

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV431 December 2010

PALESTINE

Reflections on the Israeli occupation, the Palestinian Authority and the future of the national movement

GREECE

Build to the left, quickly!

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GREECE

Build to the left, quickly!

ANDREAS SARTZEKIS ·

There are at least two reasons for this: the depth of the crisis and its impact on the lives of the majority of the population do not encourage enthusiasm for such "victories" and, linked to this, the fact that in the two cities, the two candidates were elected by approximately one sixth of the voters. The most visible lesson of the municipal and regional elections of November 7 and 14, notwithstanding comments from foreign newspapers on the alleged support of the population for the dominant party, was that they represented a scathing disavowal of PASOK and the right, although, despite encouraging results for the radical anti-capitalist left, a political alternative to the current governments has not yet emerged.

The crisis, ever harder

As expected, the draconian measures required by the IMF, the European Union and Bank – a sinister trio known as the "troika" here - have had only one effect: to accentuate the crisis, which sees every day more misery (the services of the Church, which in this country provide a good part of social assistance, indicate that request for help are increasing sharply). In addition, the 2009 deficit, already significant, has been revised upward, from 13.6% of GDP to 15.4%, which will result in new demands from the troika, which has long stressed anyway that the state does not bring enough money into its coffers and spends too much. A delegation from the troika which arrived in Athens on November 15 – to be welcomed by a rally and a demonstration called by the KKE (Greek Communist Party) and the radical and anti-capitalist left – made its priorities known: strengthening the attacks on the popu-

lation by attacking the public sector and adopting new work contracts with less pay than that laid down in collective agreements. Already in March, they had said: "Besides the wages you must cut, you must dismiss 200,000 workers in this sector!" On November 17, European officials indicated that the state should save 4.9 billion euros next year: Obviously nobody believes Papandreou when he assures them that there will be no dismissals. The government also refers to necessary reductions in the health sector. Recent weeks have seen very violent attacks in some areas, including in commerce where, apart from the closure of many small shops, big chains are also closing down: this is the case with FNAC, which only recently triumphantly arrived in Greece, while on November 17, the ALDI supermarket chain announced its closure, with 700 employees thrown out of work.

Another sector openly in crisis is the politically influential one of the press: the major group Lambrakis, with a tradition of established cultural patronage (the opera in Athens, the "Mégaro Moussikis" was funded by them), has just closed an old publishing house, Ellinika Grammata, throwing around a hundred employees out of work, while redundancies are raining down in the newspapers, of which the best-known are "To Vima" and "Ta Nea". We are also seeing public wealth stripping operations. Thus, a good part of the port of Piraeus has been sold to a Chinese group while an agreement is planned to sell off part of the seafront close to Athens to install casinos and luxury accommodation. So, whether or not the "Socialist" government discusses a new debt repayment schedule, what is certain is that new measures of economic strangulation of the population will not be delayed, possibly connected with the negotiation of a new memorandum.

Faced with all this, the workers try to resist, there are solidarity mobilizations, but these reactions remain very much smaller than the growing mobilization of spring. Working to connect all these struggles and prepare an overall offensive against the policies of Papandreou and the troika are matters of urgency. Since early November, it is now possible in support of this task to point to the results of the municipal and regional elections which saw, albeit in a fragmented manner, political tendencies to the left of the PASOK gaining 1.2 million votes out of approximately 6 million voters.

The issues at the elections for PASOK

Aware of its discredit, PASOK had planned to focus the campaign solely on local issues, wanting to highlight its modernism represented by its Kallikratis programme of "bringing the institutions closer to the citizen". However, this programme, for which PASOK has spared no advertising expenses, translates notably into the merger of the 1,004 existing communes into 370 super-communes, while administrative regions have been merged into 13 "super-regions. The logic of this model plan of liberal technocracy fits in with the anti-worker measures: indeed, the management of these super-communes involves public disengagement to off-load onto private companies such tasks such as cleaning, green spaces, etc. The consequences for employment are mentioned above: in general, public companies are in the firing line (with the threat of removal of 60,000 contract workers) and the principle is to not replace 4 civil servants out of 5 leaving. And it is precisely by making the link between the local and national scales that the radical and anti-capitalist left has campaigned since the spring against the Kallikratis programme which in reality concerns many more people than this current alone.

But after having attempted, unsuccessfully, to lull everybody to sleep with the refrain of strictly local elections, PASOK abruptly changed its tune: two weeks before the elections, the issues had without explanation become so national that Papandreou

was simply threatening to hold parliamentary elections as soon as December if his policy was not approved, without moreover defining the requisite approval threshold percentages!

Why this blackmail? In fact, PASOK never risked coming second: they were ten points ahead of the right wing New Democracy in the parliamentary elections of 2009, so there was no suspense! The real issue was that of PASOK voter disaffection and therefore of the necessary credit to continue this policy of smashing all social gains. Late August polls gave 28.6% for PASOK (43.9% in the elections of October 2009), 21.1% for the ND (33.5%), 9% for the KKE (7.5%), and 17% for small parties or spoiled votes with 10% being don't knows. During the campaign the disillusionment of PASOK voters was evident at meetings: thus in the PASOK stronghold of Patras (among the five biggest cities in the country) Papandreou could not start his meeting due to the low attendance! This note is also verified by the victory of a "diverse left" candidate' (supported by Synaspismos) above the PASOK candidate in Patras.

Overnight, Papandreou therefore turned to blackmail of the "me or chaos" type, with abject populist arguments challenging the workers' mobilization: "If the interest groups that we have affected with our reforms are saying "that's enough!", then I will have no other alternative than to address myself to the Greek people." Later, he said: "I admit that some changes, imposed out of necessity, have hurt workers, who are not responsible for the crisis. Yet maturity is required also in the trade unions: the crisis must transform all of us." (November 6, 2010 "Eleftherotypia"). A dramatisation which suddenly forgot the local issues but justified all those who had insisted for weeks on the importance of this election for beating not only PASOK and the right, but also the anti-worker policies.

PASOK and the right disowned

Because the main parties were present in all 13 regions, the regional elections constituted a good reference in relation to last year's parliamentary elec-

tions. We should however be careful: the far right LAOS only ran in six regions as such, SYRIZA was challenged by a right wing split, Aristeri Dimokratiki (Democratic left), and lists supported by Antarsya were present in 11 regions.

In any case what leaps out is the incredibly high abstention rates: running at 2.88 million votes in October 2009, it was for the first round of the regional elections 3.81 million out of a total of 9.81 million registered voters, with additionally 9.10% spoiled ballots. In the second round, which in the regional elections involved PASOK and the right alone, the abstention rate went from 39% to 53%, with an additional 11.6% of spoiled ballots! Nothing in these figures justifies the view of some European newspapers which saw these results as a successful gamble for Papandreou or as the Prime Minister escaping lightly!

In fact, the scale of the setback is even clearer in that PASOK, despite the blackmail of its leader, paid a heavy price: in the first round of the regional elections. PASOK lost approximately 1,150,000 votes, with the region of Attica, comprising one third of the voters and the most industrialised area, accounting for a loss of 446,000 votes (-7%). It counted on certain victory in the first round in three regions: it won two, including the fiefdom of Crete, where it won 50.3%, losing 71,000 votes, or 8.4%! In the third "safe" area, it lost 90,000 votes, or 9%, winning a total of 43%. In the Peloponnese, the PASOK candidate was a former right wing minister, supported also by LAOS and in Attica, if the candidate for PASOK was finally elected in the 2nd round, it was with an abstention rate of 58%, a total of 16% spoiled ballots and, here also, the support of LAOS. In the municipal elections, the two major defeats for the right did not mean a victory for PASOK alone: in Athens, the candidate Kaminis was in the second round also supported by the Greens, by Aristeri Dimokratia and by some right wing sectors, the same being true of Boutaris in Thessaloniki. In both cases against a background of gigantic abstention rates, about 65%. In addition, PASOK lost significant towns like the suburb of

Aghia Paraskevi, the big city of Patras, in a duel to its left, as in the suburb of Elliniko, where the outgoing mayor, an activist who had led radical mobilizations, was supported by the Greens, SYRIZA, ANTARSYA and other left forces. In other popular suburbs, PASOK was beaten by left lists: Kaisariani, Keratsini, Elefsina and so on. With such results, it is clear that this is a major disavowal of PASOK.

The right is now headed by the former leader of a dissident nationalist group within the ND, who has the difficult task of restoring the fortunes of a party reeling from its heavy defeat last year as well as a series of scandals for which trials are currently underway. As with Papandreou for PASOK, Antonis Samaras sees a victory for the right in these elections. Observe: in the regional elections, the right, which could only advance after October 2009, lost 563,000 votes, 256,000 of them in Attica! Proclaiming that it wanted to win between 6 and 8 of the 13 regions, it obtained only five and, if it won Piraeus, it was more due to the internal crisis in PASOK than its own dynamic. It can only be welcomed: it is obviously paying for its share of responsibility in the crisis, and its demagoguery against the memorandum fooled nobody, since at the same time it supports the austerity measures. The crisis of the right is certainly a durable one and its luck is that in this period, the LAOS grouping, whose profile is equivalent to that of the Front National in France, is one of the biggest supporters of PASOK's policies. This positioning of LAOS has two consequences: an electoral weakening, where it ran, as in Attica where, with 6.57%, it lost 1% and 53,500 votes, but also the freeing up of space for openly fascist currents.

One notes then a very important fact: for the first time since the beginning of the 1980s, the bipartisanship which infected Greek political life has been dramatically weakened. The results of the elections, as well as discussions in workplaces, prove that a deep political crisis has opened, not witnessed since the junta of the colonels in the years 1967-74. It has become clear that a positive outcome to this situation depends exclusively on the responses and

credibility offered by the radical anti-capitalist left. And on this terrain, things may begin to evolve.

The results to the left of PASOK

The KKE was presented as the main winner of these elections and this is largely correct. It must be said that it began its campaign a long time ago since it is in fact almost permanent. Indeed, the KKE favours mobilisations as the sole solution, not hesitating to accuse workers who do not vote for it of bolstering the "plutocracy". In this systematic electoral campaign, it utilises a discourse which is in part anti-capitalist. But in part only, since arguments about "real" patriotism have lately been employed, and the party continues to sow division, refusing any unity of action of workers: for it, the sole unitary framework is its PAME current, framed by itself, and on the "political scene", the KKE presents itself as alone against everyone, it being understood that the radical left defends according to this party the capitalist system!

Nevertheless, once again its campaign found an echo and the KKE was able to attract young people. Its score in the regional elections was approximately 580,000 votes, or almost 11%, with a gain of 62,600 votes and 3.5% on 2009. Yet this increase should be put into perspective. First because it was not in the most industrialised regions that the KKE advanced most: the southern Aegean Islands (+ 6,000), central Greece (+ 12,000). It even lost votes in the north Aegean (-500) and above all, its progress in Attica was very modest: certainly, it scored 14.4% but it only won 6,000 extra votes, which is very little given PASOK's losses and the gains made in the same area by Antarsya, namely + 23,000 votes. Similarly, the KKE won only a single municipality, the popular suburb of Petroupolis. Even though it is by far the main force to the left of PASOK, we must be aware of these weaknesses, which once the official period of satisfaction is over, may facilitate internal questioning, until now fairly discreet.

One of the most urgent balance sheets to be drawn is that of Syriza: this radical reformist coalition has

for several months experienced existential problems, quite simply of political identity, which hark back to the confusion related to its formation. Bringing together revolutionary or radical groups around Synaspismos, without these groups having had any common project of developing an anti-capitalist wing, Syriza has been buffeted over three years by the rhythm of the polls and actual results, which hardly exceeded those of Synaspismos alone, if we put aside the good result of Alexis Tsipras in the Athens mayoral elections four years ago (more than 10%). In recent months Syriza has divided into at least three currents: the first is that of the "renovators" of Synaspismos, who eventually left the latter and Syriza also in spring to form Dimokratiki Aristera (Democratic Left). Their electoral baptism of fire electoral was satisfactory to them: presenting alliances of variable geometry (with the Greens, with Syriza, with PASOK and so on), they got quite a number of elected representatives and their regional candidate in Attica, Grigorios Psarianos, a former MP for Syriza, won 52,500 votes, or 3.8%. This also raises their political profile as a party of elected representatives with a discourse oscillating between radicalism and the flattest reformism.

The core of Syriza, around Synaspismos, got nearly 240,000 votes (4.5%), as against 315,000 and 4.6% in October 2009. If the decline in percentage is not huge, it is more so in votes, and even if the leadership of Synaspismos expressed satisfaction at this score, it is clear that not to advance in such a context is a setback. Moreover, before the vote two Syriza MPs and the representatives of a few currents (Kokkino, AKOA, Xekinima and so on) in the secretariat highlighted in an appeal the deep crisis of the coalition, undermined by conflicts between different projects but also by centralism and bureaucracy, and affirmed its failure to promote that which had justified its creation, namely left unity and common action of the broad forces of the radical left. Their conclusion is that after the elections, Syriza can no longer continue under the same conditions. During this time, the leadership around

Alexis Tsipras imposed for the municipal elections the line of turning towards PASOK cadres in disagreement with the Papandreou line, and thus in Attica the Syriza leadership hoped that the head of the regional list would record a two digit score, attracting disappointed PASOK voters: the result was a total of 89,000 votes, representing 6.2%, down by 42,000 votes from 2009. This suggests that the youth who had voted for Syriza did not identify with such combinations, while the disappointed PASOK voters did not find it credible either.

A word on the third current in Syriza, grouped around a list represented in Attica by the former leader of Synaspismos, Alekos Alavanos. Alavanos, very much on the right when he was an MEP, now uses a very leftist language, as seen in his central leaflet for the campaign whose conclusion is: "To combat youth unemployment, we are ready to go to jail." Alavanos's list, in which he had high hopes, ultimately obtained 30,000 votes, 2.2% and a single elected representative. But the most serious aspect in this case is that the disagreements between the former and current leaderships of Synaspismos will tear apart the radical and revolutionary groups which are members of Syriza, with all the resentments that might leave. This relates to the absence of a joint project for these groups at the launch of Syriza.

An anti-capitalist breakthrough

This is the good news of the elections, although modest in terms of numbers, but for many observers a new element: clearly anti-capitalist lists supported by the coalition ANTARSYA (Cooperation of the anti-capitalist left for the overthrow of the system), present in 11 of the 13 regions, scored about 2% and had seven representatives elected. Its percentages varied from 1.5% to 2.6%, much better than the usual very low vote for the Greek revolutionary left! The vote increases were spectacular and was the vote that increased the most: if the KKE got 62,500 more votes, ANTARSYA got nearly 71,000 more, reaching a total of nearly 95,500 in 11 regions. In Attica, it got 31,500 votes and elected

Angelos Hagios, also leader of the NAR. And ANTARSYA supported several lists in the municipal elections, as in Athens where it got 5,500 votes (2.9%) and one elected representative, Petros Konstantinou, leader of the SEK. In various suburbs, lists supported by ANTARSYA and sometimes other forces got good scores: in Piraeus, 2%, 3% and one representative elected in Peristeri, the largest of the suburbs and a working-class neighbourhood, 2.8% and one representative elected in Petroupoli, 6.5% and one representative elected in Nea Smyrni, 5% and one representative elected in Zografou, 6.3% and one representative elected in Ymittou, 10.7% and two representatives elected in Halandri, 13.8% and two representatives elected in Vrilissia. And other good scores outside Attica in Iannina with 4.1% and one representative elected or Pyrgos with 4% and one representative elected.

This significant breakthrough has at least two explanations. The first is the dynamism of the ANTARSYA grouping in which the two strongest Greek revolutionary left organizations, the NAR and SEK are involved, as well as different groups such as OKDE-SPARTAKOS, the Greek section of the Fourth International, and individual members. We saw it throughout the mobilizations of spring, when ANTARSYA helped structure rank and file unions against the line of the GSEE confederation leadership. Big contingents on demonstrations, and an activist profile helped affirm ANTARSYA's place, with its posters and slogans present in many regions. The second reason is a vote of radicalization in favour of the only list clearly stating the need for an anti-capitalist alternative to defeat the PASOK and troika policies. In the massive vote to the left of PASOK, the vote for ANTARSYA is a bearer of hope also because sectarianism has broken down: given that outside of SYRIZA and ANTARSYA, other far-left groups called for abstention, it is clear that the Antarsya lists benefited both from the votes of voters rejecting the evolution of Syriza and those young people closer to radical proposals.

Organizing the counter-offensive

The stakes emerging from this new situation are clear: ANTARSYA is now invested with new responsibilities, huge in relation to the urgency of the situation, but also if we take into account its small size and the fact that its process of constitution, work and co-operative debates remain recent. It is first and foremost about helping, despite the obstacles, the construction of a unitary and massive response to the policies of the bourgeoisie, making all the necessary proposals along the lines of a break with capitalism. Rejecting the payment of the debt, a ban on layoffs, defence and improvement of public services, these are some urgent axes, which involve extending cooperation well beyond ANTARSYA!

But another sector is of greatest urgency: on the basis of the achievements of the anti-racist battles, to organize the broadest unitary mobilization against racism and fascism, without delay. In Athens, a neo-Nazi group, Chrysi Avgi (Golden Dawn) has for month organized violent campaigns against immigrants in some districts and at the municipal elec-

tions they got 10,000 votes (5.3%) with one representative elected. If electorally they have had no other successes, these practitioners of the fascist salute, enjoying a disturbing indulgence from the police, are attempting to implement their racist practices in several areas, and only an anti-racist mass mobilization can neutralise them.

Two indices of the possibilities of rapid development since the second round of the elections – the meeting hastily organised by Antarsya on November 16 with more than 1,000 highly motivated participants, and the next day, the commemoration of the massacre of students at the Athens Polytechnic by the military junta in 1973 – a 50,000 strong demonstration, with a lot of youth, and several tens of thousands in Thessalonika. Reviving the hope of being able to win by actually constructing together against the policies of poverty as the only way forward, that is the crucial issue for the weeks and months to come.

Reflections on the Israeli occupation, the Palestinian Authority and the future of the national movement

JULIEN SALINGUE ·

I intend here to try to identify the major coordinates of the situation in the Palestinian territories even if I do not aspire to give a complete picture. It amounts however to redefining current events in their context and their historicity, by advancing an analysis of the underlying trends and realities on the ground, then identifying the logic at work on the Palestinian side by focusing on the PA in Ramallah and on the left. The latter, in particular the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), is indeed taking a critical review of the Oslo years, conscious of the tragic course followed by the forces originating from the PLO. Consequently, the PFLP recently announced it was suspending its participation in the meetings of the PLO leadership as a sign of protest against the resumption of direct talks by Abbas. This is not the first time that the PFLP has taken such a decision, but it is still significant.

But it is the meaning of recent and current developments that I wish to emphasize, first reviewing the legacy of 17 years of the "peace process". I will then attempt to establish the specificities of the policy of Salam Fayyad, the de facto Prime Minister (the list headed by Fayyad won only 2.4% of the votes in the general election of 2006 and the government he has led since June 2007 has never won the necessary vote of confidence of the Palestinian Legislative Council), and then, finally, examine the current dynamics of the rest of the "non-Islamic" Palestinian national movement (this is not to minimize the importance of Hamas but a study of the

internal dynamics of the Islamic movement deserves a full article).

1. 17 years of the "peace process"

The fiction of the "peace process"

Since words have a meaning, it is appropriate to question the concept of a "peace process", which returns as a refrain in Middle Eastern reality. In its most common sense, the "Israeli-Palestinian peace process" opened in the early 1990s, and was embodied in the signing of the Oslo Accords (1993-1994), which promised, in the view of a number of commentators and diplomats, "the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict". This "peace process" has been repeatedly "interrupted", but it still exists, suspended over events, waiting to be "revived".

The reality is very different, as the Palestinians have reminded us on at least two occasions during the last ten years - in September 2000, when the population of Gaza and West Bank revolted to express its anger against the continuation of Israeli occupation, colonization and repression, and in January 2006, when Palestinians, in parliamentary elections, elected a parliament largely dominated by Hamas, a political organisation openly hostile to the negotiated process and advocating the continuation of resistance, including military resistance, against Israel.

Had the Palestinians gone mad? No. The Palestinians, unlike diplomats, live in Palestine. They saw the number of settlers in the West Bank and Jerusalem double between 1993 and 2000. They saw hundreds of Israeli roadblocks and dozens of reserved roads for settlers, subordinating the slightest movement to the goodwill of the Israeli authorities. They saw Jerusalem cut off from

the rest of the West Bank. They saw the Gaza Strip cut off from the rest of the world. They saw, from September 2000 onwards, unprecedented Israeli repression, thousands of houses destroyed, tens of thousands of arrests, thousands of dead and tens of thousands wounded. They saw a wall, which encloses them in ghettos. They have seen neither peace nor its process.

The Oslo Accords: occupation by other means

"Since the beginning, we can identify two underlying conceptions in the Oslo process. The first is that the process should reduce the cost of the occupation through a Palestinian puppet regime with Arafat in the role of Chief Constable responsible for Israel security. The other is that the process should lead to the collapse of Arafat and the PLO. The humiliation of Arafat, his ever more flagrant capitulation will gradually lead to the loss of popular support. The PLO is going to collapse or succumb to internal strife. (...). And it will be easier to justify the worst oppression when the enemy is a fanatical Islamic organization" (translated from T. Reinhart, "Détruire la Palestine", éditions La Fabrique, 2002, p. 42).

These lines, written in February 1994 by the Israeli academic Tanya Reinhart, appear, a posteriori, prophetic. But Reinhart was not psychic - she understood, before others, what the Oslo process really was. Almost anyone who reads the texts signed from 1993 realizes very well that they amount to quite another matter to "peace agreements". Critical issues such as the future of Jerusalem, the plight of Palestinian refugees, Israeli settlements and so on are absent from the agreements and are put back to hypothetical "negotiations on final status". There is no mention of "withdrawal" of the Israeli army from the occupied territories, but only its "redeployment".

Whatever the intentions or the illusions of Palestinian negotiators as to the formation of a hypothetical "Palestinian State", the truth of Oslo is elsewhere: Israel, which then occupied the whole of

Palestine, undertook to withdraw gradually from the largest Palestinian towns and to entrust the management of them to an administrative entity designed for the occasion, the Palestinian Authority (PA). The PA was to take over the management of these areas and to demonstrate that it was able to maintain calm, by means of a "strong police force", "progress" in the negotiated process was subject to the "good results" of the PA in the security area. Continued occupation and settlement, with the PA responsible for maintaining order in Palestinian society. The colonial order therefore.

The contradictions of Israel and Zionism

The Oslo Accords were, in their logic, a rehash of an old Israeli project known as the "Allon Plan" (see Gilbert Achcar, "Zionism and peace – from the Allon Plan to the Washington Accords in Achcar, "The Eastern Cauldron", Monthly Review, 2004). From the name of a Labour Party General, the plan, submitted to Prime Minister Levi Eshkol in July 1967, was intended to respond to the new situation created by the war of June 1967, through which Israel had conquered, among other things, all Palestine. Yigal Allon had identified, before many others, the contradictions which Israel and the Zionist project would sooner or later face and proposed to resolve them as pragmatically as possible.

When, at the end of the 19th century the early Zionist movement fixed as its objective the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine, 95% of the inhabitants of this land were non-Jews. Convinced that European anti-Semitism revealed the impossibility of Jews living with European nations, the Zionists advocated their departure to Palestine so that they could become a majority and establish their own state. The first Zionist Congress (1897) therefore endorsed the principle of "systematic colonization of Palestine", in an era where nationalism on an ethnic basis and colonialism had the wind in their sails.

In November 1947 the United Nations adopted the principle of "sharing of Palestine" between a Jewish State (55% of the territory) and an Arab State

(45%). Jews then represented approximately 1/3 of the population. The armed forces of the new state of Israel conquered militarily a number of regions notionally allocated to the Arab State: by 1949 Israel controlled 78% of Palestine. So as to preserve the Jewish character of the State, non-Jews were systematically expelled: 80% of the Palestinians, or 800,000 of them were forced into exile. They have never been able to return to their lands.

The war of 1967 was less successful than that of 1948. If the Israeli military victory was undeniable and Israel now controlled 100% of Palestine, this time the Palestinians did not leave. Israel purports to be a "Jewish and democratic" state: to assign rights to the Palestinians is to renounce the Jewish character of the state; not to assign them means abandoning its democratic pretensions. Allon proposed to abandon the most densely populated Palestinian areas assigning them a semblance of autonomy while retaining control over the bulk of the conquered territories: Palestinian islands in the midst of an Israeli ocean.

From the war of stones to electoral intifada

It was the philosophy of the Allon Plan that guided Israeli governments in the 1970s and 1980s, even if they put off for as long as possible the time when they would provide some rights to the Palestinians. The first Intifada (which occurred in late 1987) - a massive and prolonged uprising of the population of the West Bank and Gaza - changed the situation. At the turn of the 1990s the Palestinian issue was a factor of instability in the Middle East, a strategic area in which the United States wanted to ensure their grip after the fall of the Soviet Union. The US administration forced Israel to negotiate the Oslo Accords, which "provide" the Palestinians with a semblance of autonomy in the most densely populated areas.

Yitzhak Rabin, often described as "someone through whom peace could have happened", was very clear: "The state of Israel will incorporate most of the land of Israel at the time of the British mandate with beside it a Palestinian entity which will be

a home for the majority of Palestinians living in the West Bank and in Gaza. We wish that this entity is less than a state and that it administers independently the lives of the Palestinians who are under its authority. (...) The borders of the state of Israel will be beyond the lines that existed before the Six Day War. We will not return to the June 4, 1967 lines" (address to the Knesset by Prime Minister Rabin on the Israel - Palestinian Interim Agreement, October 5, 1995 available on the website of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs). He added that Israel would annex the majority of the settlements and retain sovereignty over Jerusalem, its "one and indivisible capital", and the Jordan Valley.

The Palestinian population quickly noted that Israel did not intend to give up control of virtually all of Palestine: settlement was accelerating, evictions multiplied and Palestinians were increasingly confined to areas surrounded by the army and the settlements. Whereas the situation of the population was deteriorating, a privileged minority, members of or relatives of the leadership of the new Palestinian Authority, considerably enriched themselves and cooperated with Israel in a conspicuous manner in the security and economic fields: in September 2000, the Palestinians rose again.

The "second Intifada" was crushed by Israel, which further marginalized Yasser Arafat, considered too reluctant to sign a final surrender agreement. Israel and the United States favoured the rise of Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) who participated, for example, in a summit with Bush and Sharon, in June 2003, when Arafat was locked in Ramallah. At the death of the old leader, Abu Mazen was elected President of the Palestinian Authority in January 2005 (with a relatively low participation, and no Hamas candidate). Since Abu Mazen needed parliamentary legitimacy to accept an agreement with Israel, parliamentary elections were held in January 2006. The victory of Hamas was indubitable: by their vote the people had clearly signified their rejection of any surrender, and their willingness to continue to struggle.

The end of the Oslo parenthesis

The victory of Hamas revealed the totally unrealistic character of the "Oslo project", understood as the possibility of settling the Palestinian question by the establishment of cantons administered by a native government that would be both conciliatory with Israel, legitimate and stable. But the "international community" did not wish to hear it: there was a boycott of the Hamas government, support for the Israeli blockade on Gaza, recognition of the "emergency government" appointed by Abu Mazen in the West Bank and so on. The United States and the European Union continue to act as if a "return to Oslo" was possible and desirable.

However, as has been seen, it was precisely the "peace process" which led to the "second Intifada" and the takeover by Hamas, then the only organisation capable of combining both material support for the people, criticism of the negotiated process and further resistance to Israel. When some talk of a vital "return to the situation before September 2000", one would like to ask them if it was not precisely the "situation before September 2000" that provoked the September 2000 uprising!

The dithering and diplomatic posturing at work actually reflected a note of failure. All progressively became aware of the end of the Oslo parenthesis, and while some are blindly struggling to resurrect a corpse, others seek alternatives: the proclamation of a Palestinian State without borders, a Jordanian administration of Palestinian cantons, the deployment of UN troops to Gaza, the ideas keep coming, ever more fanciful. This willingness to "find a solution" is actually an understanding, even if a partial one, of the two logics really at work on the ground: the strengthening the Israeli grip on the West Bank and Jerusalem, notably through the increasingly strong integration of the Palestinian Authority in the apparatus of colonial oppression; the remobilization of the Palestinian population and the development of the international solidarity movement.

The strengthening of the Israeli grip

Let's talk about Jerusalem, firstly. Attention has been focused for a few days on a tender for the construction of 238 new housing units. So what? Have we forgotten the 200,000 settlers living in Jerusalem and its suburbs? Or the dozens of evictions and demolitions of Palestinian homes in recent months? The 238 new housing units are not an accident, they fit into a logic consistent since 1967: the Judaization of Jerusalem and its isolation from the rest of the Palestinian territories, to counter any claim to Palestinian sovereignty over the city.

Let's talk, then, about the West Bank, including its vaunted "economic development". If the influx of international aid allows the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah to pay officials, it is very daring to speak of a real economic recovery and substantial and sustainable improved living conditions for the population. Palestinian GDP increased overall in 2009 but is 35% lower than in 1999. In addition, this overall increase conceals gross disparities: the building sector certainly grew by 24%, but agricultural production dropped by 17%.

In addition Israeli control over the West Bank has not been called into question: "the apparatus of control has become increasingly sophisticated and effective in its ability to affect all aspects of Palestinian life (...). The apparatus of control includes a system of permits, physical barriers (...) prohibited entry into large parts of the West Bank (...). The West Bank has been turned into a fragmented set of economic and social enclaves isolated from each other" ("Checkpoints and Barriers: Searching for Livelihoods in the West Bank and Gaza", available on the site of the World Bank). These are the words of the World Bank, in a report of February 2010.

In addition, during the ten months of the "temporary freeze" on settlement last November, Israel allowed the establishment of 3,600 dwellings, pursuing a policy that last year saw the number of settlers in the West Bank increase by 4.9% while the Israeli population as a whole grew by 1.8%. Last but not least, on March 3 of this year Netanyahu stated that even in the case of agreement with the

Palestinians, Israel would not waive its control over the Jordan Valley.

Let's talk about Gaza, finally. Under blockade, Gazans are living through an unprecedented economic and social disaster. In the space of two years, 95% of companies have closed and 98% of jobs in the private sector have been destroyed. The list of products that have been or are still prohibited from importation includes books, tea, coffee, matches, candles, semolina, pencils, shoes, mattress, sheets, cups, and musical instruments. Prohibition on the importation of cement and chemicals prevents the reconstruction of infrastructure destroyed during the bombings of 2008-2009, whether of housing or sewage facilities, with health consequences that we can imagine.

In such conditions, it is not surprising that the Palestinian mobilization has resumed, with the development of "popular resistance" structures in many villages, protests against the wall and settlements, and that the majority of Palestinians have no illusions in the "resumption of negotiations".

II. The Palestinian Authority "Fayyad version"

A "silence against food" plan

The strengthening of the Israeli grip on Palestinian territories cannot be understood without considering the role played by the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, led by President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. In June 2007, following the failed coup in Gaza by Fatah's Muhammad Dahlan, MP President Abu Mazen decreed a state of emergency and appointed a new cabinet headed by Salam Fayyad, in place of a government dominated by Hamas. Fayyad's list had obtained only 2 seats out of 132 in the parliamentary elections of January 2006. But Fayyad, a former senior official at the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, was the Prime Minister wanted by the United States and the European Union. The blackmail of financial aid, suspended since the election of Hamas, limited the reserves of Abu Mazen as to this "choice".

Fayyad therefore took office in mid-June 2007 and undertook to conduct a series of reforms in the Palestinian territories on the West Bank. Three years later, it is quite easy to understand the role assigned to Fayyad: to disarm resistance and move the centre of gravity of Palestine politics to economics, normalizing relations with Israel. He acted to impose what I call a "silence against food" plan, whose objective is to stabilize the territories of West Bank, trying to significantly improve the life of a portion of the population and repressing opponents without however meeting Palestinian national claims.

"Economic peace"?

The year 2007 seems to have marked a change in the management of the Palestinian question. The rhetoric of "economic peace" between Israel and the Palestinians dominated, whether from Tony Blair (special envoy for the "Quartet"), Salam Fayyad (the Palestinian Prime Minister) or his Israeli counterparts (Ehud Olmert then Benjamin Netanyahu).

The general philosophy of the doctrine of "economic peace" is as follows: the precondition for any negotiated settlement of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is a significant improvement of the economic conditions in which the latter evolve. Priority should therefore be put on Israeli measures allowing better economic development in the Palestinian territories and a strengthening of the support of donor countries to the Palestinian economy.

The doctrine of "economic peace" is a paradigm shift in the management of the Palestinian question: it considers the Palestinians as individuals seeking to meet needs and not as a people claiming collective national rights. For Fayyad and his foreign supporters, it amounted not so much to breaking with the PA's "economic policy" during the Oslo years as to advance and promote it as the key to any settlement of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

Breaking with certain past practices, the Fayyad government has evidently "clarified" the PA's accounts and put an end to some clientelist practices. But the logic at work since Oslo nevertheless continued. Fayyad's "new economic policy" resembles that of the PA in the 1990s: favours granted to foreign investors at the expense of local entrepreneurs (such as tax exemptions), development of the most profitable sectors (shops, apartments and hotels in Ramallah, new mobile telephony lines) and enhanced priority in the PA budget for the "security sector", which has a budget equivalent to the cumulative budgets of the "Access to education" and "Improving the quality of health services" programmes (in gross figures, from December 2008 to June 2009, 1,325 posts were created in security and 94 posts suppressed in health and safety) ("Palestinian Reform and Development Plan", available at http://www.mop.gov.ps/web_files/issues_file/PRDP-en.pdf and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS)).

The Palestinian economic growth announced in 2009 is, according to available data, a sham. Behind the apparently impressive figures (+ 6.8%) lurk many disparities related to the logic outlined above: the sectors boosting growth are construction (+ 22%) and employment services (+ 11%), while industrial production increased slightly and agricultural production is down; the amount invested in projects for economic development (\$400 million) is far less than what had been planned by the Fayyad government (\$1.2 billion); disparities between economic enclaves are important, especially between the West Bank and Gaza, as well as between some dynamic cities (Ramallah, Bethlehem) and the rest of the West Bank; Israel still severely controls Palestinian imports and exports. Furthermore, the budget deficit is significant (\$1.59 billion, or 26% of GDP) and maintains the PA in total economic dependence on the donor countries; finally, even if unemployment is declining in the West Bank between one-half and two-thirds of Palestinian households now live below the poverty

line (according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) and IMF figures).

The current apparent prosperity does not correspond to a real economic empowerment in relation to Israel or donor countries. The Palestinian economy remains a subordinate economy dependent on Israeli decisions, the requirements of donors and investors who, taking literally the slogan of the Palestine Investment Conference organized in 2008 with the support of the Fayyad government – "You can do business in Palestine" – are developing a form of casino economy: little concerned with real, local and long term development they hope to rapidly recoup far more than they have put in, while knowing that the risk of losing everything is very high. Everything currently indicates that the "economic peace" acolytes will learn sooner or later, at their own expense, that the population of the occupied territories is not ready to monetize its rights against a relative, temporary and structurally artificial "economic upturn", which in reality benefits only a minority of the population. Hence the second part of Fayyad's policy: repression.

The reconstruction of the security apparatus

During the Arafat era, the security forces (law enforcement and cooperation with Israel on the one hand, participation, from September 2000 in armed operations against Israel on the other) had an ambiguous role which was one of the basic contradictions of the Oslo process: "Since the Oslo Accords and the emergence of the Palestinian Authority (...), the fundamental Palestinian strategic dilemma was that of reconciliation between the claims of national liberation, resistance to the occupation and the prerequisites of state-building (...). The Palestinian Authority faces two conflicting requirements. It is expected to impose the force of law, and prevent any unofficial armed demonstration. But at the same time (...) it is supposed to support the Palestinian national cause, including the right to resistance" (Hussein Agha and Ahmad S. Khalidi, "A Framework for A Palestinian National Security Doctrine", Chatham House, London,

2006, pp. 84-86). With the Abbas-Fayyad tandem the ambiguities are lifted. The two programmatic documents prepared by the Palestinian Authority from June 2007 are very compelling in this respect.

The first of them, the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP), was presented to the Paris Conference of Donor Countries in December 2007. It obviously pleased the Western countries who promised Fayyad 7.7 billion dollars, when the PA had "only" claimed 5.6. Or an increase of 37.5%. Rather rare. In its final version, the PRDP contains 148 pages. The word "resistance" does not appear once. The word "security" appears 155 times.

The second programmatic document dates from August 2009 and is entitled "Ending the occupation, Establishing the State" (available at http://www.mop-gov.ps/issues_main.php?id=13). It is better known as the "Fayyad Plan". The Prime Minister sets out his vision for the construction of a Palestinian state via a policy of "Facts on the ground": it amounts to building the infrastructure of the future state despite occupation, with the perspective of a declaration of independence in 2011. Fayyad has therefore made a major reversal: it is the process of state-building which will put an end to the occupation and not the end of the occupation which will help build a state. If we carry out the same word count in this document as in the PRDP, the result is practically the same: 37 pages, with 38 occurrences of the term "security", while the word "resistance" appears once, in a sentence indicating that the Government will support non-violent initiatives against the construction of the wall.

The general balance of both documents is in line with these quantitative elements: Fayyad assumes and claims the status of "technocrat", since he does not originate from the seraglio of the PLO; alongside "economic development", the recasting of the security services is one of his priorities. "The Government will complete the restructuring of the security (...) agencies." It will provide sustainable training, equipment and infrastructure to enable the security sector to improve their performance. "In order to achieve the highest professional stan-

dards, the government will make the security agencies responsible by promoting the separation of powers and developing mechanisms and supervisory bodies". (ibid, p.16).

The reconstruction of the security apparatus takes place according to 4 guidelines:

- Reform of the security services, including retirement and replacement of several of their leaders by individuals thought close to the United States (for example, in 2008, Hazem Atallah was appointed head of police in the West Bank, instead of Kamal Sheikh, a member of Fatah, but judged too conciliatory with respect to Hamas).
- A strengthening of these services, through the training, in camps in Jordan, of thousands of new recruits, under US supervision.
- Spectacular operations "re-establishing order" in 2008, involving a large number of police officers and soldiers, notably in Nablus, Jenin and Hebron.
- The multiplication of arrests of members or supporters of Hamas, and, to a lesser extent, those of left organisations and the popular committees.

It is the articulation of these four points which gives consistency to the security policy of Abu Mazen and Salam Fayyad. Most of the new leaders (national and local) of the security services have no past as leaders of the intifada or Fatah's armed groups. They are "security professionals", especially zealous, who carry little political baggage. Similarly, the new recruits trained in Jordan were chosen primarily from among the poorer, less educated and less politicized Palestinian population, not from the Fatah activist layers. They are more likely to obey orders, including when acting to disarm members of Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Fatah's al-Aqsa Brigades, with whom they have no common militant past.

The Palestinian Authority has exploited the situation of security chaos in some cities in the West Bank since the dismantling of the Palestinian security forces in 2002-2003 by Israel. In Nablus and Jenin, armed gangs multiplied, kidnapping traders,

stealing cars and offering their services to whoever needed mercenaries to perform any kind of dirty work. The PA has stated that it was only to put an end to this chaotic situation that "restoration of order" operations were carried out. The massive deployment of hundreds of armed men effectively put an end to gang activities.

But the disarmament of the last resistance groups, the second objective of these operations coordinated with Israel and US advisers, led to a series of incidents: in Nablus and Jenin, there were violent clashes between security forces and militants of the al-Aqsa Brigades or Islamic Jihad. There were dead and wounded, including bystanders who came under fire from recruits who had obviously been poorly trained by the Jordanians.

These events marked the end of the period, opened in October 2000, of armed resistance in the West Bank. They were the last sign of refusal by the fighters themselves of the disarmament policy initiated by the PA, which has led hundreds of members of the al-Aqsa Brigades (including, in 2008, 250 in the Nablus district alone) to publicly renounce the armed struggle in exchange for an amnesty from Israel and hundreds of members of Hamas to lay down their arms under the pressure of the security forces. It is difficult to obtain reliable estimates as figures vary according to the sources, but it can be established that almost 2,000 members or supporters of Hamas have gone through PA prisons in the past two years.

It is also important to note here that there have been relatively few armed incidents during arrests of Hamas militants, unlike what has happened with Islamic Jihad and sometimes even the Brigades, which appears to confirm that Hamas has decided to avoid a confrontation with the PA in the West Bank and an unnecessary battle for "autonomous zones" actually controlled by Israel. Hamas seems content in reality to "manage" the Gaza Strip (Hamas is in a relatively contradictory position, as a political current built and developed in the 1990s and 2000s around rejection of the PA and Oslo, it is today in a position of managing the PA apparatus

in Gaza in a manner which resembles Fatah's previous management with a monopoly over the security services, repression of opposition, development of clientelism and so on. See Yezid Sayigh, "Hamas Rule in Gaza: 3 Years on" at <http://www.brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/meb41.html>).

In summary, the reconstruction of the security apparatus under the Fayyad government is the expression of a new "phase" of the Palestinian Authority: the ambiguities that existed under Arafat have been definitively lifted: as real back-up troops for the Israeli occupation forces the Palestinian security services have obtained the recognition of the colonial authorities. US general Keith Dayton, the architect of the recasting of the Palestinian security services has said: "I don't know how many of you know, but in the course of the past year and a half, the Palestinians have committed to (...) what they call offensive security throughout the West Bank, surprisingly well coordinated with the Israeli army in a serious and sustained effort to return law and order (...) and restore the authority of the Palestinian Authority. First in Nablus and then Jenin, Hebron and Bethlehem, they have drawn the attention of the Israeli military establishment thanks to their dedication, their discipline, their motivation and their results" (Speech by General Dayton to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 7 May 2009, available at www.washingtoninstitute.org/html/pdf/Dayton-Keynote.pdf).

It is by taking into account all these elements that it is possible to speculate on the future of the national movement. In the following section, I will advance hypotheses, while taking into account the instability and uncertainty that characterize the current period.

III. What future for the national movement?

Fatah

The Oslo Accords and the constitution of the PA have been a major rupture for the Palestinian na-

tional movement, reducing the Palestinian question to that of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and fixing as Fatah's main tasks the construction of a state apparatus without a state and cooperation, sometimes at a forced march, with Israel to get more in the negotiated process, to the detriment of the daily struggle against the occupation and for the return of refugees.

These were the dynamics recorded during the last Fatah Congress (August 2009), which played a revelatory role rather than giving the signal for a new beginning. Fatah militants who are actors in the struggle for liberation are very much in the minority in the new leadership. The majority of the Central Committee of the movement, elected in 2009, now consists of pure products of the "Oslo years" and the PA apparatus even if they have an activist past: ministers, former ministers, and former advisors of Arafat or Abu Mazen, former security force chiefs, "negotiators", senior officials and so on. The whole panel of "Oslo political personnel" is here. In addition, the strong presence of representatives of the economic and security sectors embodies PA policy since its takeover by the Abbas-Fayyad duo.

Other elements confirm this trend: the virtual disappearance from the CC of representatives of the Palestinian people in exile, over which the PA has no jurisdiction (a single representative, Sultan Abu al-Aynayn, leader of Fatah in Lebanon) and Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, who the PA "lost" in June 2007; the non-election of Hussam Khadr, a respected figure in Fatah, known for his militant activities and criticism of PA policy; a "recount" at the last minute which allowed at-Tayyib Abdul Rahim, President Abbas's deputy, to "win" 26 votes and thus be finally elected to the CC after initially being defeated, and so on.

Passing from national liberation movement to main actor in the construction of a state apparatus under occupation, Fatah is henceforth no longer a political organization that can claim to represent the Palestinian people in a coherent way. The Bethlehem Congress in August 2009 sanctioned

this state of affairs, even if the organization still has a number of honest and sincere militants and cadre in its ranks: Fatah is a conglomerate of local baronies and clientelist networks of a quasi-mafia type, under the control of an unelected regime which has not hesitated to censor information, or to track down, imprison, or even kill its opponents when it has not delivered them to Israel in joint operations.

The left in the Oslo years

With the Oslo accords, the Israelis and Americans managed to marginalize the PLO to the benefit of the PA. Thus the PLO, which represented Palestinians living in the occupied territories and the Palestinian diaspora, became a reference point without a political and decision-making role, the latter having been confiscated by Arafat and the small group of adepts originating or not from the PLO who formed the Palestinian Authority.

The PA political agenda was fixed by the Oslo accords: negotiate with Israel (and it promised the Palestinian people that this would lead to an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital), ensure the security of the state of Israel against any attack of Palestinian origin and assume the responsibilities of the management of the daily life of the Palestinian autonomous areas.

The Palestinian left political groups opposed to the Oslo process quickly saw that Oslo "was a fact that had to be dealt with." They belonged to the PLO and justified their attitude by their desire not to cut themselves off from the process led by the PA. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and the Palestinian People's Party (PPP, the former Palestinian Communist Party) [1] were quick to reintegrate into the political game structured by the PA. Even today, DFLP and PPP members participate in the Fayyad government, which the PFLP has refused to join.

The weakness of the Palestinian left organizations is recognized in all polls and elections and this chimes in with the observations which can be made

on the ground: weakness of organized demonstrations, lack of public profile (with the notable exception of the annual PFLP festival in Gaza), absence of distribution of an activist press. Sad to say, hard to believe: these parties now exist mainly, especially in the West Bank, through the diffusion of press releases and their websites.

How can we explain this deteriorating situation for organizations that had experienced a real boom during the first Intifada? The Palestinian people's expectations were not modified by Oslo. To their previous demands were added those for an improvement of the performance of the PA in the autonomous areas, marked by corruption and incompetence. Putting an end to this situation has become critical. But these problems have not really concerned the left political currents. A few personalities tried to speak out, but they were cut off from any collective organisation and easily countered by the PA, such as those who have signed the appeal of the 20 (against corruption and the capitulations of the PA), at the end of 1999, including several who were then arrested on the orders of Arafat.

By the admission of their leaders themselves, a considerable gap opened between the Palestinian people and the Palestinian left political organizations. The leaderships of the political parties have acted in fact only in response to the PA and Arafat initiatives. One can measure this distancing of links with popular concerns through the practice that these organizations have shared with the PA in the bureaucratic construction and administration of mass movements.

"Mass" movements

Take the case of the trade unions of which the most important is the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU). It is a unified trade union. After Oslo unification came about by imposing quotas of representation for the four major national political currents: Fatah, the PFLP, DFLP and PPP. From the national level to that of the professional branches and territorial districts the distribution of roles was in line with these quotas. At all levels gen-

eral secretaries belong to Fatah, while others must confine themselves to participation in the designated leadership bodies. Fatah was in a dominant position while other currents, and in particular the PPP, which had a tradition of trade unionism, have seen their influence considerably decrease since the "unification" at the top.

The PGFTU is therefore entirely under the influence of Fatah. By their presence originating from a bureaucratic compromise, the others condone it. Remember that the PA is the largest employer in the West Bank and Gaza! The democratic process in the union is non-existent, as are elections or programs likely to increase the participation of workers. Moreover the activity of the union is generally limited to settling individual situations of conflict between workers and bosses.

The situation of the women's rights movement is also instructive. The Palestinian Women General Federation was formed after Oslo. It is the result of co-optation of women's committees belonging to different political organizations with few ties to Palestinian women facing inequalities in all areas of society. Other women's organizations have been converted by NGOs, thus agreeing to become organizations rendering services to women in the Palestinian community. This is done in accordance with programmes decided by foreign funders who have transformed the organisations into service providers and women into passive beneficiaries, increasing the gap between the mass of women and the co-opted leadership of the movement.

Also the role of the student movement has considerably weakened. While it was a real nursery of political cadres in the 1980s in particular, which weighed on the policies of different parties because it played an important role in the struggle against occupation, it now only reflects the balance of forces between the different political factions.

This is the reality of the "mass organizations" in Palestine, due on the one hand to their dependence on the political parties as co-opted structures and on the other their reliance on the PA and foreign

donors who pay millions of dollars in subsidies to create a passive set of beneficiaries dependent on benefits approved and not a movement of actors in struggle for their rights.

Because of the lack of development of real mass organizations the political forces have reduced their action to social activism striving to respond to requests for assistance in the problems of everyday life, abandoning the field of political struggle and leaving a corrupt Authority to lock the national struggle into the impasse of endless negotiations with Israel

This is obviously not the place to make value judgments on the political paths of the left organizations. Most of the reflections above stem from discussions with the activists and leaders of these organizations, who are increasingly likely to take a critical view of the Oslo years, even if these criticisms have not yet had any organisational translation.

Ongoing reconstruction?

The isolation of the Gaza Strip and the fragmentation of the West Bank into dozens of territorial entities separated from each other by Israeli checkpoints have greatly reduced all economic, social and political activity. This confronts all those who wish, in one way or another, to continue resistance, with a major difficulty: not only do the situations vary depending on the autonomous areas, but above all it is more difficult in these conditions to develop a "national" political project. Difficulty in moving, coming together to carry out common activities across the territory - all factors which considerably hamper anyone who attempts to organize united resistance across the Palestinian territories.

The Israeli repression continues: raids, bombings, extra-judicial assassinations are legion. There are now also 12,000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, and despite some media releases this number is steadily increasing. By way of comparison, proportional to the number of inhabitants, it is as if there were 200,000 political prisoners in France.

Economic asphyxiation has led almost all of the inhabitants of the Palestinian territories to worry more about their survival than the struggle for emancipation: rampant unemployment and rising prices (the price of basic necessities has doubled in the space of a year) affect the whole of Palestinian society and have led to an increasingly significant dichotomy between everyday problems and the struggle for national liberation, as well as an increase in individualist ideologies and behaviour.

This situation causes major psychological damage. Everyday prisoners, prisoners in their "autonomous zone", the Palestinians find it increasingly difficult to project in time and space, which has two major consequences: a turning back to the town, village, camp, family... and an inability to think about medium or long term projects. Conditions which greatly penalize those who attempt to rethink a collective liberation project which necessarily implies a vision free of contingencies on a daily basis and any form of local and/or family retreat.

The "second Intifada" is very much over, and marked by a major defeat on the military, political and ideological levels. A number of questions are openly posed, which underpin, in fact, the Palestinian national question in the light of 1948 and all that has happened since, in society and among activists and political forces. One might summarize these queries in five generic questions even if the discussion is not organised and clearly formulated, but rather diffuse across the Palestinian territories:

– What is the meaning today of the claim for an independent Palestinian State alongside Israel, even on a transitional basis? The West Bank has been integrated into Israel, economically, politically, demographically. Under these conditions what relevance does the claim for an independent state which, for Israel, never meant anything other than a few isolated cantons, surrounded by walls, without any viability, have?

– What linkage is there between popular resistance, involving the whole of Palestinian society, the trade union and associative movement, political force, and armed resistance?

– How is it possible to reunite all of the Palestinian people? The Palestinian population is in fact severely divided: Palestinians within Israel (today 1.1 million), Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza (nearly 4 million), Jerusalem Palestinians (250,000) and exiled Palestinians (over 6 million).

– What political framework should the national liberation movement have? The division of the movement weakens the struggle considerably and the establishment of a common framework, beyond the old PLO, posing the question of resistance and the struggle for emancipation, and not that of the management of autonomous areas allocated by Israel is, if as yet only relatively, openly posed.

– What links should be developed with the international solidarity movement so that this solidarity is political and non-charitable, effective, and not just symbolic? And how, *inter alia*, should we revitalise the solidarity movement as a whole with the most consensual slogan in the associative, trade union and Palestinian political movement, that of the total boycott (economic, political, diplomatic, academic, cultural) of Israel, which has proven its worth in the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa?

In June 2009, a number of left activists and officials organized an international conference in Ramallah, with the intention of, beyond the traditional divisions between left-wing organizations, establishing the bases of a new Palestinian nationalist, democratic, progressive left. The initiative has received a significant echo, and hundreds of people, from various left currents and "non-corrupt" NGOs participated in the debates, raising the questions that I have just set out. The front which should be formed, *Tayyar*, has not yet emerged, due to lack of financial resources, local implementation and a number of ideological clarifications. But this initiative shows the potential of the situation and the

availability of many sincere Palestinian militants for the reconstruction of an authentic left, drawing the balance sheet of past failures.

The Zionist project involves the denial and the destruction of Palestinian society and identity. The defeat of the "second Intifada", the bankruptcy of the PA, the course followed by the Hamas, all significantly reduce the margins of manoeuvre for those who still want to resist. However, in particular among former activists of PFLP or Fatah militants, many initiatives are nevertheless taken, especially in the refugee camps, where those who have nothing to gain from a "truce" leading to a partial agreement are located.

Their goal is twofold:

– to maintain, at all costs, the essential demands of the Palestinian people, in particular those of the right of return of refugees. That involves the organization of exhibitions, meetings between the young and the old, once expelled by Zionist militias, street demonstrations, and every kind of event aimed at transmitting the heritage and continuing to raise the demand.

– Beyond that, it is simply about resisting the Zionist enterprise of sociocide, restoring meaning to collective action, combating individualistic responses, maintaining and reconstructing the spirit of resistance in a period of downturn: women's associations, agricultural cooperatives, trade unions independent of the PA, committees of prisoners' families, village committees, cultural centres in the refugee camps and so on.

Beyond political cleavages, it is about dealing with the inadequacies of the PA and political parties, saving what remains to be saved of Palestinian society and reconstructing, gradually, the spirit of resistance, but also preparing future generations for the fight. Everyone knows that in a society where more than 50% of the population is aged less than 15, a new generation will rise up against its oppressors, Israeli, but also, where appropriate, Palestinian. When will this happen? Nobody can say exactly. But it is certain that the people will not

wait for the remaking of the national movement, its program and its strategy or an agreement between the Palestinian forces to revolt again. It is on the

other hand the latter factors, as well as the success of the initiatives described above, that will determine the character and outcome of this uprising.

FRANCE

A beautiful Indian summer of social mobilization

FRED BORRAS ·

Although he had not announced this reform at the time of his election campaign and had at that time confirmed that he would keep his commitment not to touch the legal retirement age, which was fixed at 60 years, Sarkozy made a volte-face. His bill, as adopted by Parliament, aims in particular at raising the age for retirement from 60 to 62, raising the age at which you can retire with a full pension from 65 to 67 and lengthening the duration of contributions necessary to obtain a full pension from 40 to 43 years.

To justify these radical choices, the government repeated a simple argument, that increased life expectancy would be likely to cause the bankruptcy of the French pension system. The avowed aim of saving the public pension system scarcely concealed the real one, which was to get rid of it.

The companies which want to generalize pension funds in France were not fooled. The group Malakoff Médéric, one of whose leading figures is the President's brother, Guillaume Sarkozy, who is also one of the principal figures of the Medef [4] lobbied in favour of the reform and prepared to launch its products on a massive scale. Throughout the mobilization, tens of thousands of civil servants received mails from Préfon, an insurance organization which offers contracts for complementary pensions.

Social polarization

The public pension system in France is one of the branches of the Social Security system, whose creation, obtained after 1945, was the result of decades of social struggles. Based on solidarity, it is in the eyes of the bourgeoisie an archaism and a nonsense

in a globalized capitalist world. From the point of view of the ruling classes, to destroy these remnants of solidarity is to release layers of profits which are "sleeping". There is no doubt about it; this offensive on the sector of pensions is part of an overall plan which also threatens unemployment and sickness benefits. This is a global offensive against Social Security, whose benefits have already been reduced on several occasions. It is taking place in a context of economic crisis and is part of the austerity programme which aims at purging the system in order to restore the rates of profit.

To put an end to the "French exception", i.e. to remodel the society of this country so as to align it with the rest of the developed capitalist world, to increase profits, that is the task that the bourgeoisie has set itself and which guides the policy of the government, which is entirely in the service of the bourgeoisie.

This reform could have gone through in the discreet silence of the salons of the Republic. The fact that it caused so much sound and fury constitutes a first victory for the partisans of the class struggle, among whom we count ourselves. It is also a first victory from the point of view of the need to make anger heard, to show the combativeness of those who refuse to pay for the crisis, all over the world. Clear about what was at stake, and yet without any guarantee concerning the possibility of forcing this right-wing government, which is "steady on its feet", millions of workers and young people moved into action. Participation in the days of strikes and demonstrations became stronger and stronger, in spite of the government's lies aimed at underestimating the numbers. According to the newspaper *Le Monde*, as a result of the turnover, 8 million people demonstrated at least once. That is quite simply colossal in a country of 65 million inhabi-

tants. The rejection of the government project, thus expressed, was confirmed by many opinion polls. The duration of the movement was also rather exceptional, since after the scale of the first days of action in May and June, which was already surprising, the mobilization lasted even after the definitive adoption of the law.

To these many-millioned days of action was added an ongoing strike movement of hundreds of thousands of workers and young people in a certain number of sectors. It concerned ports, oil refineries, rail transport, the refuse collectors of big cities like Marseilles and Toulouse, the employees of certain local and regional authorities and tens of thousands of young people, in particular school students. The ongoing strike in these sectors was combined with the increasing number of blockades. Airports, stations, industrial and commercial zones and crossroads were in turn the target of determined demonstrators. It was a question of simultaneously raising the level of mobilization, supporting the sectors that were on strike and having an effect on the economy in order to inflict losses on employers. An unprecedented phenomenon on this scale from a qualitative and quantitative point of view, this type of action made it possible to bring down the barriers between militants of different trade-union organizations and to help foster unity between organizations and solidarity among workers and with young people.

The government made considerable efforts to defuse the discontent. Since its "pedagogy" had not been particularly effective, we saw crude operations like the aborted attempt to divert attention onto law-and-order issues or onto the Roms, who were massively stigmatized during the summer; we saw the government playing on the fear of violence by targeted repression and by invoking threats of terrorist attacks. Nothing worked. Nothing, except attrition.

The need for and difficulties of the general strike

Although the movement considerably complicated the task of the government and contributed to

weakening and discrediting it, it could not prevent it from getting its reform through. That poses problems of a strategic order on which it is necessary to dwell.

Taking into account the scope of the attack and the level of determination of the government to impose it, it would have been necessary to strike much harder. Not to be satisfied with blocking this or that branch of industry but blocking the whole country. Only an ongoing general strike would have made that possible.

In spite of the conscious action of tens of thousands of workers and young people aimed at generalizing the mobilization it did not happen. Although the rejection of the government and its policies is obviously much stronger than in 1995, and although the days of action were more massive [5], the ongoing strike movement was weaker. There is not one single cause for this irrefutable fact. It is a mixture of closely related phenomena which explains it.

That relates first of all to a lack of confidence in the possibility of winning, of imposing the withdrawal of the bill. From this point of view, in certain sectors the weight of past defeats weighs negatively in the balance. Other important factors were the atomization of the working class, the extent of unemployment and precarious work, uncertainty about the future, the difficulty of "making ends meet". It should be noted that the level of household debt is today 10 per cent higher than it was in 1995. To overcome this last factor, millions of workers must become convinced that the strike will hit their wallet less hard than the consequences of defeat, quite simply because they are convinced that victory is within their grasp.

It is also necessary to examine the attitude of the leaderships of the big trade-union confederations. Nationally, the Solidaires union [6] which defended the need for the general strike from start to finish, was isolated on this position. Not being of the same nature, neither the leadership of the main confederation, the CGT [7], nor even more so that of the second, the CFDT [8], are motivated by radicalism,

the will to drive forward struggles to their maximum intensity, with the aim of inflicting, on the basis of a relationship of forces, defeats on the government. They are much more in the mould of "social dialogue", negotiation, compromise. If unity could be forged and could last in spite of the differences between the leaderships, in spite of the effects of inter-bureaucratic competition, if the calls for mobilization were multiplied, it was above all the result of the attitude of the government, which at no point wanted to make any concessions. However it was not for lack of overtures, on the side of the Thibault-Chereque duo, who asked for the opening of negotiations, without ever demanding the withdrawal of the project. It is also because the pressure came from the base. The first tests of mobilization showed a high level of readiness for action and trade-union activists on the ground wanted to push further and harder, also being conscious that their credibility, their utility, their role, depended on it. Showing what was possible, local inter-union co-ordinating committees, for example in the departments of Puy-de-Dôme, Haute-Garonne and Ardennes demonstrated greater combativeness, multiplying blockades involving workers from different sectors, adding departmental one-day strikes to those announced at a national level. These local one-day strikes were also successful, a sign that it was possible to go further.

The other weakness of the movement lies in the low level of self-organization of the struggles. Where the struggles were hardest, it was the inter-union co-ordinating committees in the workplaces which pushed the mobilizations forward and at same time kept control of their rhythms and forms. There was a generalized phenomenon: the weakness of participation in the general meetings held to decide to continue the strike or to organize the action contrasted with the massive character of participation in the one-day strikes and demonstrations. So it became impossible to get the struggle out of the cramped framework in which it was maintained, by the national inter-union coordination and in the different industries, sectors and workplaces, by

teams of local trade union officials who were too timid.

It is nevertheless the case that the attractiveness of the trade unions was reinforced by this mobilization. That can be seen with the naked eye. Above all the CGT, but also Solidaires and the FSU [9] are recruiting. And that is positive. Teams of radical young trade-union militants have emerged and that is an asset for the future.

Unity and its limits

Over and above their function of defence of workers' interests, it could also be seen that the population invested the trade unions with a political function of opposition to the government of the Right. That is logical when you see the crisis of credibility which affects the big institutional parties of the parliamentary opposition, and in the first place the Socialist Party. The SP sought to surf on the rejection of the Right in order to further its objective of a change of government in 2012 [10]. The principal leaders of the SP were present at the demonstrations, at the head of the contingent of their party. The fact that it was possible to constitute a broad front of the entire Left, political, trade-union and associative, against the Right, was a positive factor for the movement. But at the same time, the affair was difficult, so great is the proximity of the Socialists to the government on the fundamental issue. Sarkozy, Fillon and Woerth did not miss the opportunity to fustigate the duplicity of the SP, evoking the remarks of the current president of the IMF and potential socialist candidate at the future presidential election, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, in support of the reform. Nor did they have any difficulty underlining the contradictions of the SP whose principal leader, Martine Aubry, got herself in a pickle by approving the raising of the retirement age to 62 then backtracking. The PS has never demanded the withdrawal of the bill nor put forward measures for a really alternative programme, that is, one based on the sharing of wealth -and for good reason. As for the vote of the Socialist members of Parliament in favour of the provision of the

law concerning the lengthening of the duration of contributions, it was a resounding admission. Some SP leaders pushed this logic to the end. In Marseilles, in the city which appeared as the "capital of the strike", the principal leader of the local SP, Guerini, launched a joint appeal with the right-wing mayor, Gaudin, to stop the strike...

It is nonetheless the case that many militants and sympathizers of the SP took part in the movement. Like those of the other left parties, the Left Front [11], Lutte Ouvriere and the NPA. A unitary campaign of meetings, on the initiative of Attac and Copernic [12], made it possible to associate all these forces to distribute material with arguments against the law and to popularize alternative answers to the crisis to those of liberalism.

But differences also surfaced. While the generalization of the strike became the key question, the leaders of the Left Front, and above all Jean-Luc Mélenchon, conducted a battle for... the holding of a referendum. That does not only constitute an unattainable objective for various reasons, it also reveals fundamental differences with this anti-liberal and reformist current, which is regaining a certain influence in France. At the time of a full-scale political and social crisis, the leaders of the Left Front were seeking an institutional response. This way of approaching politics is based on a certain division of labour. The trade unions decide the calendar of mobilization. The parties find a political solution.

In the NPA, although we know that there exist differences of function between parties and trade unions and that these two types of organization have their specificities and their utility, we reject this mechanical and disjointed view of political action. What could be more political than the masses bursting onto the scene? What better solution than the majority of the population taking its destiny into its own hands? To affirm the need for the general strike is both to indicate the best way to win and to reinforce the political crisis, to allow it to crystallize, and solutions will appear with the overthrow of a government, with the defeat of its policies. When the opportunity to defend this solution

finds the ear of hundreds of thousands of workers in struggle, then it must be done. That should not certainly be put forward in a timeless or dogmatic fashion, but it is the most reliable strategic road to revolutionizing society. It is a strategy which is verified and refined through experiences drawn from the analysis of the course of the class struggle. From this point of view, the strategy combines both the patient but constant preparation of the confrontation between the majority of the population and the privileged minority and the search for the expression, for the consolidation of majorities with ideas which are radically opposed to the very organization of the system and which prefigure the outlines of an alternative society. Without exaggerating the significance of it, the fact that a big majority of the population is ready to defend a system based on solidarity constitutes a political victory in the fifth capitalist power of the planet. Because although the government won on the institutional terrain, with the adoption of a law, although it inflicted a defeat on millions of workers who will suffer from its policies, it did not succeed in convincing. It lost on the terrain of public opinion. It lost on the idea that its policy is the only one possible, that it may not fill people with enthusiasm but that it is in the general interest. That is an invaluable gain in these times of crisis.

A discredited Right

The government of the Right comes out discredited, including in the eyes of workers who had believed in the promises of the candidate Sarkozy, who had been taken in by his electoral slogan, "work more to earn more". In their eyes, Sarkozy is not any more the president of a better standard of living; he is the president of the rich. The Woerth-Bettencourt soap opera largely contributed to this discredit at the same time as it provided an additional reason to mobilize. While the Minister for Social Affairs was asking people to tighten their belts by an additional notch, he was demonstrating a sleazy proximity with the principal fortunes of the country. The image of corruption, of the vulgar dis-

play of wealth, of favouritism, is not very good for their standing in the opinion polls. Beyond that, it is Sarkozy himself who is the target, provoking a profound and virulent rejection. And the government reshuffle that he has just carried out changes nothing. That does not mean that his defeat in the 2012 elections is already certain. But the number of those who can no longer stomach him remaining in office has increased considerably.

A movement is also rich by its diversity. Among the demonstrators of this autumn, a certain number have decided to wait until 2012 to kick Sarkozy out, by replacing him by his Socialist challenger. But others understand well that the SP in power, with the example of what is happening in Greece, in the Spanish State and in Portugal, is another way of making the majority of the population pay for the crisis.

At the end of this movement, it is them that the NPA is addressing. In the midst of preparing its

first national congress, it is working on a document which starts from the analysis of the double crisis, economic and ecological, of unparalleled scope, which the capitalist system is going through, to put forward transitional responses to this crisis. Its last National Political Council launched a call to discuss the anti-capitalist alternative. This debate does not relate only to organized political forces but also to those tens of thousands of workers and young people who are looking for an alternative to the policies of the Right and the institutional Left. To turn our backs on the Socialist sirens, on the dead end that an umpteenth version of governmental coalition with the PS would represent, is a necessity in order to open up another perspective. In this context, the NPA is working to develop frameworks of discussion that make it possible to confront different points of view as to the preparation of the next stages of the struggle and the outlines and content of an anti-capitalist alternative.

Toulouse, November 23, 2010

EUROPE

Third European Anti-capitalist Conference, an encouraging step forward

YVAN LEMAÎTRE ·

Whereas the first two were initiated by the Nouveau parti anticapitaliste (NPA, France), this third conference was held at the joint initiative of the NPA and the Socialist Workers Party (SWP, Britain). It brought together 22 organisations from 16 countries [[Delegations from the following organisations participated in the conference : Bloco de Esquerda (Portugal), Gauche anticapitaliste (Switzerland), Izquierda anticapitalista (Spanish state), LCR-SAP (Belgium), POR (Spanish state), SEK (Greece), ISL (Germany), En Lucha (Spanish state), DSIP (Turkey), SWP (UK), Red Green Alliance (Denmark) Internationale Socialisten (Holland), People before profit (Ireland), SWP (Ireland), OKDE Spartakos (Greece), Polska Partia Pracy (Poland), Sinistra critica (Italy), Mouvement pour le socialisme (Switzerland), Solidarités (Switzerland), Red Party (Norway), Socialistiska Partiet (Sweden), NPA (France).

The statement adopted by the conference can be read below and highlighted primarily the structural rather than temporary nature of the current crisis. Far from generating Keynesian solutions, this crisis has given rise to austerity plans which tend to institutionalise neoliberalism, to write it into the genetic code of societies. Thus, in Germany for example, austerity measures are redefining the very notion of the "vital minimum" with a ceiling for the household basket, of 180 euros per month. In France, Spain, Greece, Ireland, it is the pension systems and labour codes which are being targeted. And in Italy, it is the national labour contract — that is the

fixing at the national level of the minimum price of the sale of labour power — which is challenged. These policies, which are being implemented in a societal and climatic crisis, are accompanied by authoritarian measures, the development of racism and a return to "values" which tends to legitimate the return to the house of hundreds of thousands of women. In addition, as in Germany, Switzerland or Poland, there is a new offensive favouring the construction of nuclear power stations which is only beginning.

The fact that this meeting took place at the heart of the movement against pension reform in France underlined the necessity of coordinating struggles at the European level, and more modestly, that of anti-capitalists coordinating their own intervention. It is this which the participants wanted to bear witness to by interrupting their work to participate in the Parisian demonstration. A Polish comrade, one from the Spanish state and one from Greece were thus able to address the demonstrators under the auspices of the NPA. This conference also preceded the mobilisations being prepared in various European countries, which in the two following months would embody popular resistance to austerity in Britain, Ireland and Portugal, and against nuclear energy in Germany.

There were three points on the conference agenda: the crisis, its political consequences and the resistance of the workers; the responses to the crisis advanced by anti-capitalists; our common interventions and perspectives and their coordination.

The first point introduced by Alex Callinicos of the SWP allowed a rich exchange. Without going over the different mechanisms at work in the development of the crisis, a broad agreement emerged on

stressing its deep and durable character, not as a simple cyclical episode but a profound turning point embodied in the austerity policies engaged upon by all the European states. It amounts to a challenge to social gains which knows no other limit than the resistance of the workers and popular classes. It generates a crisis of neoliberal ideology: far from bringing democracy and progress, the market economy is identified with social regression which accompanies the rise of reactionary ideas born by a new far right.

The interventions illustrated the great diversity of workers' resistance. And also the paradoxical political consequences of the crisis, as in the Spanish state, where the collapse of the left has left the field free to the right despite the success of the general strike. In any case, for anti-capitalists, the question is posed of acting in unity through a united front policy while defending anti-capitalist perspectives, in acting so that the workers lead their struggles, at the rank and file level, without handing them over to the bureaucracies, by making democracy live inside the movements. Several comrades stressed the importance of the movement in France which represents a point of hope beyond activist layers.

The second point — introduced by Yvan Lemaitre of the NPA on the basis of the document "Our responses to the crisis" submitted for discussion at the NPA congress — showed a broad agreement on the demand that workers reject bearing the costs of the crisis, the need to grasp the question collectively at the European level to better integrate this dimension in our policy. Even if the national arena remains the framework of the class struggle, the European dimension remains, as shown on September 29 in Brussels. The discussion on the question of the slogan concerning withdrawal from the euro is an illustration of it. This discussion is very present in the Greek workers' movement where the feeling that Greece has been subject to the diktat of the European Union and the IMF is summed up in this slogan, to such an extent that the movement has not been able to oppose the attacks of the PASOK government. Withdrawal from

the euro appears as a "possible" response. It is an illusion, the only way out of the crisis is that of the intervention of the workers to break with the bourgeois institutions, nationalise the banks by creating a single credit organisation and then to break with capitalist Europe but acting in the sense of another Europe, that of the workers and the peoples. The discussion is not closed, it has only begun.

The need to deepen this discussion on anti-capitalist perspectives was one of the main conclusions of this conference, introduced and developed by Vanina Giudicelli of the NPA. It is about seizing each opportunity to act together, demonstrate the existence of a European anti-capitalist current, draw up common material, favour interventions in meetings, show internationalist solidarity with struggles, and so on. A common date was agreed, in spring 2011, to celebrate the 140th anniversary of the Paris Commune.

For all the participants, this third conference marks a stage, undoubtedly a step forward in the quality of relations and discussions, despite the lack of advance preparation. The holding of two conferences per year was decided with the concern of giving us the means of better preparing them. The question of a more structured coordination was discussed, it did not receive unanimous support from the participants and we preferred the idea of a flexible coordination. A final declaration was discussed, amended, formulating the key points of the approach which unites us.

Anti-capitalist Conference - Paris October 16th and 17th - Final statement

Capitalist Europe, the Europe ruled by the European Central Bank, the Maastricht and Lisbon treaties, the Europe of "free and fair competition", the tool of the offensive of the multinational corporations and their states against workers and peoples, is now in crisis.

All the European governments have widely used public subsidies to save financial system and banks after the subprime crisis in 2007 and 2008. These

policies have increased budgetary deficits. All the European governments have imposed their will on Greece and now they use the deficit to impose stringency and austerity to ordinary people. The profits of the banks are higher than ever. But it's up to workers to pay the bill! The reason for the deficits is very well known and obvious: the scale of subsidies given by states to the bosses and the rich. On one hand they distribute gifts to them; on the other hand, they exempt them from taxes. And in order to raise, finance they borrow money from these people ! So the finances of states are being privatised. The balance sheet is clear: the forecast economic recovery hasn't happened and everybody can hear the new cracks opening up in their system. Everywhere unemployment is increasing, except partly in Germany. Wages are stagnating or decreasing. Public services are being dismantled and sold off cheaply to private sector. On a worldwide scale, a currency war is raging. A new financial crisis is threatening.

The governments are trying to divert the anger emerging from popular layers of society; they are encouraging xenophobia and racism, linked with laws who refuse to recognise immigrants as citizens at all. In order to divide workers, they refer to immigration - or the Roma in France – as scapegoats. So they pave the way for a new far right populism that is now rising up everywhere. Once more, women are mainly paying for this crisis, the effects of which come on the basis of profound gender inequalities. The threat of unemployment and increased pressure towards "going back to being a housewife". The decay of public services and the lack of facilities force millions of women into domestic slavery.

The political bankruptcy of the ruling classes and their states is ruining the conditions of living of an endlessly increasing section of the people. It also threatens previously won democratic rights. We need urgently to put an end to this dangerous and destructive approach; unite the working class and its forces; reverse the balance of power; refuse be divided by old fashioned borders. Already the aus-

terity policies being pursued right across Europe have provoked widespread resistance. This has been highest in Greece – above all with the quasi-insurrectionary general strike of 5 May – but in recent months we have seen massive protests in France, the Spanish state, and other countries, and further mass action is in prospect. The first task of the anti-capitalist left must be to build these struggles on as broad and a militant basis as possible, and to seek to ensure that they are not undermined by the efforts of the trade-union bureaucracy and social-democratic politicians to limit and control them. It's also important to support the calls for the unity of the trade union movement, to help them come into being on a europe-wide level, like on 29 September in Brussels,

The same policies are hitting us; we need to fight them altogether. All together we have to coordinate at the European level in order to popularize emergency measures – social, democratic and ecological measures, which are mandatory if we don't want to pay for their crisis.

We refuse to pay for their crisis

To get rid of the plague of unemployment and casual work, it is necessary to share work among all workers, to give everyone a job and wages and to impose massive recruitments in public services. Against poverty and inequality, it is necessary to increase all wages and to guarantee everyone the right to enjoy a decent retirement pension. Rights to enjoy housing, health care and education need to be protected by stopping the sabotage of public services. They need to be reinforced, under the control of people. Unity of oppressed and exploited people doesn't fit with borders and discriminations. All men and women living and working in the territories of Europe are full citizens. Identity papers for everyone! While states are cynically imposing sacrifices to people, they are squandering billions of euros in military expenses and on the war in Afghanistan for the exclusive purpose of defending their imperialist interests. Stop that waste! Stop that dirty war! Stop NATO and military expenses!

The crisis also shows clearly the predatory character of the profit system, by recklessly exploiting natural resources, annihilating peasant agriculture, destroying ecosystems, causing global warming. As never before, justice and self-management, emancipatory projects and a socialist horizon are becoming consubstantial with the environmental struggle.

To fulfill fundamental human needs, it's necessary to abolish the illegitimate public debt. This means getting to an end with the voluntary submission of governments to the banks and hedge funds. These must be put out of harm's way by being expropriated in order to socialize credit.

Conquering democracy, rights and the means to decide and control

This break with capitalism requires a growing and sustained mobilisation by millions of people, which raises the consciousness of the power of the working class movement and opens up the conquest of democracy, allowing workers and the people to develop everything needed directly to intervene in the management of society, of workplaces, of public services and local communities.

This break needs a democratic upheaval, a new organization of the people to assure their control of every area of economic social life. This upheaval means a break with the institutions devoted to the defence of the privileged social classes. It also requires - through social and political mobilizations - a government born from the mobilizations, under their control and able to impose respect for workers' rights. To make this easier we need to defend the political participation of workers and the demand for unity in the struggles of those forces claiming to be of the working class and of the left against the right and neoliberal policies.

Breaking with a Europe ruled by finance, Building a workers' and peoples' Europe

We want to take a step further on the road of coordinating struggles at a European level. We want to

work together and formulate demands and perspectives, and to implement them. We want to open the road to the Europe for the workers and the people we are fighting for, right now.

Our purpose is to prepare the future. Wealth and the means to produce wealth already exist. Unemployment, precarity, poverty and that subsequent trail of social pains and violence are nothing but the consequences of an unfair social organization. This system of exploitation is based on private ownership of the main means of production. The crisis shows every day how absurd it is.

The future belongs to socialism, to social ownership of all the main means of production, whose management already depends on the cooperation of billions of men and women at international scale.

Belgium : LCR/SAP

Britain: Socialist Resistance, Socialist Workers' Party

Denmark : Red/Green Alliance

France : Nouveau parti anti-capitaliste

Germany : ISL, RSB

Greece : OKDE Spartakos, SEK

Ireland : People before profit, SWP

Italy : Sinistra critica

Netherlands : Internationale Socialisten

Norway : The Red Party

Poland : Polska Partia Pracy

Portugal : Bloco de Esquerda

Spanish state : En Lucha, Izquierda anticapitalista, POR

Switzerland : Gauche anticapitaliste, Mouvement pour le socialisme, Solidarités

Sweden : Socialist partiet

Turkey : DSIP

CHINA

Neither Washington nor the Party State

AU LOONG-YU ·

They have a loud voice especially among those who are exiled in the west. In a petition letter to the The Norwegian Nobel Committee, a group of exiled dissidents wrote that they thought Liu is not the appropriate candidate for the prize because he has not been standing firm in upholding human rights, and has even practically cooperated with the authorities by inappropriately praising the CCP's human rights rhetoric.

On the other hand, on the Utopia (*Wuyouzhixiang*) website, which is well known for being associated with some of the 'new leftists', articles were posted echoing the authorities' attack on Liu, suggesting that Liu is an agent of US imperialism. In one of these articles, the author Xibefeng denies that Liu's sentences has anything to do with freedom of speech, arguing that Liu's advocacy for Charter 08 is as criminal as a drunk driver demanding freedom to violate the rules of traffic. [1]

Those Who Act are Spared, Those Who Talk are Indicted

Not everyone who criticizes Liu share Xibefeng's crude defense of the authorities' absolute intolerance though. Two professors in Hong Kong, Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, agree that 'there was no need to imprison Liu'. 'Rather, there has only been a need to bring to light Liu's self-proclaimed goals. If most Chinese, especially the non-elite majority, knew about his prescribed path for China, they would turn away from him as from someone with ignoble things on offer.' [2] By this they mean that Liu's pro-US and pro-market position is not something beneficial to the Chinese people.

In a certain sense it is true. We do not entirely share the Norwegian Nobel Committee's statement

on its decision to award the prize to Liu. The Committee praises China for having 'achieved economic advances to which history can hardly show any equal', but regrets that it is in breach of several international agreements on human rights and also its own constitution concerning these rights. We must say that anyone who praises China's economic achievement without at the same time qualifying this with the fact that labor's share of national income has dropped 15 percent in the last 20 years for the benefit of profit, a necessary outcome being political repression concerning workers' right to association and to strike, cannot be said to be a real friend of the Chinese working people who constitute the majority of the population.

Further down the statement praises Liu as having been 'a strong spokesman for the application of fundamental human rights also in China. He took part in the Tiananmen protests in 1989; he was a leading author behind Charter 08, the manifesto of such rights in China'. We have written some time ago that Charter 08, while supportable whenever it advocates basic civil liberties, is severely limited by its call for the privatization of farm land and further privatization of state owned enterprises. [3] This, along with the obvious negligence of labor rights, leads us to believe that the Charter is far from being one for the working people.

Sautman and Yan pointed out the same limitation regarding Liu, but they lost sense of proportion in their accusation. If Liu's advocacy for privatization should be criticized, then by logic the CCP must be treated more harshly for actually pushing through two gigantic waves of privatization --- first most state and collectively owned enterprises, resulting in more than 50 million workers being dismissed, then a second wave of privatization which targets urban lands, resulting in price hikes in the property

market which most people cannot afford. While Liu boldly calls for privatization, but without the power and money to implement it, it has been the CCP which has acted boldly but silently (privatization is still a banned word in China). Curiously Sautman and Yan do not criticize the CCP. If they do it is just to remark that 'there was no need to imprison Liu'; in other words the CCP's only error was having taken a slightly superfluous step. One may wonder if there is more miserable misjudgment than this.

The same goes for their criticism of Liu's support of the US war in Iraq. In their second article published in the *Guardian*, they accused Liu's 'stand for war not peace'. [4] We do not share Liu's position on the Iraq war, but again our criticism must be fair. While his support of the war carries no weight at all both in China and the international community, the Chinese government, with its power to veto, abstained from the vote in the UN Security Council in 1991, which thus practically credited the US and its allies with UN legitimacy to go to war against Iraq. It was done in the sacred name of expelling the invader from Kuwait, but only resulted in allowing another invader — the US — to enjoy an even more dominant role in the region, which led to the second Gulf war in 2003. If Liu should be indicted for his views supporting the US war effort, should not the Chinese government also be criticized for its action?

'Democracy is Bad for You'

What is more troubling is that Sautman and Yan went even further when they condemned Liu 'who has long been financed by the US government's National Endowment for Democracy, proposes an instant shift to electoral democracy as the solution to China's problems.' We do not share Liu's pro-American government position, but it has no bearing on the question of whether 'electoral democracy' is desirable or not. Sautman and Yan see electoral democracy as bad for China because 'states that have made the transition to electoral democracy at low levels of wealth (and China is still very much a developing country) have low levels of de-

velopment and considerable instability... In many cases the transition to electoral democracy in developing countries worsens rights.'

In arguing this they are taking the side of the CCP's continual denial to the Chinese people of basic democratic rights. We believe free elections are a basic right of the Chinese people and the CCP has owed this to the people for too long. Apart from this moral imperative behind the demand for democracy, there is also an issue of political necessity. It is necessary, now more than ever, to put the CCP under democratic control before one can seriously talk about controlling the plundering of public wealth by the bureaucracy. Any attempt in minimizing the importance of advocating democratic rights, including free elections, is objectively justifying the absolutism of the one party state.

Sautman and Yan went even further than the CCP indeed; whereas the latter justified its despotic rule by saying that Chinese people do enjoy all rights enshrined in the constitution --- an absolutely stupid defense, Sautman and Yan provided the CCP a more sophisticated argument by telling Chinese people that fighting for electoral democracy now jeopardizes their own interests. This is especially harmful in a China context where awareness of popular sovereignty and democratic rights is at its all time low since the 1911 revolution.

Re-Colonization a Real Threat?

A common trait which runs through those who are associated with the Utopia is the ever stronger statist and nationalist arguments. They are statist because they fall into the false dichotomy of state versus market, hence in opposing, rightly, the privatization of public assets they come to embrace the state as the only viable vehicle to fight privatization — not only the state in general but first and foremost the one party state, despite the fact that it is this very state which pushes forward privatization in the first place. They are nationalist, not only because they allege that the supposed value of national interest overrides all other values, be it working class interest or human rights in general, but also

because they wrongly judge the present situation. They often argue, in the light of the 150 years of contemporary Chinese history when China was invaded and humiliated by imperialism, that the greatest danger at all times for China now is the danger of re-colonization by Western or Japanese influence, not only in an economic sense but also a political sense --- hence they echo the CCP's repeated alarm regarding 'color revolution'.

There is a grain of truth in this argument, but only a grain. There has been features of dependent accumulation in China's economy since the 1990's, in relation to Western and Japanese economy, and correspondingly there has been growing sections of the bureaucracy and the new rich who have acquired features of a comprador mentality. However, since 2003, the bureaucracy finally settled on a decision for a more independent economic growth, with special emphasis on 'autonomous innovation'. Features of dependent accumulation in the economy still exist, but are not dominant. For instance, the 2 trillion US dollar exchange reserves which China accumulates are both a sign of dependent accumulation and a factor in the rise of China. It is a sign of dependent accumulation because it is a result of over-reliance on exports, made possible only by surrendering China's resources and surplus value to the West and Japan. However it also enables the CCP to import ambitiously modern foreign techniques and to enjoy a strong bargaining position in relation to global competition. Henceforth there is even less chance that China will be re-colonized economically in the strict sense.

If China had not been colonized, as India was, between 1840 and 1949 when it was much weaker, it would be equally difficult for Western countries and Japan to dominate China economically now, in face of a China which is much stronger. The party state draws its strength from China's contemporary glorious history of anti-imperialist struggle, including fighting the US in Korea. It also benefited from the achievement of Mao's enormous industrialization drive in a vast country, which has given the party state exceptional power to bargain with the

developed countries since the reform period. The first factor determines the party state's deep seated distrust against foreign influence, especially when it targets Chinese people, while the second gives the CCP enough power to fend off foreign competition, politically and economically. Hence the CCPs opening up of the market to foreign capital is always restrained by the need for the maintenance of its grip over the society. Although attacked by the nationalists for abandoning Mao's self reliance strategy, the top leaders really never went that far; on the contrary, despite internal squabbles and vacillation, they have been keen for China to develop its own domestic players in all key industries. The CCP has promoted a second wave of even more rapid industrialization, outstanding if not exceptional among the so called transitional economies, and put itself as the ultimate ruler of the most strategic industries. In order to gain a more autonomous position for its industries, the party state often go one step further by developing its own industry standards, often in defiance of foreign capital and its governments, from a VCD, mobile phone, Wifi to a credit card standard,.

The self interest of the bureaucracy also determines its decision for a relatively autonomous path of development. Increasing sections of the bureaucracy clenched its teeth at the scenario where huge profit were garnered by foreign capital; they vow to seize back at least a part of this profit for themselves. With the help of the alignment of exceptional advantages peculiar to China (which we have discussed in earlier articles [5]), they succeeded, even if within limit.

China is deeply integrated within a global economy; hence its autonomous path of development must be highly qualified by this. There is also no doubt that China is now encountering a bottle neck for its growth model in the midst of global crisis, but how much it will hamper China's rise still remains to be seen. Even with a slower rate of growth China is already a great power. As an economy ranking second in the world, any talk to suggest that China is under threat from economic re-colonization makes

no sense. The major threat for Chinese working people today is less re-colonization than the plundering of the wealth by the ruling party and a break-down of social fibers resulting from this. To argue the otherwise is simply providing support to the party in its attempt to divert attention from domestic corruption to an alleged re-colonization threat.

As to the threat of a color revolution, again it is grossly exaggerated. There are no signs at all that the US has enough support in China so as to put a color revolution in China on the agenda, nor is it true that the party state is so weak that even the smallest political liberalization will end up in the CCP losing power. Despite economic decentralization since the market reform, politically the CCP's grip over society only grows stronger. There was and is no real civil society, no real social movement, no organized opposition. If China ever has a color revolution like those in Kyrgyzstan in a distant fu-

ture, it is not because of people like Liu Xiaobo or because of free elections, but because the party state is hated so much by the people that they think any other party taking power will be better than the CCP, hence they are either indifferent to its downfall or act to make it happens. So it leads us back to the basic question which the nationalists try to avoid: the chief threat today in China is not foreign aggression, politically or economically, but the CCP dictatorship, a dictatorship which is corrupt to the core but armed to the teeth. It must be noted that it is also a dictatorship which also benefits the US ruling class, without it, it would not have been possible to hold back both wages and the Chinese workers movement for so long.

The debate between the liberals who support Liu Xiaobo and the nationalists is essentially a debate of either Washington or the Chinese party state. For us working people this is a false choice.

December 7, 2010.

Assembly of Social Movements meets in Dakar

OLIVIER BONFOND ·

The global crises of the capitalist system (economic, financial, environmental, ecological, energy, social, migratory, cultural) has had particularly dramatic social impacts, and has increased the pauperization of the vulnerable by increasingly excluding people from access to land, water, food, housing, employment, health, education and energy...

This social war against the vast majority of the population is made possible only because of the historically high rate of unemployment and by the fact that the "progressive" governments support of neo-liberalism and their defense of major capitalist interests. The situation of out and out war, of militarization, of the criminalization of the social movements are all tools in this offensive.

The fragile and contradictory return to an « economic revival » has not translated into stable job creation. Quite the contrary.

Taking a longer view, the systemic crisis has impacts on the environment and the climate. The so-called "natural catastrophes" are particularly affecting the least protected peoples, as recently demonstrated by the floods in Africa and Asia, the earthquakes in Haiti, Chile and Indonesia....

The African continent that is hosting this Seminar of the Assembly of the Social Movements has also felt the these impacts to a high degree: the exclusion of people from access to the natural riches of the continent, in terms of mining, agriculture and fisheries, land-grabbing by transnational companies and States to produce agrifuel or food that is exported, the accumulation of waste, fewer remittances sent home by migrant workers who are the first victims of the crises in the countries where they live. Youth is excluded from any hope of a bet-

ter life by the fact that young people find it impossible to find stable jobs; this itself is a factor that aggravates emigration.

The sovereignty of African States is threatened by the transnational companies and the International Financial Institutions and the countries of the North. This translates on a daily basis into violence, with women as the main victims, and leading to forced migration of people fleeing the crisis etc.

Although this situation weighs heavily on the ability of people to resist, is also an enormous challenge for the social movements. With the divisions and isolation of the struggles, there are also huge grassroots assemblies taking place. They are united and leading struggles that have led to victories in the Niger in 2005, in Bolivia with the water war, in India against the privatization of rivers...

The Assembly of social movements, which is conceived as a space for struggles, is therefore facing a dual challenge : building linked-up grassroots struggles, patiently rooted in the communities, towns and rural areas, refugee camps, slums...and the perspectives for radical change that will prove that the capitalist productivist, patriarchal system can be overcome by humanity.

We need to achieve a different way of sharing wealth that serves all people here and now, and builds a just world, without war or discrimination.

Decisions

We the social movements gathered for the third world social movements assembly:

1) Reaffirm that the process of the Assembly of social movements (ASM) is a space for convergence and structuring of the social struggles. In the ASM

we act in order to give visibility to the struggles, to coordinate and strengthen them.

2) Create a facilitation group of the Assembly of social movements for WSF Dakar 2011 composed of Senegalese, African and international organisations. This group has for primary task to prepare the Assembly for the WSF in Dakar. It is an open group, to be part of it you have to get in touch with Vanessa Jarlot from Attac/CADTM Togo: vanessa.jarlot@cadtm.org

3) We will begin today to mobilise massively in order to assure a popular success to the Assembly of Social Movements (and so to the WSF)

4) We will call at the International council of the WSF in November 2010 to confirm July 2010 "consensus". As a result, ASM will have a space and will take place after thematical Assemblies. We will also try to facilitate the meetings of Social Movements prior and during WSF.

5) We will organise the ASM at the WSF Dakar inside the place which will be determined for the WSF. Nevertheless, we will organise as ASM one or several "external" activities prior or during the WSF to show in concrete terms our solidarity with the Social struggles.

– To answer the demand of various Social Movements a dialog was opened regarding Social Movements Assembly. The importance and the legitimacy was put forward as well as its presence from the beginning of WSF process. The Assembly will take place probably on the 5th day of the Forum after the other Assemblies on various issues and an effort will be done to avoid this Assembly to be confused with the Assembly of Assemblies, with the process' global convergence and to confirm this Assembly does not represent WSF.

| BRITAIN

The politics of class hatred as a response to the economic crisis

ALAN THORNETT ·

The Liberal Democrats moved sharply to the right immediately after it became clear that a coalition was in the offing. They rejected a coalition with the Labour Party and formed a coalition with David Cameron's Tories – which they hope will last for a five-year term.

This government, however, is a coalition in name only. David Cameron is the most ideologically driven Tory leader of modern times. It is more consistently ideologically neoliberal than Margaret Thatcher, in fact. What Britain actually has is a right-wing Thatcherite, small state, slash and burn, Tory Government, propped up by the Liberal Democrats who have collapsed into their politics.

It is a government defined entirely by its cuts agenda and by its approach to the crisis and Britain's debt. It is a government of millionaires who are delivering an attack on the poor the like of which Margaret Thatcher must have dreamed of but was never remotely able to achieve.

They have launched the biggest package of cuts in Britain in living memory — £81 billion of cuts, the sacking of at least 500,000 public sector workers, with an additional 500,000 job losses in the private sector as a consequence, plus massive attacks on health, education, pensions, transport, housing, welfare, local government, the arts, and the environment. It goes alongside massive deregulation and privatisation of services. Their project is to put an end to the age of welfare which opened up with the Beveridge reports on social insurance and full employment as the Second World War came to an end. The National Health Service established in the 1940s is to be broken up and privatised.

It will be the urban poor, particularly in the inner city areas, who will be the hardest hit particularly by the decisions to slash local council spending by 25%. The cut in housing benefit and the introduction of means tested tenancies in social housing will drive hundreds of thousands of poorer families out of the richer boroughs in a huge exercise in social cleansing. The cuts to local council budgets will also rapidly impact on the NHS as hospitals are unable to discharge patients because of the lack of care in the community and hospital beds are blocked.

Yet neither the Tories nor the Liberal Democrats had any kind of mandate for this onslaught in the election. David Cameron cynically cultivated his socially concerned image and talked about how much he loved the National Health Service at the same time as he was planning to destroy it.

The true class nature of this coalition was exposed when this reactionary package was announced in Parliament — including the loss of 500,000 jobs. It was greeted by Tory and Liberal Democrat MPs with prolonged cheering and stamping of feet and waving of order papers. This reaction exposed the most disingenuous mantra in the coalition vocabulary — that they are forced to do this by the debt and that they have to make 'hard choices' in order to save the economy.

This is complete nonsense. They love every minute of it. The decisions they are taking are precisely the ones they have wanted to take for a long time and are now using the crisis as a battering ram to force them through. And they have absolutely no intention of reversing any of this whatever happens to the economy. Some of the Tories have said openly that the crisis must not be allowed to turn into a missed opportunity.

The Tories have planned for this for years before getting into office and the language they use is becoming increasingly savage. They have reinvented concepts such as the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor — dredged up from Victorian England. The media has been fed with endless stories of 'benefit scroungers' sponging off 'hard working taxpayers' and 'housing cheats' living in luxury accommodation with huge families at the expense of the rest of society.

Incapacity benefit claimants are portrayed as 'work-shy scroungers' who have no intention of finding a job. Public sector workers are demonised as useless bureaucrats sitting in overstaffed workplaces waiting to draw their 'gold plated' pensions. They are 'waste' to be 'cut out' as soon as possible. This is the language of naked class hatred.

Alongside all this reactionary spin has gone the ridiculous mantra that the debt must be repaid and the 'there is no alternative'. It is the economics of the madhouse and is likely to push the economy further down probably to a double dip recession and throw even more out of work.

Remarkably the coalition has launched this massive attack and still have majority support in the population for the proposition that 'there is no alternative' to the cuts and that the coalition 'has got it about right' This may well now start to change of course but to get to this stage with majority support is a remarkable achievement. It means that they have decisively won the ideological argument over the past 5 months.

The tactics of the coalition seems to what some activists are calling 'shock and awe'. An echo from the invasion of Iraq. It involves launching a tidal wave of attacks and initiatives day after day backed up by massive propaganda - which is designed to make people feel that resistance is pointless.

And unfortunately against the relentless onslaught of the coalition there are no alternative authoritative voices.

The media collapsed wholesale into the politics of the coalition from the day after the election. They

now present 'there is no alternative' as it is was an indisputable truth. The media has shifted to the right and lost its critical faculties since the coalition came to office.

The new Ed Milliband leadership of the Labour Party has already completely failed. They not only left the field open to the coalition to do their worst but they allowed themselves to be trapped into the Brown/Darling formula of halving the debit over 4 years — which itself implied massive cuts even if they were a bit less than the coalition.

Most damaging of all is that there is nothing from the leaders of the major unions or from the TUC. They discussed the cuts last September and decided to call a demonstration NEXT MARCH! Meanwhile most of them have nothing to say about the cuts and have organised nothing against them.

Some of the smaller unions have more militant leaderships but the larger unions even at rank and file level are very weak. In most industries massive attacks have already taken place without resistance. Wages have been cuts jobs have been lost and pension rights have been attacked. Under these very weak conditions action against the cuts does not come easy.

This is why the student demonstrations we have seen in recent weeks have been so magnificent. Of course the attack on university education is extreme. Tuition fees are being increased from £3,000 a year to £9,000. At the same time there is a huge cut in funding for the universities — so the debit is being transferred into the pockets of the students. Arts and humanities courses are suffering 100% cut if their budgets.

Despite this extreme provocation by the coalition the response from the students in terms of mass demonstrations, occupations and protests exceeded all expectations. The occupation of the Tory Party offices have had world-wide publicity as have the demonstrations. What is not so widely understood is how quickly this movement has radicalised and its impact on the coalition government — who fear

with some justification that this is a sign of things to come rather than a once-off protest.

Also new is the widespread participation of school students in the demonstration. In some cases whole schools participated, not least because the cuts will not effects students who are currently at university but the new students as they leave school.

Exactly how this movement will help to generate a wider movement against the cuts and/or effect the situation in the trade unions is not yet clear – but it is certain to have an impact.

This was clear on Saturday November 27th in the first major conference to organise against the cuts

called by the Coalition of Resistance – a broad body which seeks to generate a the widest possible campaign against the cuts. The conference attracted 1300 activists and both students and school students were amongst the most active and inspiring participants.

Until now the anti-cuts movement in Britain has been divided. There have been three campaigns: one organised by the SWP, another by the SP (Militant) and the Coalitions of Resistance which is far broader and pluralistic. Hopefully the success of this conference can promote a positive unity which would be a breakthrough for the whole movement.

PORTUGAL

"No to war, No to Nato"

XECA ROBLES ·

The Schengen Treaty was suspended for 6 days and the frontiers locked. Hundreds of people were not able to get through the border checkpoints, like a bus with Finnish peace activists who were blocked with the argument that they were carrying leaflets and banners against Nato. At the airport in Lisbon, other activists were blocked and sent back to their countries with an official document saying they were considered a "threat to internal security".

Despite repressive police presence, activists organize

Meanwhile, in the city center, several activities took place, mobilizing thousands of activists against the Nato Summit. On the 18th, Bloco de Esquerda organized a public concert with the slogan "Portugal out of the Nato/ Nato out of Portugal". The square in the city center was fully packed with young people in a clear protest against the Summit and the brutality of the war.

From Friday the 19th to Sunday the 21st, the international network "No to War, No to Nato" organized the counter summit in an high school, also in the center of Lisbon. Activists from 21 countries had the opportunity to participate in tens of debates and workshops about the military industrial complex, feminism and militarization, nuclear weapons, alternative security systems, non violent resistance actions, war in Afghanistan, relations between Russia and Nato, missile defense system in Europe and several other subjects.

The most visible event was the demonstration held on Saturday afternoon with the participation of 20.000 people. Even though all the repressive attitude and apparatus by the police, the demonstration occurred in a peaceful way without any violence.

"New strategic concept" for keeping imperial and military control

All these events showed that the heads of state gathered in the Nato Summit were not welcome in Lisbon. They met to decide about the future of Nato and to recreate new ways of making the war. Afghanistan is becoming a huge military and political problem for the Nobel Peace Prize, Barack Obama, and an impossible solution for that conflict was outlined in this summit. Karzai, representing one of the most corrupted governments in the world, was seated together with the other Nato members begging for some more years of military occupation.

The new strategic concept approved in Lisbon is the tool invented by the warlords in Washington to keep the imperial and military control of the globe. This document assures a new partnership with the European Union with the increase of the military budgets with the legal support of the Lisbon Treaty, even in the nowadays economical crisis scenario, and confirms the installation of the so called missile "defense" system in Central Europe. It also confirms the abandon of the nuclear disarmament process.

CHINA

Exacerbation of Corruption and Social Contradictions

ZHANG KAI ·

Zhang Kai

Anti-corruption as the Primary Public Concern

It is evident that, although the Chinese government has claimed that it is necessary to combat corruption, the situation is gradually deteriorating and now it has become the most serious social problem. According to a survey, 60% of interviewees consider that official corruption is the problem causing the most damages to the national reputation in 2009. It ranked first on the list in the past consecutive three years. The number of interviewees is the largest one recently, which shows that common people are discontented about the issue (1).

Similarly, as the surveys conducted by the official media like People's Daily and People's Net state, anti-corruption ranks top on the list of public concerns, and the gap between the rich and the poor, and the control of the price of property estates rank the second and the third, replacing food security and medical reform in 2009 (2).

According to the statistics, in 2009, more than 19 provincial officials stepped down due to corruption, which is the largest number in recent years. Among those, we find some well-known names such as Huang Songyou, the Deputy Head of the Supreme People's Court, Zheng Shaodong, assistant to the Head of the Ministry of Public Security, Wang Huayuan, the General Secretary of Chinese Communist Party in Zhejiang Province, and the chairmen of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in Guangdong Province, Shandong Province and Guizhou Province.

The statistics are incomplete as they only refer to some of the corrupt and stepped-down officials. There are still numerous corrupt officials remaining in power.

In March 2010, Cao Jianming, the Head of

Supreme People's Procuratorate, reported to the National Congress that in 2009, the number of cases of commercial bribes and crimes committed mainly by officials was 10,218, with 18,191 cases of corruption, and 2,670 division heads were involved. Both the number of cases and the people involved have increased over the previous year.

In early 2010, Li Changchun, the head of Supreme People's Procuratorate of Zhoukou Municipal of Henan Province, was suspected of taking advantage of billions of money of the Committee on Basic Infrastructure, and then was under detention and interrogation. It is another case of corrupt officials in the juridical system.

The government announced that it has fought corruption, but in reality, corruption is still rampant. For example, recently, both the national and local sessions of the National People's Congress and the People's Political Consultative Conference have been criticized for huge expenditure and exploitation of intensive labor, and this phenomenon is challenged even by the official media that call for change in the practice. The media in the mainland once estimated that the expenditure on food, accommodation and transport for the representatives of the sessions of the two congresses every year is at least over 100 million yuan. This year every deputy is given a free notebook, so the total direct expenditure will be 127 million yuan (3).

After attending the sessions, 5,224 deputies and committee members can take away the notebooks. The public is outrageous about this kind of 'generosity' as it abuses public money. Some scholars point out that in this sense, the deputies are corrupt in another way, under a beautiful name (4).

Officials of the administration system, or Chinese Communist Party members, are not only corrupt in everyday life, they also take advantage of their authority for making profits. There is a sharp increase

of personal wealth. Many cadres get involved in doing business and then become one part of the Red Capitalists.

In big contrast, the majority of the working class has yet to share the fruits of the economic growth.

Injustice of low-paid jobs for the working class

Over many years in the past, China's economy has rapidly increased with 8% or above, but the proportion of labor income in the GDP has continuously dropped for the last 22 years. It fell from 56.5% in 1983 to 36.7% in 2005, which was almost a decrease of 20%. In contrast, the proportion of capital income in the GDP has increased by 20%. According to a recent survey by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, 23.4% of workers have obtained no increase in their wages for the last five years. 75.2% of workers thought that the current social distribution of income was unfair. 61% of workers considered that workers were comparatively low paid, which was the most serious social injustice.

Zhang Jianguo, the head of Department of Collective Contract of All-China Federation of Trade Unions, pointed out that in recent years there have been a series of extreme cases of mass events caused by contradictions between capital and labor. The essential causes are low income and little benefit. Based on an unfinished two-year statistics, capital-labor disputes caused by problems of income distribution, social benefits and insurance has counted for 65% of cases, which is an important factor of endangering social stability (5).

Even the high ranking officials of the Chinese official trade union publicly recognize the problem. As there were serve discontents among the masses, it could be understood that the national union was under great pressure.

Now in China, the disparity of the rich and the poor is very serious. Some scholars stated that the gap between 10% of the population with the highest income and 10% of the population with the lowest income has increased from 7.3 times in 1988 to 23 times in 2007 (6). This is why this issue becomes

the second public concern, according to the survey reported by People's Net. The workers are comparatively low paid which exacerbates social contradictions.

In reality, the mass incidents of capital-labor disputes are increasing (even if they are labeled as 'extreme cases' by the government).

In 2008, the author quoted a news report from Ming Pao, dated 15 March 2008, that 'according to the statistics of the Committee of Enterprises and Coordination of All-China Federation of Trade Unions, there were 406,000 cases of capital-labor disputes in 2007. The figure did not include the statistics of Ministry of Labor and Social Security and the juridical system. Zhang Mingqi, the vice chairman of All-China Federation of Trade Unions, disclosed that the number of capital-labor disputes rapidly spiraled, with an annual rate of 20% (for the details, please see October Review, No. 224).

In March 2010, Wang Shenghou, the head of Supreme People's Court, also publicly reported that in 2009, the courts at different levels have handled 317,000 cases of labor-capital disputes, with an increase of 10.8%.

In 2008, according to the data of China Labor Bulletin, the mass incidents of working class in China had reached 127,467 cases (quoted from October Review, no 227).

Exacerbation of Social Contradictions

In some places, the working class used strikes to fight for wage increase and better working conditions. But some workers were desperate and committed suicide due to bad working conditions and always being under great working pressure. In Foxconn, a Taiwanese enterprise in Shenzhen, within four months, from 23 January to 26 May, 12 workers had committed suicide by jumping off the building, causing 10 deaths and 2 injured.

The enterprise is a typical capitalist corporation. There is rigid management of production, tightly controlling the workers. Its management is criticized for inhumane and high exploitation. Workers are considered as machines, without privacy in daily life. They are exhausted out of 12 working hours

daily. The wages are merely around RMB 1000 but they always have to do overtime work. There is hierarchy within the corporation. The management do not pay respect to the workers, and always scold at and insult the workers. Worse still, the relationships among the workers are indifference. They not only have to endure the pressure of production, but also to work with such indifferent human relationships. All these led to the feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness and despair among the workers. Not surprisingly, some of them committed suicide.

The suicides of Foxconn workers are only an iceberg of the plight of workers in China. Behind the booming economic growth of China, there exist plights and struggles of workers at the sweatshops. The suicides also disclose the deeply rooted social contradictions. On the other hand, some innocent people were murdered out of any particular reason. Particularly, there were murder cases happening in primary schools, due to bitter anger and revenge. From late March to mid May, there happened six cases of killings, leading to nearly 100 casualties.

Professor Hu Xingdou of Beijing Polytechnics University claimed that there were two reasons of social violence: one, the marginal and vulnerable social groups do not have access to make their complaints and appeals recognized; two, the mindset of taking revenge on society by the lowest stratum of society, through victimizing the most vulnerable groups.

In addition, there are numerous cases of "people getting insane out of official oppression". In July 2009, a rural woman from Shaoxing Municipal of Zhejiang Province was under detention after making an appeal about demolishment. Her house was demolished by the township government. Her daughter-in-law was too shocked and then became

mentally disordered. Moreover, Ma Jiwen, a peasant from Luliang Municipal of Shanxi Province, appealed that his land was invaded. It turned out that the court sent him to jail based on "his crime of blackmailing the government". If the conflicts between the government officials and ordinary people cannot be solved, there will appear more and more social violence.

After several cases of violent attacks on children, Wen Jiabao, the Premier of the State Council, stated that the government not only has to strengthen the security, but also to solve the underlying problems of social violence, such as to tackle social contradictions and disputes, as well as to reinforce the function of coordination at the ground level.

Being one of the top rulers of the country, the Premier would clearly understand the social situation and the origins of social conflicts. This is caused by the bureaucracy system which enables the bureaucrats to abuse the political and economic privileges and become corrupt. They adopt the path of capitalism which causes exploitation of workers, social polarization, the disparities between the rich and the poor, widespread unemployment, and escalating price of property estates. In addition, many government policies have worsened the situation. Therefore, if one wants to solve the above problems effectively, one should change the existing bureaucracy system completely.

26 May 2010

Notes:

- (1) Ming Pao, 4 January 2010
- (2) Wen Weipo, 24 May 2010
- (3) Wen Weipo, 13 May 2010
- (4) Apple Daily, 3 March 2010
- (5) Wen Weipo, 13 May 2010
- (6) Ming Pao, 14 May 2010