, but occupy less prominent positions.

Translating the "Back to Keynes" message into better-sounding slogans might be possible, but it is by no means certain this would gain much traction. Advancing alternative economic policies is not just about proper marketing and/or waiting for people to "get it." It is also about asking whether the suggested alternatives are alternative enough to make a difference to people looking for solutions.

In fact, Keynes may have been purged from most economics curricula but was never really absent from economic policies. During the Great Recession, Keynesian measures ("stimulus") were applied quite openly and with considerable success. The free fall of the world economy was stopped within months — but the public debt that was incurred in order to do so was ruthlessly used to justify a new age of austerity.

This turn from a little bit of Keynes to a lot of neoliberalism had its corollaries. One is the continuing existence of the institutions of the Keynesian welfare state. Their capacity to dampen income inequalities have been reduced, if not reversed, but they still pay enough to leave the blame for deficits and debt at their doorstep.

In the ideological wars, it doesn't matter that rounds of tax cuts to the benefit of corporations and the well-to-do contribute much more to the wrecking of public purses than generous welfare payments. All that matters is that states make such

payments, thus offering the pretext for more austerity.

Tax and spending decisions by the state are clearly a matter of public policy. Consistent campaigning and mobilizing for taxing the rich may enable some change on this matter, though fears of profit and wealth squeezes amongst the propertied classes would probably soon rebound and trigger resistance to any substantial state-engineered redistribution from top to bottom.

Another Keynesian element in neoliberal capitalism, less debated than budget policies of the state, is the way that the complementary expansion of cheap credit and stock markets contributed to the absorption of savings in excess of investment demand. The fact that interest rates may neither fall automatically, nor be pushed down by central banks to a level that spurs enough investment demand to absorb all available savings, didn't go away just because neoliberals are bragging about the magic of supply and demand.

Keynes suggested that public spending should pick up the slack of private demand. This political fix to monopoly capitalism's economic woes fell out of favor when the propertied classes felt that the continuation of accumulation by Keynesian means would lead to accelerating demands from the popular classes and thus a bankrupting profit-squeeze.

Yet while neoliberal capital was prepared to accept recessions as a means of recreating a reserve army of labor that had been largely depleted by the post-war boom, and mobilize it against active workers and their unions, it had no desire whatsoever to see the return of depression economics.

Swelling Debt and Fictitious Capital

Policy responses to the Great Recession show that there still is no such desire. The already mentioned emergency spending programs during the Great Recession and continued public spending certainly did their part in avoiding depressions. Still, a more crucial part of getting neoliberal accumulation go-

ing was to shift deficit spending from public to private households.

Access to cheap credit allowed people to boost spending beyond their income levels and thus led to an increase of aggregate demand. Rising house prices temporarily covered up the fact that the servicing of these credits went way beyond the required incomes that households could realistically expect in the future.

As long as the mortgage-house-price-spiral kept on spinning, aggregate demand was fuelled. Warnings that the paper accumulation of property value was just a cover for rising debt seemed hopelessly out of place. Savings for which there was no investment demand were recycled back into the economic circuit by boosting consumer credit, seemingly backed by rising property values.

This new way of recycling excess savings has been aptly described as privatized or stock market Keynesianism. Like its public deficit spending predecessor-type of Keynesianism, it was limited by the complementary acceleration of debt and inflation. In different ways, fictitious capital, debt and inflation are problems for Keynesian and neoliberal capitalism.

This points to an aspect of accumulation under monopoly capitalism, whether regulated by Keynesian welfare states or by neoliberal states with Keynesian elements, that Keynes himself didn't take into account. The accumulation of fictitious capital, profit claims derived from it, and the accompanying debt outpace the production and realization of profits made possible by the actual accumulation of capital.

In the Keynesian era, this constant overaccumulation of finance was adjusted to the actual accumulation of productive capital through permanent inflation in markets for goods and services. In order to defend real wages and get their share in productivity gains, workers factored this inflation into their union demands and thus did their part in turning the price-wage-spiral.

Politicians inspired by Keynesian ideas were hoping that incomes policies could contain wage and price increases. However, capitalists saw such policies as unacceptable interference by state and union bureaucrats. In their view, the right to manage, which they were not willing to give up under any circumstances, included preemptive or retaliatory price increases to defend profit margins against workers' demands.

Ironically, looking at this from the other end of the bargain, workers had a very similar view. For many of them, incomes policies (wage controls) were an objectionable attempt to sacrifice hard-earned wage increases on the altar of Keynesian technocracy. As long as unemployment and fears of job loss were low, demanding individual raises or even going on wildcat strikes were more effective means of securing their share of the welfare state pie.

The result by the late 1970s was the turn from permanent to accelerated inflation, a turn that free-market guru Milton Friedman had correctly identified as the weakest link in the Keynesian policy chain.

Monetarism and Crisis

Big money, private households with savings accounts, and even capitalists who began keeping money in the bank rather than investing it when continued investment growth looked like a one-way street to a profit-squeeze, began identifying inflation as the main threat to their wealth and power.

To their good luck, monetarism (sharp restrictions on the money supply — ed.) offered a way out. The disinflation that began with the 1981 Volcker-shock (a reference to the Reagan-era chair of the Federal Reserve) and brought the capitalist centers to the verge of deflation during the post-2008 Great Recession reinstated money's function as a reliable store of value. However, it also destroyed the mechanism that had secured a fairly smooth devaluation of financial overaccumulation during the long post-WWII boom.

As it turned out, neoliberal capitalism, for which monetarism had been a door opener, propelled this overaccumulation to record highs. More precisely, soaring stock markets pushed profit claims to ever higher levels and put complementary constraints on wages to make sure that even an economic upswing with rising employment levels won't see rising wages.

During the Keynesian era, persistent inflation in markets for goods and services continuously devalued purchasing power of all incomes and overaccumulated financial claims. It thus served as a social mollifier and accumulation stabilizer.

Asset-inflation in the neoliberal era drives accumulation forward, but in doing so also paves the way for manias, panics and crashes. Plummeting stocks devalue overaccumulated finances, too. They don't do this continuously but recurrently, as part of the specific form the cycle of capitalist crises has taken under neoliberalism. Still, by annulling significant amounts of fictitious capital and overaccumulated profit claims, the ground gets cleared for another round of accumulation driven by asset-inflation.

The role of privatized or stock market Keynesianism in this cycle is drawing private households with little or no savings into the whirlwinds of upward-spiralling wealth illusions, regularly ending in the loss of original assets and still leaving unpayable debts behind.

Gathering Rage Demands Alternatives

People going through the rollercoaster of financial hopes, fears and frustrations surely don't do an economic analysis to carefully dissect the neoliberal and Keynesian elements in the game they put their bets on.

Yet there is a growing sense that something with this game or system is wrong. Any proposal to change it that looks only remotely like a neoliberal offshoot, if only because the economic language in which it is expressed is similar to that in which the neoliberal welcome to the world of finance was presented, won't gain much traction.

There is nothing wrong with adding reregulation of finance to the demand-management agenda of alternative economic policies, but it misses the main point.

The problems of maxed-out credit cards, mortgages and student loans and pensions caught in the insecurities of stock market evaluations are too real to be ignored. Aggregate debt levels of private and public households have reached a point where common sense recognizes that they are not repayable but continue to be an impediment for any kind of departure from neoliberalism and its discontents.

Cancelling at least some of the existing debt burden, which grows bigger with every round of austerity policies launched in the name of balancing the books, must be integrated into the core of any alternative economic policies. Without such proposals it is easy to dismiss public spending proposals as not financeable in light of already existing debt levels.

Again, it doesn't matter whether these levels were reached through public spending and/or tax cuts in the past. But it does matter that the argument against public spending today can be persuasive if these debts are ignored, or if it is simplistically suggested that sufficient amounts of kick-start spending would trigger accumulation strong enough to repay them.

The neoliberal recipe of using debt to justify more cuts for the popular classes shows very clearly that this is a question of class struggle over the distribution of wealth and incomes. This will continue as long as there is enough debt that can be used as a weapon against the popular classes, but it won't stop unless claims are made, and social movements emerge, to cancel debt at the expense of the propertied classes.

Beyond Back-to-Keynes

Just to recap: Advancing alternative economic policies on a "Back to Keynes" platform has its limitations because there were already contradictions between the imperatives of capital accumulation and

the Keynesian welfare state that contributed to the latter's demise. Another limitation is that the superseding neoliberal form of capitalism contains certain Keynesian elements, making the claim that Keynes would represent an alternative to neoliberalism somewhat dubious.

But this is only the economic side of the story. Main Street is not only outraged by the economic outcomes of neoliberal capitalism but also by the way this whole system is run. Rage against the one percent, or the elite of oligarchs and plutocrats, also articulates a very realistic sense of powerlessness among the subordinate classes.

Charismatic leaders on the populist and fundamentalist right build on such sentiments by promising "to really take on the powers that be." Their followers can't and probably really don't expect to overcome their own powerlessness by supporting such leaders, but may comfort themselves by believing that some of the glorious leader's light might shine on them.

However, that same rage can also lead to "power to the people" demands. Picking up such demands, and linking them to an alternative economic agenda, is difficult for a set of policies derived from a Keynesian focus on aggregate analysis and state policies.

Some proponents of alternative economic policies in the 1970s were aware of this problem, and therefore included calls for an extension of democracy from the system of political representation to public and private sector firms.

The economic democracy they had in mind was very much a reflection of intense shop-floor struggles at the time, and aimed at further empowering the workers engaged in these struggles. As these practical battles were lost, along with ideational left alternatives to the Keynesian welfare state, notions of workplace democracy receded. Reviving them could certainly be an important aspect of making an alternative bloc.

At the same time, the commodification of many aspects of life that had been partially sheltered from the imperatives of capital accumulation during the Keynesian era also poses the question of democracy beyond the shop floor. This includes a recapturing and transforming of state apparatuses, but also struggles in the many front organizations of the capitalist state, civil society on national and international levels.

Recent movements from the World Social Forum to Occupy and its offshoots in other countries are acutely aware of this, rallying around the fact that the ever greater concentration of capital undermines even a representative democracy — the natural complement to a free market economy, according to many neoliberals — and that the concomitant commodification of life takes breathing space away from any opposition movement.

Isn't Marx the Answer?

Echoing widespread discontent with "the system," many activists in these movements resort to horizontalism and localism as obvious alternatives to the hierarchies of states and markets. Keynesian and, for that matter, Marxist critics are quite right in pointing out that this kind of alternative, at best, will be able to carve out niches within capitalism or raise false hopes ending up in disillusionment and frustration.

At the same time, though, the democratic impulse coming from these movements might reinvigorate the search for democratic intermediations between individual and collective actions that was absent from the left mainstream in the past.

The statist and technocratic character of Keynesian welfare states and Soviet communism, but also of many suggested alternatives to these two "actually existing socialisms," did their share in discrediting left alternatives altogether. To make alternative economic policies more attractive it is important not only to move from a "Back to Keynes" to a "Beyond Keynes" message, but also to come up with

democratic organizing principles that could be applied beyond local communities.

An obvious way to move beyond Keynes is adopting Marx as godfather of alternative economic policies. Drawing on his economic and political theories might help to overcome the conceptual limitations of policies inspired by Keynes. Moving in this direction, though, requires as much rethinking of Marxism as this text demands from Keynesianism.

Marxian critiques of Keynesianism have a long tradition, and many of the above arguments draw on them on way or another.

Yet it doesn't take much looking around to find out that Marxian socialism isn't more popular than Keynesian alternative economic policies. Marxism, at least in the version with which it is widely identified in the former "actually existing socialisms" of Eastern Europe, shared with Keynesianism a bureaucratic character that flies in the face of demands for democratic participation.

Although representative "bourgeois democracy," the political form in which Keynesian welfare states developed in the postwar era, had its deficiencies that were vividly articulated by 1960s New Lefties and new social movements from the 1970s onwards, it certainly scored better on the democratic-content scale than the politburo-dictatorships in the East.

True enough, Marxists were among the harshest, maybe the harshest critics of that system, and tirelessly pointed out that it had nothing to do with Marxian socialism. Yet such criticisms hardly resonated beyond small circles. To outsiders, it was all the same.

Some of the critics turned the fact of political isolation into a virtue and went all the way from socialist politics to a purely theoretical amalgamated critique of political economy, Keynesian welfare states, and Soviet communism.

This critique is useful in its way, sharpening a sense for the limits of capital accumulation and social reforms relying on continued accumulation and class

compromises. It also produced valuable critiques of bureaucratic rule in private corporations and state apparatuses, East and West.

But while Engels wrote a scathing critique of utopian socialism, and Marx declined requests to draw out roadmaps to socialism in his day, this doesn't mean that later, when socialist movements began wielding power, strategies of transformation didn't become a necessity to further advance these movements. The tragic outcomes of actually occurring transformations also were the reason for many Marxists to retreat from efforts to changing the world to just interpreting it.

Interpreting is certainly an indispensable part of changing the world, but won't contribute to it unless it is connected to the anger, fears, hopes and desires of the many who feel there's something wrong with the world and looking for alternatives.

Unless interpretations can be translated into programs and slogans capturing the imagination of the discontented, no alternative bloc will be constructed capable of actually changing the world, and hopefully avoiding some of the mistakes of past social movements.

Who knows: Maybe some of the already existing interpretations of the capitalist past and present, supplemented by critical analysis of the history of the left, can be condensed into a slogan with a mobilizing capacity similar to yesteryear's slogans like the "Eight-hour Day," "All Power to the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils" or "Land and Freedom." Besides, there's also lots in those three that is worth fighting for these days as much as it was in the past, necessary additions and updates notwithstanding.

[Against the Current

USA

From Slaveholders to Sanders: A Brief History of the US Democratic Party, for British Readers

BILL CRANE · 13 April 2016

The US Democratic Party is the oldest surviving modern political party. [1]

In its longer than two centuries' history, it has survived multiple political crises, including one genuine social revolution, transforming itself accordingly each time. What was once the political operation of the slave-owners of the US South, the closest thing the country has had to an aristocracy, in the mid-twentieth century presented itself as the party of Keynesian state management, economic populism and establishment anti-racism. Toward the end of that century it transformed itself yet again to be 'history's second-most enthusiastic capitalist party' under the neoliberal order.

American socialism, since its beginnings in the late nineteenth century, have always had a somewhat schizophrenic attitude toward the Democrats. If Eugene Debs, godfather of the US Socialist Party in its heyday and its perennial presidential candidate (running once from a prison cell) could say that the conflict between Democrats and Republicans had 'no issue, no principle in which the working class have any interest,' this did not stop his comrade Upton Sinclair from running as the Democratic candidate for governor of California on a social-democratic platform several decades later.

Similarly, mass movements such as that for Black civil rights have divided on the issue. While Martin Luther King, Jr. openly broke with the Democrats over the Vietnam War toward the end of his life, his successor Jesse Jackson ran several popular high-profile campaigns inside the party.

Bernie Sanders, Independent Senator from Vermont and an avowed democratic socialist, has made worldwide headlines with his call for a 'politi-

cal revolution against the billionaire class' in his campaign for the Democratic nomination for President. This poses the question of the Democratic Party much more acutely for the US left than probably at any time during the past several decades. Even those of us, like myself, coming from a tradition that has proudly argued for the left, the working class, and progressive social movements to break from the Democratic Party have no easy answers, as many former revolutionaries and even some current advocates of socialism-from-below argue for engagement with and participation in the Sanders campaign.

This article is a necessarily abbreviated history of the Democratic Party. In contrast to many European leftists, who tend to see the Democrats as the US equivalent of right-trending social democracy, I will argue that the Democrats' history and composition marks them as qualitatively different. Unlike the British Labour Party or the French Socialists, the Democrats have never been a workers' party or had structural links to the organizations of the working class. Moreover, their composition as an exclusively electoral machine rather than a mass-membership political party leaves them without the activist basis on which even weakened European social-democratic parties operate in the era of neoliberalism.

The Good Old Party

The Democratic Party begins its lineage with Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence, noted partisan of the French Revolution, third President of the US, and also probably the most influential writer and theorist of American liberal democracy. He became the party's

first president when he defeated the Federalist John Adams in the election of 1800. In a touch of irony, Jefferson's organization became known as the Democratic-Republican Party, or more concisely, the Republicans.

As well as being the early US' most noted theorist of political liberty, Jefferson was one of the wealthiest slaveholders in his home state of Virginia, in which respect his brutality was notable even by the standards of his time. The contradiction was a real one. In the United States up to 1865, political liberty and radical democracy for the white man was the dialectical inverse of the brutality Black people faced under slavery.

In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson expressed some of the core principles of his worldview, which to a certain extent continue to frame American political discourse. He argued that the bedrock of American democracy was the yeoman farmer, independent, free, and hence virtuous. In a society that remained predominantly agrarian up till the Civil War years, the greatest threat to individual liberty was the federal government, run by career politicians who were likely to use their privileges to favor their own interests or those of special interest groups. Hence, 'that government is best which governs least,' along the principles of political democracy and economic *laissez-faire*.

As the British Marxist historian John Ashworth has shown, Jeffersonian (and later Jacksonian) Democracy was an ideology that remained throughout its life *functionally pro-slavery*. This does not mean that every Democrat of the age was a partisan of the slaveholders—even prominent slaveholding Democrats like Jefferson maintained throughout their lives a moral ambiguity toward slavery itself. Pleas for the highest degree of economic and political liberty had the effect of endorsing (often unspoken) the bondage of Blacks in the Southern states, for they were not included in the promise of American democracy. For the Democratic mainstream, slavery was a matter of the individual conscience, in which the federal government was forbidden from interfering. Thus, a Northern

Democrat who had no interest in slavery but accepted Jeffersonian ideology would likely end up a strong partisan of the slaveholders in national debates.

The Democrats as the organized political expression of the slaveholding class split and collapsed as a national party with the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. With the strength of their party in the South having gone into rebellion, Northern Democrats either went over to the new Republican party or consigned themselves to be a marginal force in that part of the country. Though Democratic rule by the planter class in the South was re-established after the end of Federal Reconstruction in 1876, Democrats could not truly claim to be a national party for decades. From the end of the Civil War until the Great Depression (a period of over seventy years) they elected just two presidents for four terms.

Roosevelt's Reinvention

The major re-invention of the Democratic Party took place under Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who was elected to no less than four terms as president between 1932 and 1944. [2] Roosevelt first came into office as a repudiation of the Republican Party led by President Herbert Hoover, which proved itself both unable and unwilling to find a way out of the economic crisis starting in 1929.

Though Roosevelt's brave promise of 'a New Deal for the American people' during the campaign of 1932 was unmatched by much in the way of concrete proposals to end the crushing poverty and unemployment faced by the millions of Americans who elected him, it was this name that would stick to his presidency, and a whole period of American political institutional formation. It was the economic recovery Roosevelt instituted, drawing on Keynesian economic management, that would end the Democratic Party of the old Southern elite and, by giving it new mass constituencies in organised labour and Black people, would cement it as the more liberal and populist of the two main American parties.

The accomplishments of the New Deal were indeed great. Millions of Americans, from builders to artists, participated in the economic recovery through federal employment in the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Roosevelt also instituted poverty relief to the elderly in the form of Social Security, which remains, despite Neanderthal Republican opposition, the most enduringly popular government program in the history of the US. With the prompting of Black leaders such as A. Philip Randolph, Roosevelt's administration also began dismantling some of the racist barriers to Blacks in the government, ordering the desegregation of the US armed forces. He also signed the G.I. Bill into law, paving the way for hundreds of thousands of ex-servicemen to attend higher education free of cost.

It is this period of American political life that Bernie Sanders has evoked time and again in his campaign speeches, calling on the example of Roosevelt to lead an economic recovery that can put millions of Americans back to work and in education. In a speech at Georgetown University in November, Sanders defined FDR's accomplishments as a positive example of his own 'democratic socialism': 'real freedom must include economic security,' he said, channelling Roosevelt.

All of this, I suspect, would come rather as a shock to Roosevelt were he alive today. A true scion of the ruling class, it was Roosevelt's fear that the depression unaltered by federal economic intervention would lead the way to a socialist revolution. He expressed this well in a letter to his Supreme Court appointee Felix Frankfurter, lamenting 'the failure of those who have property to realise that I am the best friend the profit system ever had.'

This is indicative of a profound truth about the New Deal that Sanders and many of his supporters fail to recognise. The programs instituted by Roosevelt were never about any kind of socialism, but meant to rescue American capitalism from its own destructive tendencies. Economic reconstruction in post-war Europe, which did take place under the (gradual reformist) banner of socialism, went much

further than the New Deal ever did or was meant to.

The achievements of European social democracy, such as a national health service, nationalisations of whole branches of industry, experiments in some places with workers' ownership and enduring levels of working-class prosperity, were never matched in the US. As Robert Brenner has pointed out, the New Deal reforms led to each large union in essence negotiating a 'mini welfare state' for its own members, some of the benefits of which were then extended piecemeal to the rest of the working class. This left the American welfare state in the end much weaker and more susceptible to rollback by the capitalist class.

A more enduring and stable welfare state would have depended (a) on the will from the ruling class to accommodate itself, and (b) the force of the working class in an independent, mass labour party. Both were entirely absent in the United States.

There had been several attempts to start such a party in the US. The Socialist Party under Debs was one, and the Communist-backed Farmer-Labor Party of the 1920s was another. Labor militancy in the 1930s, which was both a condition for and a result of the success of the New Deal, broached the question again to labour's leaders. However, the will to break with the Democrats was absent. Leaders of the newly-formed CIO, who had launched organising drives under the slogan, 'The President wants you to join the union' found the offer of a seat at the table with Roosevelt more convenient to their instincts.

With the main radical force of labour organisation, the Communist Party, having abandoned independent politics in favour of the Popular Front alliance with the liberal members of the ruling class dictated by Moscow, only a small constituency for forming a workers' party was left. David Dubinsky and Sidney Hillman, two leaders of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union who had been members of the Jewish Bund in Russia, formed the American Labor Party as a halfway house for so-

cialists and union members supportive of the New Deal but unwilling to join the Democrats. It only caught on in New York City, and after a series of splits was wound up in the 1950s.

Can We Turn the Democrats Left? Two Major Attempts

The transformation of the Democrats from the party of white Southern conservatives into the apparent representative of organised labour, Blacks, women, the LGBT community and other progressive interests was a massive shift in American politics. From this, many leftists as well as some civil-rights groups have drawn the conclusion that its recent shift back towards the right represents a break in continuity and that the party should be 'reclaimed' for the popular interests it used to represent.

However, understood properly, the Democratic party has *never* been a 'party of the people' in any real sense. Its role in American politics is that of a typically ruling-class party, which has developed the function of an effective shock-absorber for social movements that threaten the rule of American capital. The history of the party from Roosevelt onwards demonstrates precisely this.

I will now tell briefly two stories that show how effectively the Democrats have managed to co-opt and neutralise progressive movements. Both begin in the 1960s and end roughly in the 1980s. While deeply intertwined, the attempt to 'realign' the social-democratic left within the Democrats, and that of Black leaders to shift the party left show similar goals, and a similar failure to affect the priorities of the ruling class, which will likely be replicated by any future attempts to change the party.

Paul Heideman tells the story of early attempts at realignment in the 1960s. Renegade Trotskyist Max Shachtman had drawn the conclusion that the Democrats could be turned into a mass party of labour when he led his group into the declining Socialist Party in the late 1950s. Realignment also attracted the support of Bayard Rustin, a Black ex-Communist and adviser of Martin Luther King, Jr.

They concluded that an alliance between the Left, the emerging coalition around Black civil rights, and the AFL-CIO, on whom the Democrats depended for much of their ground game, could drive the conservative and racist 'Dixiecrat' wing out of the Party.

Indeed, the Dixiecrats were alienated by civil rights and left the Democrats *en bloc* during the 1960s. However, instead of prosecuting a further turn to the left, Shachtman and Rustin maintained a pragmatic alliance with the labour bureaucracy, firmly pro-Vietnam War under the leadership of George Meany. Rather than change the Democrats, they themselves were changed and became advocates of a conservative part of its leadership.

Michael Harrington, a onetime follower of Shachtman, was committed to strategic independence from the labour bureaucracy at the same time he pursued work inside the Democrats. His Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) was instrumental in reviving attempts at realignment in the form of the New Politics (NP) coalition. NP won a number of progressive reforms within the party. They ended once and for all the monopoly of 'smoke-filled rooms' where elected officials and union bureaucrats would choose the Democratic nominees for President, Congress, and important state offices.

As a result of NP's audacious work, many delegates selected from good-old-boy patronage networks at the 1968 convention were replaced with progressive and anti-war delegates, among them many women, Blacks, and members of other oppressed groups in 1972. The height of NP's strategy was seen when they secured the nomination of South Dakota Sen. George McGovern on an anti-war platform for President.

At this development the old networks of the Democrats revolted. Meany effectively withdrew the AFL-CIO's practical endorsement, leaving McGovern without any troops on the ground. The Democratic state machines quietly supported

Nixon's re-election campaign, which went on to win every state except Massachusetts.

Attempts at realignment nonetheless continued. The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) was formed in the early 1980s out of a merger between Harrington's DSOC, and part of the multitendency New American Movement, an ex-New Left group. Its main goal was, and remains, working within the Democratic Party's structures and campaigns to turn it left. Harrington's call for socialists to be 'the left wing of the possible' was echoed by many in the declining New Left groups during the 1980s, who sought to make themselves relevant during the reaction launched by Ronald Reagan.

But as shown by Mike Davis, the formation of the DSA, rather than being one of the first events in a process which would pull the majority of the Democrats left, turned out to be the conclusion of a process in which social-democrats and former revolutionaries were pulled to the right. Seeking an alliance with the US labour bureaucracy in the AFL-CIO, the leaders of the DSA backed the right-wing candidacy of Walter Mondale, formerly Jimmy Carter's Vice President, in the primaries of 1984. Mondale shared some of the responsibility for the Democrats' neoliberal turn under Carter, and as the presidential candidate made commitments to cut social welfare even deeper than had Reagan in an attempt to appeal to big business.

The DSA's Quixotic attempt to pull the Democrats to the left continued after Mondale and into the 21st century. However, the Democrats accelerated rightwards under Bill Clinton, who with the neoliberal Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) scrapped the party's lukewarm commitment to social equality for disadvantaged groups and the welfare state, 'ending welfare as we know it' and laying the basis for the destruction of organized labour's remaining bastions through the North American Free Trade Agreement. Subsequent Democratic campaigns and administrations have led equally reactionary attacks on labour and the oppressed, as well as leading the way in reformatting US imperialism for a new era. The DSA's commitment to 'the

left wing of the possible' has in the worst circumstances led to its leaders giving socialist cover to a neoliberal, ruling-class party.

The campaign of Jesse Jackson and Rainbow-PUSH for the Democratic nomination for President in 1984 (and again in 1988) seemed to have much more promise. Jackson was a former aide to Martin Luther King, Jr. in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, who after his mentor's death led the way for Black leadership embracing the Democratic Party and capitalism, which King had rejected at the end of his life. Despite this, his 1984 campaign was launched on a principled social-democratic commitment to reversing Reagan's attacks on the welfare state, as well as opposition to US military intervention in the Middle East and Central America and aid to apartheid South Africa, and support for Palestinian liberation.

Jackson's campaign drew the enthusiasm and energy of thousands of Black activists, as well as many militants of the then-declining Maoist organizations of the New Communist Movement. For a time, he looked as if he really had a chance to win the nomination over Mondale and neoliberal Colorado Senator Gary Hart. However, when it got to the convention floor, Jackson's principles were abandoned. Not only did he not receive the nomination for President, Jackson's goals for a more democratic convention structure, for commitments to roll back Reagan's attacks on the poor and working class were whittled away until nothing remained.

Jackson could have maintained his principles—and preserved the coalition that propelled him nearly to the nomination—if he had broken with the Democratic Party and run an independent campaign for President. However, in his words, 'you don't walk away from money you have in the bank.' Jackson, and the national Black political leadership he represented, had too much invested in the success of the Democrats. Unfortunately, this meant that the progressive activists in Rainbow-PUSH became little more than a ginger group in a Democratic Party that was racing to the right, and Jackson himself becoming a Black spokesman to

get out the vote for neoliberal Democrats, a role he retains to this day.

Both major attempts, by the social-democrats and the Black leadership, then, to 'take over the Democrats for the left' failed. They did so despite largely favourable circumstances—on the one hand, the departure of conservative Dixiecrats and their replacement by organized labour in the New Deal coalition, and on the other, the resurgence of Black demands in a popular social-democratic campaign. We are left without any of these conditions today. Organized labour and the Black social movement (in addition to women's and LGBT groups) are in the first case much weaker and in the second further removed from the halls of power than at any point since FDR's administration.

Realignment did accomplish some basic objectives, such as reforming the primary system and forcing the Democratic leadership to include more women, Blacks, and advocates of progressive causes. Yet even before the internal counterrevolution of the DLC, a huge gulf divided it from social-democratic parties like Labour. Unions had a seat at the table, but no structural voice in setting Democratic policy, their role open to challenge as labour grew weaker under neoliberalism. The party remains primarily responsible to the centrist faction of capital.

Furthermore, unlike the membership parties of the old social-democratic left, the Democrats remained as they were and are now: an electoral machine without a real activist base, thus giving an immense measure of control to the party bureaucracy and elected officials. If equivalent structures pose huge challenges to the leadership of a socialist like Corbyn in the Labour Party, in the Democrats they are likely insurmountable.

The Berning Question

I write the following the night after the New Hampshire primary, the second round of campaigns that will result in the selection of Democratic and Republican nominations for President during the summer. Sanders' success in

Iowa, where he nearly won, and his landslide victory in New Hampshire, a northeastern state bordering his own Vermont, has put paid to the Democratic elite's plans to have a speedy coronation for Hillary Clinton as the party's nominee.

His campaign for the Democratic nomination has shown more promise than any left-wing campaign probably since Jackson's in 1984. His avowal of 'democratic socialism' and the fact that increasing numbers of his supporters as well as Democratic voters generally are willing to identify as socialist shows a mass audience for our ideas that has not existed in a long time in the US. His call to renew the welfare state, and to break the monopoly of corporate economic interests over American politics reflect a yearning for substantial progressive change in perhaps the most deeply inegalitarian and undemocratic society in the world of developed capitalism.

Sanders himself has walked an interesting road to the current race. A member of the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL) and a civil rights activist during college, as a politician he initially led an independent progressive and socialist coalition in Vermont as the mayor of 'the People's Republic of Burlington.' As an eight-term Congressman and then a US Senator since 2006, he has maintained his formal independence from the Democrats, up till recently, by running as an Independent in each election, though he caucuses with other Democratic Senators.

Sanders supports continued American operations in Iraq and Syria under the liberal model of 'international coalition-building,' which he also supported in Afghanistan. His stance on Palestine is hardly to the left of the Clintons, calling for a two-state solution with continued negotiations on the basis of Israel's 'right to defend herself.' He has also taken a conservative stance on undocumented immigration, denouncing open borders as a 'Koch Brothers proposal.' [3]

It would be foolish for any socialist to not be concerned with these and other reactionary stances of

Sanders. In terms of a comparison which is often made, it marks him as being *far to the right* of Jeremy Corbyn, who has taken principled anti-imperialist stances on Iraq, Syria and Palestine, as well as solidarity with migrants. However, they are easily explicable in terms of his essentially social-democratic politics.

FDR, who Sanders praises as a 'democratic socialist,' led the US into the imperialist Second World War and interned thousands of Japanese-Americans. The American social-democratic left which Sanders came out of took the side of American imperialism over the national liberation movement in Vietnam. While being politically anti-war Michael Harrington failed to support the anti-war movement, and his support for Israel was a major divide between the DSA and Jesse Jackson's campaign in 1984. Sanders' stance on open borders, moreover, matches the chauvinism of the AFL-CIO leadership which sees undocumented migrants as a threat to American workers' (declining, relative) relative prosperity.

The American revolutionary left has supported social-democratic candidates in the past. The most successful in recent memory was consumer advocate Ralph Nader, whose Green Party campaign for President in 2000 won over three million votes. Nader has many troubling views, including a similar hostility to open borders and a disturbing history of suppressing union organization in his own businesses.

Nader's campaign, however, was run on a platform of principled independence from the Democrats. This is precisely why the Democrats launched into him with such vitriol in 2000, blaming him for the defeat of Al Gore rather than the fraud-infested recount process, and in 2004 when they convinced the majority of the Green Party to split from him on a safe-states 'Anybody But Bush' platform. Sanders' decision to run within the Democrats, despite his own status as an Independent Senator, immediately confronts him and his supporters with a number of problems.

All the party networks, from the Democratic National Committee, to elected officials at the national and state levels, to the party-oriented pressure groups such as the DLC, to major party contributors and canvassers of capital and labour, women's, Black, and LGBTQ groups are overwhelmingly in favour of Hillary Clinton. Should he win the nomination, Sanders may face a palace coup of the type made by Hubert Humphrey in 1968, when he won the nomination without running in a single primary. Even if his victory in the primaries were convincing enough to undermine a coup, he could well face the situation faced by McGovern in 1972, when the Democratic machine essentially seceded from its own nominee.

Even this is a best-case scenario. Despite his success in Iowa and victory in New Hampshire, Sanders still remains without any real hope of winning the Democratic nomination. At the Democratic convention, only two-thirds of the delegates are selected through the state primaries. The rest, the so-called 'superdelegates' are unelected officials introduced as a counter to New Politics' success at reforming the Party machine in the 1970s. Clinton has received the overwhelming support of this group so far, mostly elected Democrats and party machine operators, since she herself is from this background. At this point, technically she could win only 35% of elected delegates and still be crowned.

The crucial question for Sanders and his supporters is how they will react to a Clinton victory. Sanders has committed, loudly and repeatedly, to campaign for the eventual Democratic nominee. 'I will not play spoiler,' Sanders said in August. 'I do not want to be responsible for electing some right-wing Republican to be president of the United States.' In the most recent Democratic debate, he doubled down: 'I do want to see major changes in the Democratic Party. I want to see working people and young people come into the party in a way that doesn't exist now. And you know what, I want a 50-state strategy so the Democratic Party is not just the party of 25 states.'

Revolutionary socialists who share many of the goals supported by Sanders, such as a \$15 minimum wage, single-payer healthcare, and free state-provided higher education, have called on him and his campaign to break with the Democrats now, or should he be unsuccessful in winning the nomination. We are, however, forced to uneasily concede that his Democratic campaign makes a certain amount of sense in a country whose electoral realm features the unchallenged domination of two capitalist parties. Sanders would certainly not be reaching the amount of people he is now succeeding in reaching with his calls for a 'political revolution,' were he to run an independent campaign.

More likely than the McGovern scenario, then, is a repeat of the Jackson scenario. Sanders at the convention will face an overwhelming call by the Democratic establishment to surrender every one of his principled positions in order to become part of the Clinton campaign. That Sanders has already given up his potential leverage of threatening to run as an independent leaves little indication that he will not follow the same course as Jackson in 1984.

Revolutionary socialists seeking to influence the Sanders campaign from within face an impossible task with both the Democratic establishment and their own candidate fundamentally opposing their efforts. Socialists, or any other rank and file activists for that matter, have little space in which to prosecute their demands. 'Any parallel project within the Democrats' to Corbyn's Labour 'is inconceivable,' writes Adam Hilton. 'The party, unlike

even the hollowed out Labour Party, has neither an organizational presence, nor any real meaning at the local level. In the likely event that Sanders does not outcompete Clinton in the primaries, there are few institutional spaces where any forward momentum could be maintained.'

Whereas from the outside, though we swim against the stream, we can engage with Sanders supporters in public fora and in all kinds of activism in which the stakes are not stacked so impossibly against us. Through principled socialist independence, we can convince groups of Sanders supporters to go beyond the limits of his campaign, most basically its commitment to working within an established capitalist party. Socialists celebrate Sanders as an advocate of substantial social reform, and the wide reach of his social-democratic message. But a 'political revolution' confined from the start within the limits of what the Democratic Party establishment finds acceptable is a revolution that will certainly fail. As veteran American socialist Charlie Post writes:

'The only way any of the enthusiasm generated by Sanders' anti-corporate message will have any resonance is if we find ways to work with the minority of Sanders supporters who will not support Clinton to build INDEPENDENT movements and organizations. I believe that this will be best done by being supportive of those "Feeling the Bern" without joining them in another dead-end Democratic campaign.'

RS21

What do Syrian and Lebanese activists think?

MIRIAM AOURAGH · 12 April 2016

The attacks in Paris in November provoked greater imperial frenzy and added more questions to an already confusing narrative about Syria. The dynamics of the ensuing debate, shaped by media populism and ruling class opportunism, have been very frustrating. As such, there has been an increase in confusing positions and vague assessments in our own progressive circles.

In the current contradictory context, our political analyses need reassembling. Adjustment is a fairly normal process for progressive movements to undergo. Clear analyses with regard to increasing military operations in Syria are crucial because the Paris attacks created the condition for Britain to engage (or, rather, continue) in this endless, pitiless, warfare.

The vote on the war in Parliament brought the sense of an impasse regarding a political position around Syria to the surface. It is infuriating to see the debate about Syria being hi-jacked by Blairites and Tories in order to strike at Jeremy Corbyn. Moreover, the realignments of global imperialism – the simultaneous condition of a continuous US hegemony and a relative decline – have implications for radical analyses. So does the fact that much of the current devastating events are, in part, consequences of the massive Arab uprisings that have sent shockwaves through the region since 2011.

After 9/11 and the "War on Terror" our position as radical left groups was clear: all-out against war. And for that matter we did not really have any relations with groups in Iraq or Afghanistan. But revolutionary upheavals alter our positions. These revolutions and subsequent counter-revolutions, to-

gether with the larger political-economic conditions in which they emerged, greatly impact the socio-economic and political uprisings and the strategies and tactics of movements. This leads to at least two shifts: enforcing on activists in these regions an incredibly difficult task to manoeuvre between local and global dynamics and between survival and death, and it influences the political tactics of activists here and our politics of solidarity and anti-imperialism. At least they should have done so.

It has for that reason been striking to see a vast amount of articles full of analyses, theories and prognoses – and not shy about providing urgent 'advice' – made without citing activists from the region. And – and this is probably one of the causes – without engaging those active for/in the Syrian cause present here in the UK who have organic links to Syria. In fact, there has been a framing of groups like Syrian Solidarity Movement UK (SSM) and Planet Syria as pro-war (because some people in those groups have supported a no fly zone option) on the one hand, and, on the other, charging them as having a malicious agenda to destroy the Stop the War Coalition (StWC), i.e. seeking to take from us that which we have helped build –leaving us without an anti-war movement altogether. These groups have been artificially constructed in the left-ist imaginary as part of the problem. In other words, it has been deemed not necessary to account for such groups. For some comrades they are even a liability. What does that say about the larger ideas and challenges they represent though?

On a meta-level, the Syrian "uprising", in the sense of those continuing to keep the small roots and legacies intact for the next round of uprisings, or just for the sake of dignity continuing to survive, seem to have disappeared from our discourse. And even the left accepts by now the full civil war narra-

tive. The idea of a (civil) war is not untrue, but it is only part of the truth.

Syria in 2011 was not a society, like Iraq by 2003, paralyzed after years of sanctions on top of a brutal dictatorship: it has experienced one of the most extraordinary social uprisings in recent history. What is more, we know the people who are taking part in this uprising, some even directly because of our international activist networks in the region. In other words, there are agents to account for: there are comrades to extend solidarity and support to, and above all there is an abundance of knowledge to benefit from. Should these people not be the prime source of our knowledge?

The divisive narrative around Daesh – whether based on inadequate information or offered in a dichotomous format – has strongly shaped our debates. You are either with foreign intervention or against intervention. There is also the notion that Daesh is overpowering, a force that eclipses everything else: the greatest fascist threat of the new century.

Alternatively, because of its anti-Western propaganda, some don't see Daesh as counter-revolutionary. Some (due to the group's presence in a proxy imperial setting), see it as anti-imperialist. But none of this relates to real life. Today's reality is one gigantic paradox. Born from the carnage of the "War on Terror" and bred by the racism in Europe, Daesh is not only a threat to US (and its regional lackeys') imperialism, it is also (also, we don't dare to say "foremost") the executioner of our friends, our comrades. It has also come to represent the doom of thousands of working class families: fatalities of their severe sectarian ideology that has little to do with Bashar al Assad's regime or of Obama, Hollande or Cameron's geopolitical threat. To see it otherwise has astounded people involved in Middle East activism.

Firstly, the typical top-down assessments those perspective emanates from arouses indignity, produces a demoralising paralysis. For many the idea of solidarity is meaningless – it turns out that the

archaic principle of internationalism is sacrificed for the monotone "the enemy is at home" focus. Hence, and secondly, what does "our real priority is Cameron" or "support for Syrians is fine but best done by their communities" as we often notice in commentaries, mean? This notion is occasionally even accompanied by the paternalistic complaint of 'identity politics'. Sometimes it seems as if our cities, movements here do not include people that have roots there. The idea of the domestic ruling class (enemy) is not (probably never was) a singularity: one cannot wave off criticism about the lack of solidarity or the disturbing pro-Assad sentiments emanating from some at StWC rallies, by saying that our focus should be first and foremost on the British Parliament. It is a false dichotomy.

It is no secret that the left has been confused about its stance in general and that this goes beyond a dogmatic anti-war/anti-imperialist analysis. Many of us simply feel unable to take a position because of the real complexities that Syria presents. And many of us exert caution because of the very real dilemma caused by a historic tension between our ruling class's imperialism, internationalism and solidarity in the context of uprisings against a dictatorship that is not the ally of the west.

We can learn from our comrades how to reconcile these seemingly contradictory positions. It is also clear that this confusion is due to the general lack of context and knowledge "from below" and "from within". In fact, what happened to our comrades and their voices that could inform us, and help us to disentangle all these confusing positions. Why not "shut up and listen" – to what our comrades from there have to say? Just for a moment – before we pick up again and redefine our positions based on our own objective conditions. What follows is a small, and probably inept, attempt to help us to do this.

We presented a set of questions to different people, from different backgrounds and cities in Lebanon and Syria [3] – all involved and struggling for, perhaps against all odds, a non-sectarian and progressive outlook. In a series of questions distilled from

the on-going debates in the UK we asked the respondents about a variety of subject, including the role of Daesh, sectarianism, the Kurdish resistance, as well as the issue of military intervention and support abroad. Most interviewees picked a few questions. Some referred us to other important voices, while one aborted the interview due to the loss of a comrade who was kidnapped and executed by Daesh. Others were not sure how to think of solidarity at all any more after organising – often in vain – for five years. For example, Razzan replied: "How to support us? I really don't know what to say at this point."

Q1 Is Daesh part of the revolution, is it merely counter-revolutionary, does it have an anti-imperialist stance?

Shiar (Syrian)

Of course Daesh is not part of the revolution! It has been fighting, killing and kidnapping Syrian revolutionary forces from its very beginning, while avoiding, and even collaborating with, the regime until they were forced to fight each other (still only to some extent) because the international rules of the game changed. Neither is Daesh – and Jabhat al-Nusra for that matter – simply a counter-revolutionary force. The revolution and the subsequent war were merely the context or the opportunity that allowed them to emerge and rise. It is more accurate, in my opinion, to talk about multiple revolutions and counter-revolutions unleashed in Syria – and the whole region more broadly – some of which are of a progressive nature or potential and others reactionary. And I use the word "revolution" here in a broad sense, to mean fundamental changes in power structures and values that take place violently in a relatively short period of time. Revolutions are not necessarily progressive, neither are all counter-revolutions necessarily reactionary.

Daesh depends largely on foreign jihadists, who are fighting in Syria to impose a specific version of extremist Islamic rule that is alien to most locals. They have nothing to do with the revolution. If this is not a form of imperialism or colonialism, then I

don't know what is. Moreover, Daesh has been secretly collaborating with various imperialist regimes (Syrian, Iranian, Turkish, Saudi, etc.) depending on their interests and the changing rules of engagement. So I really can't understand how anyone can call them "anti-imperialist" just because of their stated opposition to the West (which is largely rhetorical and does not go beyond terrorist acts).

Farah (Lebanese)

We definitely regard Daesh as a reactionary and an anti-revolutionary force. I was shocked reading the other day a statement issued by an Italian Maoist party explaining their position in support of Daesh as anti-imperial! It really shocks me that there are sections of the Left still discussing the nature of Daesh, with the same binary thinking that they have been employing to set their positions regarding the Assad regime! Is it anti-imperialist? Or is it anti-revolutionary? This binary thinking made a section of the Left support Assad while he was slaughtering the revolution under the pretext that he is fighting imperialism! Let's make it clear, Daesh is the result of Western imperialism and the reign of the authoritarian regimes in the Arab region. Daesh is the result of the state's rule of terror and the imperial so-called "War on Terror". The solution for us is of course to oppose reactionary forces such as Daesh.

But this is not enough. If we want to build a democratic alternative we have to condemn Western imperialism, and also and on an equal ground, the authoritarian regimes with their sectarian and repressive policies that have ruled us for so long. If these sections of the Left, want to build a position, regarding Syria, probably they need to listen, or in this case read, what people on the ground in Syria have been saying. This placard, for example [see image below], that was written in Aleppo in January 2014, represents my position: "Assad will not be overthrown if ISIS is not overthrown". For people who are directly hit by this bloody war, it's crystal clear: no defeat of Daesh is possible without the overthrow of Assad regime. If this Left will grant itself the authority to ask the Syrian people

who they want to be their butcher then the project of this Left is doomed to be a big failure politically and ethically.

Ghassan (Lebanese)

I agree with Farah that Daesh is a counter-revolutionary force and I am not sure how it could be construed as "anti-imperialist", knowing its links to Turkey and Saudi Arabia. However, I am really concerned how parts of the left tend to ignore its positions regarding society in general (women, gays, etc.). Although it is an excuse used by many liberals to support bombings, it does not mean that there is no truth to it. We must, of course, oppose the bombings and the foreign interventions (from all sides as it seems right now). But the solution is not to support Daesh – rather, to look at other forces in the revolution, the revolutionary left and local committees, for example, which Joseph, Razzan, and others have written extensively about but have been ignored to a large extent.

Joseph (Syrian)

It's clear that Daesh is counter-revolutionary. In addition to what Ghassan and Farah said I think the problem of many sections of the left internationally is that they understand imperialism as a single actor (the West or the US) and not as a system with competing capitalist powers that we should all oppose. Therefore Russia is put outside of the picture. This is one thing. The other problem (which is linked to the first one) has been the analysis of actors, whether state or organisations, according to their foreign policies, leading some to speak of anti-imperialism in the case of Syria, Hezbollah, Iran and even Daesh, and not analysing them, as Ghassan said, according to their policies regarding the society or country in which they exist. In addition to this there is a sort of reductionism in the analysis. For instance, "economism" shapes how we analyse the region, putting aside sectarianism, feminism, struggle against homophobia, secularism, etc... leading to a situation where liberals often appear to be the only ones speaking about such matters. This larger problem in my view is

linked to economism and the way that Islamic fundamentalism groups are still perceived by many on the left as "reformists" or some sorts of "anti-imperialists?", or more generally as real authentic groups of the region representing Islam. They don't make the difference between a Muslim believer and an Islamist, many times mixing both, which is very essentialist and problematic.

Razzan (Syrian)

The approach to fighting ISIS has always been a Eurocentric one: dealing with ISIS on our own with no need of Syrians' feedback on, or expertise in, the matter. Without learning from the history. This has been evident from the very first days of the US bombing Syria – Nusra specifically – without coordination with Syrian brigades or activists on the ground, which has caused lots of anger from people living in areas that were bombed. Imagine if your organisation is being funded by a UK or US INGO [international non-governmental organisation], and these states bombed and killed a child or family. How do you imagine the people would react towards the employees of an NGO funded by Britain or America? Many civil society workers were threatened after the international bombings.

The result has been further hatred towards international military support. There is no regards given of Syrian lives that are already in danger due to ISIS and regime bombardments. The international military support is not to help Syrian lives, but to lessen the threat on their borders that are shut in the face of those who are fleeing Syria – from ISIS mostly. So it does make a negative difference. It makes things worse. It fuels terrorism, extremism.

A friend from Raqqa is on ISIS's list of wanted people. Raqqa partly consists of big families and it's a very communitarian society. So if one member of the family is anti-ISIS, the rest of the family would know and hence the word might go out. What I am certainly aware of is that since anti-ISIS sentiment is associated with any anti-ISIS military actions, the people in the face of Daesh pay the price. This is

my own experience with people living in liberated Idleb in 2013.

Rima (Lebanese)

It is hard to say something comprehensive about Daesh at this moment. I was part of a group of activists who occasionally meet comrades from Syria. One of the comrades was captured by Daesh and killed during one of our workshops. He had contributed enormously with information and data on the living conditions under Daesh in Raqqa before he was captured.

Yasser (Syrian)

Daesh is the head of the counter-revolution and the worst nightmare that humanity could face. We have had as a movement (Citizens Movement) an office in the city of Raqqa after the fall of the regime. I was the Director, but we closed it after Daesh took control of the city. We continued our activity clandestinely within the city.

Ramz (Syrian)

ISIS is the vanguard of counter-revolution. I never had direct personal experience with ISIS but members of our group were arrested and imprisoned by them. Some of our comrades living in territories ruled by ISIS were forced to escape when ISIS discovered their political disobedience.

Q2 Is sectarianism a dominant factor? Is there a civil war? Can class still be a source of analysis for the dynamics of the uprising?

Shiar

The problem with the term civil war is that it reduces complex socio-political dynamics to a savage "civil war" between religious sects. It stems largely from the Western obsession with Middle Eastern sectarianism. As I understand it, the MENA [Middle East and North Africa] uprisings were – broadly speaking – triggered by varying combinations of political repression, economic deprivation and social disintegration, which made people in those countries feel more and more marginalised, powerless, humiliated and undignified. Even if they are

linked to the wider processes of global politics and economics – like everything else – these are specific local dynamics that cannot be simply seen as a direct result of imperialism and globalisation. Syria was perhaps the most acute manifestation of these dynamics, which is what distinguishes the Syrian revolution from the (first) Egyptian revolution, for example.

The mass protests in Syria started and remained, for quite a few months into the revolution, largely confined to marginalised, neglected regions and rural areas such as Dar'a, Idlib, Deir al-Zor, al-Raqqa, the poor suburbs and slums of Damascus, etc. Coupled with strong regional identities that made it easier for these people to break away from the regime's discourse, this meant the Syrian revolution was – at least in the beginning – an almost classic revolt by the marginalised rural poor.

Assad's economic liberalisation of the country, celebrated by the West as welcomed "reforms", was carried out through a Mafia-like network of high ranking military and security officers partnering with big businessmen, which was largely concentrated in and benefited the traditional bourgeois urban centres. Moreover, economic liberalisation was not accompanied by "political liberalisation" that could have made these "reforms" more acceptable by people – save for a brief period of political freedom, known as the "Damascus Spring" in 2000–1, which was soon heavily repressed as the regime feared too much freedom may destabilise its rule.

It is true that the subsequent, full-fledged internationalised war has changed these socio-economic-political revolutionary dynamics (for now) but that does not mean that we should abandon our analysis of the origins and beginning of the revolution. With the militarisation of the revolution in late 2011 and early 2012 – first by the regime forces and militias and the protesters' resorting to arms to defend themselves, then by the interference of regional and international powers in support of this militant faction or that – the above-mentioned socio-political conflicts gradually developed into full-fledged

wars. Most military operations by opposition and Islamist armed groups were initially directed against the regime. As military advances were made and power bases consolidated, however, "infighting" over territory, weapons, spoils and influence started to surface, sometimes distracting from what was supposed to be the main battle.

By the end of 2013, there were at least four main poles or parties to the war, with various other smaller centres of (armed) power revolving around them because they shared similar worldviews and/or similar goals and backers with the main poles – though they should not be readily lumped into one basket. I have previously called this Syria's "multi-party conflict" that turned into a "multi-way war".

A dualistic view continues to dominate much of the debate and writing on the war in Syria, often painting what is happening in the country as one war between the regime and the opposition forces, or between government forces and Islamist terrorists, or between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and so on and so forth. This dualism may partly explain the West's prioritisation of the war on Daesh and ignoring, or postponing, an inevitable confrontation with the Syrian regime and its backers – as if a state can only have one "enemy" at a time.

Anthony (Lebanese)

Syria is going through a war on the class war that started with the Syrian revolution. Both Assad and Daesh are at the lead of this war on the working classes. The sectarianism we see in Syria is the main feature of that. Sectarianism is an ideological smokescreen, it hides the crisis of the Syrian bourgeoisie and the demands of the working people for social, political and economic freedom. This was the basis of the Syrian revolution, through the popular slogan "one, one, one, the Syrian people are one", and it continues to be so. Many Syrians I've met say that sectarianism was not a main feature of life in Syria before the crackdown of the Assad regime on the revolution. Everything has changed now, and the sectarianism we see today is "born out

of the contradictions of Arab society and shows its ugliest forms in times of crisis" – it is another form of nationalism, and seeks, in the end, to accumulate capital and the means of production and power to an elite (whether for Assad or for Daesh's leadership) while exploiting the working people and the proletariat. We see one of the worst kinds of exploitation in Syria: exploitation of life, working class people recruited as soldiers to kill other soldiers. Bassem has started with this analysis, we need to build on it.

Yasser

Since the first days of the revolution the regime and its loyalists tried to transform the uprising into a sectarian war. Today, sectarianism is among the main ideological orientations for the competing groups: the regime factions, its Iranian allies, as well as some opposition groups. I think it is appropriate to say that since approximately a year the situation has become like a civil war. At the same time, though, some factions are explicitly non-sectarian, cross-confessional initiatives, such as the Declaration of Damascus, the Movement for Citizenship, for example, as well as leftist groups such as the Democratic Left Party, the National Democratic Bloc and the Socialist Union. But I don't think the revolution emerged as a class struggle as some think, but as a political revolution during which economic factors played a major role in the indignation of Syrians. The reasons for the Syrian uprisings are the struggle for freedom and dignity and against repression.

Joseph

Of course sectarianism is an important factor and it has increased since the beginning of the revolution importantly: first, because of the regime through various means (killing, media, releasing Islamists and jihadists, etc...) and then by the development of Islamic fundamentalist forces. In addition, the sectarian discourse, on a propaganda level, of Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey and Iran, fuelling sectarianism, in addition to their actions.

This said, this does not mean that class analysis does not work, and sectarianism has to be understood as a tool to control and use the popular masses and for the bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie to take the lead and control of popular movements. Sectarianism is a way to redirect socio-political frustrations against other "enemies". This is strengthened by the lack of democratic and social forces on the ground.

This does not mean that cross-sectarian movements are not possible, and actually they still exist in various regions of Syria. Popular movements in Syria are still struggling for the initial objectives of the revolution and against sectarianism. In addition we have seen this summer in Iraq and Lebanon a cross-sectarian popular movement challenging all the sectarian bourgeois forces. This should be put forward much more, these are the ways to defeat authoritarian regimes and Islamic fundamentalism.

Ramz

Sectarianism is one of the most significant elements of conflict in Syria. The revolution switched from a political revolution against a totalitarian regime to look more like a civil war when the armed conflict took over. But, yes, there are many democratic and secular opposition forces and cross-sectarian communities such as Citizen Movement, the Democratic Bloc, the National Bloc, etc. Although they are weak and isolated now.

The internal/national factors were relegated in the conflict while the regional factors, elements and interests became the determining factor. However, you cannot find a solution to the conflict without resolving the question of political power and without the departure of Al-Assad and his gang.

Q3 Can we regard the Kurdish resistance as the alternative? Are they non-sectarian, for instance?

Shiar

I suppose by "Kurdish resistance" you mean the Kurdish armed forces affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its Syrian offshoot, the PYD [Democratic Union Party], which are often de-

scribed as the "third way". I personally don't agree and don't believe that they really represent a third way. If anything, they seem to follow their own separate way, parts of which intersect with the events in Syria, while others follow their own specific Kurdish dynamics. As far as the Syrian revolution is concerned, these forces are still oscillating between the regime and the opposition (and now between the US and Russia), flirting or conflicting with this side or that depending on the situation on the ground. They are yet to settle on a clear, consistent position, or to be forced to do so by changing geopolitical equations (the battle in Kobanê, the US-led war on Daesh and so on).

The PYD's political pragmatism and its thirst for power are two important factors to understand the party's dealings with the regime, the revolution, the FSA [Free Syrian Army], and even the Kurds themselves. Moreover, the PKK is a highly ideological, nationalist party based on a strict military regime and blind loyalty. It still thrives on the apotheosis of the leader and the notion of one party leading the state and society. In this sense, it is not very different to so many leftist parties that have been riddled with these Stalinist-Leninist plagues.

I would like to believe that the party is changing and is rethinking its ideology and practices (the PKK and PYD have been rebranding and promoting themselves in the West as an "anarchist" movement). But until they really change, I cannot understand how anyone can call it an anarchist movement, or even a legitimate representative of people's struggle for freedom and justice. But the reality is, so many of their repressive practices remain the same – e.g. the PYD forces recently shot live ammunition at peaceful demonstrations because the protest was organised by a rival Kurdish faction.

In fact, I do not doubt for a moment that the PYD – if things carried on like this – will re-produce an oppressive, totalitarian regime, just like what the Ba'ath party or the two ruling parties in Iraqi Kurdistan did – bearing in mind the differences in their experiences, of course. The same applies to

many of the other Syrian opposition factions, from the radical Islamist forces to the nationalist leftist parties that lean towards fascism. The hope is that the revolutionary movement will continue and give birth to different forms of organisation and self-organisation, and to new structures that are more consistent with the original values and goals of the revolution.

Ghassan

As for the Kurdish resistance, while there are secular forces involved that we must support, it has also become entangled in the civil war in Syria and there are some instances where anti-Arab sentiments have led to unfortunate incidents and positions. However, based on the same reasoning above, it is important to discern between the various forces.

Joseph

Regarding the Kurds, I agree with Ghassan: contradictions exist with PYD (the Syrian PKK), which acts often as an authoritarian organisation that has not hesitated to repress popular demonstrations and pro-revolution activists. And some anti-Arab sentiments do exist in certain regions (for historic reasons of oppressions and colonisation by the Ba'ath regime) – see the last reports of Amnesty on this region. One thing: the criticism against the PKK can only be made constructively if someone has a clear position regarding the Kurdish issue, meaning support for self determination. The problem is some people criticise them without criticising the Arab chauvinism of the majority of the Syrian opposition regarding the Kurdish issue.

Yasser

The experience of the Kurdish areas is special and a positive experience in many features. However, the issue is that the PYD is a non-Syrian political project (decided in Mount Kendal) and does not fall within the objectives of the Syrian revolution and the project of state citizenship. It is correct that the PYD is beyond sectarianism; nevertheless, it has nurtured and helped create contradictions and con-

flicts of another type, with a dimension of nationalism.

Elia (Lebanese)

The Kurdish question is indeed a complicated one, especially that the forces that represent them (YPG, PYD) have, for the most part, an opportunistic relationship with the Syrian revolution, trying to navigate through the current war with the fewest enemies possible and the most gains on the ground as possible. This "real politik" of the revolution has seen them ally with Assad on some fronts, coordinate with US air-force at some times, cleanse villages, and sometimes ally themselves with the FSA (Free Syrian Army) to fight with Daesh. I highly recommend the piece by Leila Al Shami on the selective solidarity around the world with Kobane.

Ramz

The Kurdish experience will probably be what will prevent the establishment of an Islamic State [authority] in the whole of Syria. The Kurdish people do not have a tendency to religious extremism but their political factions don't accept the Islamist ideology in essence because Daesh opposes the Kurdish identity. Nevertheless, due to their own opportunism Kurdish forces do not really help setting up a national, overall, Syrian programme. Some of their chauvinist attitudes even lead to tensions between Arabs and Kurds.

Q4 Is the issue of military intervention relevant: does receiving weapons from or granting help to Western powers make a difference?

Shiar

As much as I am (theoretically) against foreign (state) intervention and militarisation, I think this question is academic and we're way past that point. When talking about wars and armed struggles, we have to be realistic. If there were other, less dodgy sources of arms and other material support available, I can assure you that many Syrians fighting today would not have had to seek help from the US and the Gulf countries and to forge alliances with

"Islamist fundamentalists" actually fighting on the ground.

We cannot defend the rebels' right to defend themselves, then condemn them for their reliance on the West or the Gulf without identifying a realistic alternative of support (there is none at the moment, it seems). Asking the rebels to demand arms with no strings attached is not going to get us anywhere because there are no such arms (with no strings attached) in the real world.

Anthony

I cannot speak for the Syrian revolutionaries regarding intervention. My position is against Western military support, but it is not my livelihood that is destroyed, my community that's killed and displaced, or my own life that's on the line. What I can say is that the weaponising of the Syrian revolution, from the US, from the Gulf, from western Europe, from Iran, have turned it into a bloody massacre, and the military forces operating in Syria today (whether armed groups on the ground or bombings from the air) have caused nothing more than non-discriminating murder.

We stand firmly against military support to Assad or Daesh, or the reactionary counter-revolutionary forces, and for the full and unconditional support of the Syrian socialist revolutionaries and their demands on the ground. The socialist parties in the West need to turn their ears to the ground, to put in the great effort of steering their statements, slogans, positions and actions away from their own political benefits at home and towards a daring answer to one question: what do the Syrian revolutionaries need? The phrase "shut up and listen to what they have to say" puts it well. This is a process that needs to start now.

Ghassan

Our position, ever since the war on Iraq has been to oppose imperialist wars in the region, but also to oppose all types of dictatorships, regardless of their pseudo-anti-imperialist positions. The Assad regime, for example, although against "the West" is

working hand in hand with Russian imperialism. The same could be applied to Daesh, Hezbollah, and other forces entangled in the Syrian situation. The question of sectarianism is also extremely important, since it has been detrimental to the revolutionary process in Syria, Bahrain, Yemen, etc. and cannot be ignored by the left.

Tammam (Syrian)

In truth, it is difficult to find a reason for the position of the international community on the Syrian issue, without coming up against so-called "conspiracy theory". Nearly five years have passed since the start of the Syrian tragedy; for five years the Syrians have been exposed, daily, to planned death, in front of the whole world. Is it really convincing that the world still does not know what is happening in Syria?! Is knowing that difficult?! The Syrians are suffering – and have been for five years – not just from death, for death in one of its senses is not suffering; they are suffering from life! Yes, the Syrians have reached a stage beyond death, beyond fear of death. Now they are afraid of their life! A young man from Homs told me that the people of his village, on their way fleeing to Lebanon, felt comfort every time one of them who was injured died, because he would lighten their burdens!

Does the international community, and do the states that are bombing or preparing to bomb the Syrians, truly believe in the pretext of putting an end to terrorism, which was carried out and is carried out, in the end, by European citizens, from France, Belgium, Sweden, Holland, etc. Does this community and do these states believe that the Syrians have reached the point where they fear living more than dying?!

Well, the Syrians know that they face a fascist regime, the likes of which were extirpated from the world decades ago, but they also know that they face, along with it, a global decision to be silent about their liquidation; they face states on whose territory extremism receives support, and sometimes receives direct or indirect finance from them; and the extremists move from these lands to the re-

gions of struggle, especially the Middle East, coming and going with the greatest of ease, and killing the local inhabitants of these areas, taking part, along with the dictatorial regimes, in forcing those inhabitants to flee; and then they return to their countries as European citizens, while Europe's borders are closed in the face of refugees fleeing, essentially, from their citizens.

What I say in this context will seem exaggerated, it will seem biased, and will seem like a conspiracy theory. But the Syrians, and I among them, have reached a point where we are incapable of knowing the reason for our death. Have you seen it? We no longer want life... we now want to know the reason for our death... that is cheaper than our life.

Yasser

Military support can change the balance, which is now clearly in favour of the regime after the Russian intervention. The Syrian opposition was asking for support from the beginning, but as it never arrived it meant some opposition groups accepted any offer, also coming from Qatar and others [with an agenda]. That help is representing the voice of Islamists in the region and is reinforcing them in Syria. For instance, since 2012 Al Qaida and its Syrian section Al-Nusra received crucial support which allowed them to gain ground in the battlefields against Assad forces. But the military support was conditioned by the integration into an Islamist programme. This is the reason why the moderate Syrian opposition has become so weak. One last point, we understand that "fighting terrorism" is an issue but we should not forget that the basis of terrorism in Syria is the regime. Its practices and its propaganda favoured the emergence of extremism and encouraged terrorism against the revolt of ordinary Syrian people that started with legitimate claims.

Q5 What can we here do to support your cause?

Shiar

On a state policy level, a more nuanced approach to armed conflicts may succeed in persuading the US and its allies to seriously support the moderate Syrian opposition in its multiple wars, rather than insisting that such support should be solely directed, for now, at fighting Daesh, which is what the US administration has been doing. And to be effective, such support should be provided through one unified channel, rather than leaving it to regional powers with conflicting agendas.

On a popular level, there is today more need than ever for "critical solidarity" with the Syrian revolution; a solidarity that does not fall into false binary polarisations and is not, at the same time, "conditional solidarity". Critical solidarity means you support a struggle as a matter of principle, with real, material support, but maintain an active, critical stance toward a particular version or force that claims to represent people's aspirations or capitalises on them for political ends. Without such solidarity, it is likely that we will keep being presented with the false choices of Assad vs. Daesh, or Iran vs. Saudi Arabia and so on.

Yasser

Political solidarity is more important than ever yet political opposition groups do not receive consistent support. There is an intense political struggle between the opposition and the regime, which obliged many since 2012 to flee from the country or simply stop fighting. You have to know that: the regime targets essentially political and civil activist. No-one from the "democratic side" supported the National-Democratic opposition; international support currently creates or reinforces political power relations. Regional powers started creating oppositions aligned to their political vision: e.g. support mainly goes to military Islamist forces, sometimes aid is distributed to those close to the supporting countries. We can even say that political decisions migrated outside of the country.

Farah

What we request from all the progressive forces in Europe and elsewhere in the world is to show di-

rect, non-hesitant, and courageous support for the Syrian people's revolution and demands for democracy and social justice. I have never seen in the world similar revolutions that were isolated and deserted such as the Syrian people's revolution. What we also request is for people to oppose the imperial wars on Syria. The bombings are only aggravating the situation on the ground, giving more power for the regime and Daesh and killing every hope for the rebirth of a popular movement with a progressive horizon. In the Arab region and in Lebanon in particular in 2003 during the war on Iraq we held the slogan "no to war, no to dictatorship". This slogan continues today to retain its full veracity.

Joseph

In Europe I think the best way to help people struggling in the Middle East is notably as follows:

- Daesh has continuously attacked and killed democratic activists in Raqqa and even elsewhere (in Turkey for example), notably activists from the group Raqqa is Being Slaughtered.

- Speaking and supporting, as Ghassan said, the people still struggling on the ground against the regime and Islamic fundamentalist forces. We have seen in Syria the highest level of self-organisation by the people because the state disappeared. Helping them in all their kind of activities on the ground.

- Rebuilding an anti-war movement based on what Farah spoke about – the "Lebanese experience" of no to interventions and no to dictatorships and actually real solidarity with people in struggle in the region. Today, anti-war movements in the UK and I think the USA are based only on no to foreign interventions and denial of internationalist solidarity and we have seen the results. It's completely a shame, and Syrians who are pro-revolution are not joining, others as well. I would personally never go any more or participate in the construction of the current Stop the War. I would seek an alternative, and I think space exists to do it, on the principles I spoke about above.

- Welcoming and opening borders to refugees and giving them the conditions in which they can live and not just survive – in other words be able to work, have housing, etc... In Switzerland many joint-experiences with refugees that were very successful.

- Fighting against new laws limiting democratic rights, struggling against Islamophobia.

Ramz

The most important assistance which could be provided to the Syrian people is to pressure governments to find an acceptable political solution by all parties, not just managing the crisis and extending the conflict. In addition to support for secular and democratic movements.

Many initiatives in support of the Syrian uprising and against Assad's regime have surged in the past years. Some of us in the radical left were initially a part of these initiatives. It is probably a reflection of our internal disarray and leftist regroupments that our collaborations in these initiatives have been forsaken. But the fact that groups such as SSM had less "leftist" engagement meant that their content became less and less "leftist" in the sense of for instance a clear position about foreign (western) intervention.

After losing momentum, some of these groups have started to call for – or rather not to resist – a no fly zone. This is being refashioned by StWC as "pro-intervention" with obvious reactionary connotations. However, rather than focusing on support vs. rejection of (western) intervention we should consider the political forces inside these networks and try to understand the desperate context that lead to their positions. They have repeatedly said that for it to be principled, 'military intervention' cannot only an issue of US/UK politics and must include Russia, Iran, etc., and that Assad's barrel bombs must be stopped. Yes, these arguments might be exploited to promote war, but we also know that an anti-war movement, which has been taking a de-facto pro-Assad position, has lost the legitimacy to make this argument.

Hence, others on the left should make sure that we lose neither side of the argument. But we have learned the hard way that this can only be done from a clear position of solidarity. Syrians are undergoing a tragedy of unimaginable proportions: their cry for help to stop the Assad barrel bombs, the Russian fighter jets, and Daesh's slaughtering

are not less valid than their cries against US or British bombs. The possible negative implications of those cries should never be the starting point for a socialist. Internationalism and its pillars – solidarity, empathy, brother/sisterhood – is what drives our struggle. [4]

RS21

NEWS

News from around the world



EGYPT

Egypt: crackdown on activists ahead of 25 April protests

28 April 2016

Haitham Mohamedain detained for 15 days as Egypt crackdown gathers pace

Egyptian prosecutors ordered the detention of labour lawyer Haitham Mohamedain for fifteen days, while they investigate serious charges against him. Haitham is one of at least 100 activists seized in a series of security raids aimed at stopping the growing momentum behind protests over the handing over of Red Sea islands Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia by the Egyptian government. A coalition of opposition groups and student movements is calling for protests on 25 April.

According to prisoners' rights group Freedom for the Brave, Haitham is currently under investigation for alleged membership of the Muslim Brotherhood, for attempting to overthrow the regime and for calling for illegal demonstrations.

Haitham is one of Egypt's best known labour lawyers, and an activist with the Revolutionary Socialists. He has worked tirelessly to defend striking workers from attack by the police and army. He was arrested previously in September 2013 while en route to represent steel workers in Suez who had been arrested after the police attacked their sit-in, sparking an international solidarity campaign supported by the leaders of most of the UK trade union movement.

25 April 2005

Dozens of activists arrested in Egypt security swoop ahead of 25 April protests

Egyptian security forces raided cafes in downtown Cairo and took activists from their homes on 22 April in a coordinated crackdown ahead of planned protests on 25 April over the transfer of the Tiran and Sanafir Islands to Saudi Arabia, prisoners' rights group Freedom for the Brave said in a statement on Facebook. According to the campaign, arrests were also reported in Alexandria and Gharbeyia province. On 15 April thousands took to the streets in defiance of the Sisi regime, raising demands for the release of political prisoners and justice for victims of disappearances and police killings alongside call for the return of the islands to Egyptian sovereignty. The crackdown is widely seen as a pre-emptive strike against the reviving confidence of political activists to take to the streets.

Labour lawyer and Haitham Mohamedain, a member of the Revolutionary Socialists, was among those arrested in a dawn raid on his home and reportedly detained in Al-Saf police station. According to lawyers supporting the detainees and their families, some of those arrested in the raids on downtown cafes were released Friday afternoon, while others are currently being interrogated by National Security officers.

23 April 2016

What you can do:

Send protest letters to the Egyptian authorities via the embassy of Egypt in your country calling for the immediate release of all the detainees.

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Site Egypt Solidarity Initiative.

| SPANISH STATE:

Build a social bloc capable of leading the country

ANTICAPITALISTAS · 16 April 2016

However, after the retrograde agreement concluded between the PSOE and Ciudadanos as well as in the framework of the current relationship of parliamentary forces, we consider that it is politically sterile to continue to expect from the PSOE the formation of a "strong government for change". The insistence of the PSOE leadership on using its agreement with Ciudadanos as a basic document for negotiations with other political forces invalidates, in fact, the creation of a government of transformation and the conquest of rights for the majority of the population, for the workers. Anticapitalistas therefore considers that it is necessary to recognize today that such a government, an alternative to that of a "grand coalition", is currently not possible. The PSOE has clearly defined itself in recent weeks: it cannot be a reliable ally for the process of fundamental change of the social and economic structures, that the current situation requires. It is loyal to the Troika (IMF, ECB, and European Commission) and economic policies in neoliberal continuity as well as to the restoration of an exhausted political regime. The process of change opened by 15M [2] is a living process, with its difficulties and refluxes. It cannot progress without struggle and it will never be subordinated to the logic of the "reduction of hopes". We have not come so far to be satisfied with a "lesser evil", which would only be a "greater evil": the assimilation of the block of change to the managerial logic of "No, we can't".

To still give credit to the idea of a "government of change" on the part of the PSOE generates expectations and could create false hopes. Thus, under the PSOE-Ciudadanos agreement, which can now be extended to the Popular Party, there are only two outcomes: a grand coalition or new elections. In both cases, we must be ready to organize a response and to be in the best conditions to face the two possibilities. And, especially, the discourse for true change will need to be much more precise and clear if we want to defeat this pseudo-change of regime, or be able to face the new government which could emerge from the current operation aimed at forming a "grand coalition".

These new possible elections should be organized, clearly, around an objective: accumulating the necessary strength in the social and electoral terrain for projects to reform the regime and, in this way, place at the centre of the political debate the horizon of constituent processes as well as the democratization of the economy (repeal of the labour reform, the socialization of strategic sectors such as the banks or the electrical companies, introduction of forms of workers' control in the enterprises, a basic income), leading to a new confederal pact between the peoples and advancing towards a new institutional framework, where power would be exercised increasingly from below. The challenge facing the forces of the "bloc of change" is immense. We must intensify the dynamics of contestation of a possible "grand coalition", and at the same time act to avoid the end of the political cycle opened by 15M. This means that it is necessary to continue to broaden the social and political terrain of the forces of change. In short, we must prepare to be in the best position in a scenario which will be full of dangers, but also of opportunities for those who want to end the regime of 1978 and of totalitarian austerity.

This grand coalition prepared by the elites, the oligarchies and the European institutions could be formed on the basis of social passivity, facilitating a political dynamic for the restoration of the regime. In the face of this danger, we consider that only a new dynamic of mobilization can change the political dynamic in force. A dynamic oriented toward the creation of a sense of stability in the framework of an economy which, far from so-called recovery, continues to produce unemployment, poverty and insecurity. In the face of this, the forces of change must promote a broad social coalition to disrupt the political and social scenario.

Anticapitalistas thus considèer that now a change of gear is need. That requires, on the one hand, ceasing to have any truck with a PSOE incapable of breaking with the élités and neoliberalism. And, on the other, developing an alternative dynamic to that of the élités, a dynamic which broadens the social base of the bloc of change, involving the popular classes. As the parties of the régime build their grand coalition, we, the forces of change, on the basis of our diversity, will go forward with the construction of a social bloc capable of taking the leadership of the country, so that capital will never govern again.

March 9, 2016

USA

International Actions Called to Free Puerto Rican Political Prisoner Oscar Lopez Rivera

STEVE BLOOM · 9 April 2016

That's the first day of testimony this year being held by the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization in New York. A public demonstration in support of Rivera is planned at UN headquarters. The goal is to have some kind of action ("candlelight vigil, an educational forum, a letter-writing tabling effort, creative street theater, meetings with government officials, or whatever makes most sense given your political context and capacity") in 35 countries on the same day, one for every year that Rivera has been in prison.

The call requests "that you send us at least one photograph of your activity along with a short summary of what you did, and that you adhere to the following basic, respectful points regarding Oscar and the need for his release:"

"Since 1981, Oscar Lopez Rivera has been incarcerated in the US—an act condemned by the UN—making him the longest held political prisoner in the history of US-Latin American relations. In 1898, US Marines landed in Puerto Rico, taking control of the government, economy, and general sovereignty of the island. Since 1946 (shortly after

its founding), the United Nations and its Special Committee on Decolonization have reviewed Puerto Rico's status, asserting its 'inalienable right to self-determination.'

In 1998, following the conclusion of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Archbishop Desmond Tutu led a half dozen fellow Nobel Peace Prize recipients in a Call to Free Oscar Lopez Rivera. Last year, several heads of state attending the annual Organization of American States General Assembly proclaimed Oscar to be 'the Nelson Mandela of Latin America.' This year, THIS CALL asks the people of the world to speak with one voice and demand, in local and regional actions to be held the first day of the 2016 UN Decolonization hearings on Puerto Rico: FREE OSCAR LOPEZ RIVERA NOW!"

Readers who reside outside the USA and who would like to either participate in or initiate actions on June 20, are urged to contact Matt Meyer (Resistanceinbrooklyn.ows@gmail.com) to discuss what might be possible. Readers who reside inside the USA, but who know people in other countries who might be interested, are urged to forward the relevant information to them.

February 16, 2016