

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV453 October 2012

WOMEN:

Women are the real creditors of the public debt

WOMEN AND FOOD

La Via Campesina: Food Sovereignty and the Global Feminist Struggle

DOSSIER

Portugal

Women and Food

Syria

Iran

Russia

Greece

Uruguay

Women:

Pakistan:

Spanish State

Bangladesh

Iberian Peninsula

Catalonia/Spanish state

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WOMEN AND FOOD

La Via Campesina: Food Sovereignty and the Global Feminist Struggle

ESTHER VIVAS ·

Since its founding, Via Campesina has promoted a "female peasant" identity that is politicized, linked to land, food production and the defense of food sovereignty—built in opposition to the current agribusiness model (Desmarais, 2007). Via Campesina embodies a new kind of "peasant internationalism" (Bello, 2009), that can be viewed as a "peasant component" of the new international resistance presented by the anti-globalization movement (Antentas and Vivas, 2009).

In 1996, coinciding with the World Food Summit at the FAO in Rome, Via Campesina highlighted food sovereignty as a political alternative to a profoundly unfair and predatory food system. This does not imply a romantic return to the past, but rather recovers knowledge and traditional practices and combines them with new technologies and new knowledge (Desmarais, 2007). As noted by McMichael (2006), there is a "mystification of the small" in a way that rethinks the global food system to encourage democratic forms of food production and distribution.

A feminist perspective

Over time, Via Campesina has incorporated a feminist perspective, working to achieve gender equality within their organizations, and building alliances with feminist groups, including the international World March of Women, among others.

At the heart of La Via Campesina, the struggle of women is situated at two levels: defending their rights as women within organizations and society in general, and the struggle as peasant women together with their colleagues against the neoliberal

model of agriculture (EHNE and La Via Campesina 2009).

Feminist work in Via Campesina has taken important steps forward since its inception. In the First International Conference in Mons (Belgium) in 1993, all the elected coordinators were men. In the final declaration the situation of rural women hardly received any mention. Although it identified the need to integrate women's needs in the work of Via Campesina, the conference failed to establish mechanisms to ensure participation of women in successive meetings. Thus, at the 2nd International Conference in Tlaxcala (Mexico) in 1996, the percentage of women attending was 20% of the total: the same as at the 1st International Conference. To address this issue, a special women's committee was created (later known as the Women's Committee of La Via Campesina) and methods that permitted better representation and participation were enacted.

This move facilitated the incorporation of feminist analysis in Via Campesina. Thus, when Via Campesina publicly presented the concept of food sovereignty at the World Food Summit of FAO in Rome in 1996, women contributed their own demands. These included the need to produce food locally, and they added the dimension of "human health" to "sustainable agricultural practices," demanding a drastic reduction in harmful chemical inputs and advocating the active promotion of organic agriculture. Women also insisted that food sovereignty could not be accomplished without greater female participation in the definition of rural policies (Desmarais, 2007).

The work of the Women's Commission helped promote exchanges between women from different

countries, including women-specific meetings to coincide with international summits. Between 1996 and 2000, the Commission's work focused mainly on Latin America—through training, exchange and discussion—and rural women increased their participation in all levels and activities of La Via Campesina.

In October 2000, just before the 3rd International Conference of La Via Campesina in Bangalore (India), the 1st International Assembly of Women Farmers was organized. This allowed for greater participation of women in the organization. The Assembly adopted three major goals: 1) to ensure the participation of 50% of women at all levels of decisions and activities of La Via Campesina, 2) to maintain and strengthen the Women's Commission, and 3) to ensure that documents, training events and speeches of Via Campesina did not have sexist content or sexist language (Desmarais, 2007).

Members at the conference agreed to change the institutional structure to ensure gender equity. As Paul Nicholson of La Via Campesina notes: "[In Bangalore] it was determined that equality of man and woman in spaces and positions of representation in our organization opened a whole internal process of reflection on the role of women in the struggle for women peasants' rights. ... The gender perspective is being addressed now in a serious way, not only in the context of parity in responsibilities, but also a profound debate about the roots and tentacles of patriarchy and violence against women in the rural world." (Food Sovereignty, Biodiversity and Cultures 2010: 8).

This strategy forced the member organizations of Via Campesina at national and regional levels to rethink their work in a gender perspective and to incorporate new measures to strengthen the role of women (Desmarais, 2007). Josie Riffaud of the Confédération Paysanne in France, states that: "the decision was critical of [lack of gender] parity in the Via Campesina, as allowed in my organization, the Confédération Paysanne. We also apply this measure." (La Via Campesina, 2006: 15).

As part of the 4th International Conference in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in June 2004; the 2nd International Assembly of Women Farmers brought together more than a hundred women from 47 countries on all continents. The main lines of action that emerged from the meeting were to take action against physical and sexual violence against women; both domestically and internationally; demand equal rights and invest in education. As its final statement states: "We demand our right to a dignified life, respect for our sexual and reproductive rights; and the immediate implementation of measures to eradicate all forms of physical, sexual, verbal and psychological violence. ... We urge states to implement measures to ensure our economic autonomy, access to land, health, education and equal social status." (2nd International Assembly of Women Farmers, 2004).

In October 2006, the World Congress of Women of La Via Campesina was highlighted in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Participants included women from agricultural organizations in Asia, North America, Europe, Africa and Latin America; with the objective of analyzing and discussing the meaning of equality in the field from a feminist perspective, and a plan of action to achieve it. As one of the presentations—Sergia Galván's Women's Health Collective of the Dominican Republic—pointed out, the women of La Via Campesina had three challenges ahead:

- 1) to advance the theoretical discussion to incorporate the feminist peasant perspective in mainstream feminist analysis,
- 2) continue work on autonomy as a vital reference for the consolidation of the movement of rural women,
- 3) to overcome the feeling of guilt in the struggle for higher positions of power over men (La Via Campesina, 2006).

The World Congress of Women of La Via Campesina emphasized the need to further strengthen the articulation of women of La Via Campesina, and created mechanisms for a greater

exchange of information and specific plans for struggle. Among the concrete proposals were the articulation of a global campaign to combat violence perpetrated against women, to extend the discussion to all organizations that are part of Via Campesina, and to work to recognize the rights of rural women in demanding equality in access to land, credit, markets and administrative rights (La Via Campesina, 2006).

At the 5th International Conference in Maputo, Mozambique, in October 2008, La Via Campesina hosted the 3rd International Assembly of Women. The assembly approved the launch of a campaign targeting all forms of violence faced by women in society (physical, economic, social, sexist, cultural, and access to power) which are also present in rural communities and their organizations.

Work that aims at achieving greater gender equality is not easy. Despite the formal equality, women face obstacles when traveling or attending meetings and gatherings. As Annette Desmarais (2007:282) noted, "There are many reasons why women do not participate at this level. Perhaps the most important is the persistence of ideologies and cultural practices that perpetuate unequal gender relations and unfairness. For example, the division of labor by gender means that rural women have less access to the most precious resource, time, to participate as leaders in agricultural organizations. Being involved in reproductive, productive and community work makes it much less likely [for women] to have time for training sessions and learning as leaders."

It is a struggle against the tide, and despite some concrete victories, we face a long fight in our organizations, and, more generally.

Weaving Alliances

La Via Campesina has established alliances with various organizations and social movements at the international, regional, and national levels. One of the most significant alliances has been with the World March of Women, a leading feminist global network that has called for joint actions and meet-

ings, and has collaborated in activities: the International Forum for Food Sovereignty held in Mali in 2007, among others.

The original meeting between the two networks was under the anti-globalization movement, and its purpose was to agree on counter-summits and activities within the World Social Forum. The incorporation of a feminist perspective within Via Campesina generated more solidarity, and this has built over time. At the Forum for Food Sovereignty in 2007 in Sélingué, Mali a meeting was convened by leading international social movements such as Via Campesina, the World March of Women, the World Forum of Fisher Peoples, and others to advance strategies within a wide range of social movements (farmers, fishers, consumers) to promote food sovereignty.

Women were a major catalyst in this meeting, as organizers and participants. The Nyéléni Forum in Sélingué was named in honor of the legend of a Malian peasant woman who struggled to assert herself as a woman in a hostile environment. Delegates from Africa, America, Europe, Asia and Oceania attended the meeting and identified the capitalist and patriarchal system as primarily responsible for the violations of women's rights, while reaffirming their commitment to transform it.

The World March of Women has taken up food sovereignty as an inalienable human right, especially for women. Miriam Nobre, coordinator of the international secretary of the World March of Women, participated in October 2006 at the World Congress of Women of La Via Campesina in the global feminist movement. The 7th International Meeting of the World March of Women in Vigo, Spain in October 2008, held a forum and exhibition for food sovereignty, showing the links between the feminist struggle and those of peasant women.

The success of this collaboration is embodied in the dual membership of women who are active members in the World March of Women, and La Via Campesina. These experiences encourage closer

ties and collaboration between both networks, and strengthens the feminist struggle of rural women that is part of the broader struggle against capitalism and patriarchy.

Conclusion

The current global food system has failed to ensure the food security of communities. Currently more than a billion people worldwide suffer from hunger. The global food system has had a profoundly negative environmental impact; promoting an intensive agro-industrial model that has contributed to climate change and collapsing agro-biodiversity. This system has been particularly detrimental to women.

Developing alternatives to this agricultural model requires incorporating a gender perspective. The food sovereignty alternative to the dominant agro-industrial model has to have a feminist position to break with patriarchal and capitalist logic.

La Via Campesina, the largest international movement for food sovereignty, is moving in this direction: creating alliances with other social movements—especially feminist organizations and networks such as the World March of Women—to promote networking and solidarity among women in North and South, urban and rural areas, and between them and their companions. As Via Campesina says: "Globalize the struggle. Globalize hope."

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From the Esther Vivas blog.

SYRIA

"The enemy within" and the centrist forces

GHAYATH NAISSE ·

During this broadcast, Assad said "this time, the enemy comes from inside and not from outside... and any Syrian who executes a foreign enemy plan becomes an enemy and is no longer a Syrian". Therefore, the margin of manoeuvre of those components of the opposition who have sought - or are seeking - solutions at the centre, as in Yemen or elsewhere, becomes narrow if not non-existent.

We talk here of the National Coordination Committee of the Forces of Democratic Change [1] and those who adopt its political strategy, one way or the other.

The dictator did not stop there; he described as them "merchants of the crisis". If he did not cite them by name, he spoke of the opposition which called for "dialogue": "We were surprised by the dialogue. It has refused to participate in the dialogue because it had conditioned the dialogue as being between the state and these groups." He described as trying to "opportunistically win political positions to negotiate with the state".

Responding directly to the invitation issued by the Coordination Committee to hold a congress "for the salvation of Syria" in Damascus in mid-September, the tyrant said: "Recently we learned that they began to talk about dialogue... but if you want to arrive so late, then you need to come sincerely and not again in an opportunistic fashion". And he concluded by speaking to these forces: "you're talking about the rejection of violence and weapons" by requiring of them that they recognize that they had lied in the past or at least that they had "committed an error of judgment".

This speech was a slap in the face to the ambitions of the leaderships of these forces, centrist at the

level of their discourse and opportunistic in their practice. They had hoped to hold their planned congress in Damascus, but the dictatorial regime gave its approval on condition that they participated "in the framework imposed, otherwise, they would be in his eyes, like the rest of the opposition, a domestic enemy".

Centrist positions, opportunistic practice

Criticizing the discourse and the practice of the Syrian political opposition forces, especially in the context of the popular revolution, is not intellectual vanity, but a necessity because political practices which have harmful consequences on the course of the revolution have to be addressed.

From the beginning of the popular revolution, the Coordination Committee and its partner, the Democratic Forum [2], have by their concepts and practices taken an ambiguous position with regard to the revolution and the regime.

The Committee was in fact neither for the revolution nor for the fall of the regime, despite some recent press releases published under the pressure of the revolutionary movement, which could give the illusion to the contrary. Each time, they came back to their original position and attempted to lead in their wake other forces, like the Maan movement and the Watan Coalition [3]. The Coordination Committee has systematically emptied meetings and encounters of their revolutionary dynamics. The fluctuations in the positions of their leaderships - seen as being on the left - have damaged the image of the Syrian left in general and its capacity to act in the revolutionary movement.

The left forces which had joined the Coordination Committee, such as parties like the "Rally of the Marxist left" [4] monopolized its flag for a short pe-

riod. This "left" decided to conduct its political action through the Coordination Committee, renouncing an independent practice. On the other hand, the forces of the official Communist Parties have defiled the heritage of struggle of the Syrian left very early on by rallying to the clique in power. And the radical left supporting the revolution and militating within it had to stand out quickly from all these opportunists of the "left", whether they are allies of the regime or centrist opponents. This was the role of several left groups supporting the revolution as the Syrian Left Current [5].

The position of the Coordination Committee has established itself as a component of consensus with its initiative to put an end to violence, announced on August 14, based on an analysis of the "balance of forces" between the forces of the revolution and those of the regime in the shadow of an "international equilibrium not allowing the victory of the two parties over the other". Based on these assumptions, the Coordination Committee placed itself in a mediating role, despite the denials of some of its leaders. Its initiative called for "consensus on a temporary truce between the parties carrying out armed action", in other words, it puts the forces of the revolution and popular resistance on equal terms with the violence and savagery of the regime.

In fact, the Coordination Committee advocated this centrist position from July 26, 2012 in the Rome communiqué, published on the heels of a meeting at which it was the organizational backbone. Also present were personalities from other forces, such as the Watan Coalition. The Rome communiqué says that "weapons are not the solution" and that the situation needs "more than ever a political solution" calling for "renouncing weapons... to get to negotiations excluding nobody". The last paragraph is the prelude to dialogue and negotiations with the regime, so dear to the Coordination Committee.

The Coordination Committee made its final shift to a centrist course in the violent class struggle underway in its last appeal, published on August 28, 2012, for the holding of "a national congress for the

salvation of Syria". It said that it will be held in Damascus on September 12 [6], considering that the violence of the regime – this amounted to a rhetorical assertion – "was the cause of the emergence of counter-violence".

So the popular resistance is reduced to "counter-violence". To justify its approach, it centres its statement on the loss by Syria of its national sovereignty, since she has become "totally dependent on foreign, international and regional decisions". So Syria would be, as a country, society and state, now "completely dependent" on abroad, according to the Coordination Committee, and this would a justification for the latter to save the country and play a role of mediator between the forces which are "party to the conflict" in Syria. It is no longer a question of the revolution of a people, nor of sacrifices made to confront a bloody dictatorship. The position of the Committee takes shape: neither with one nor the other, it assigns itself the role of mediator.

The left face of the Coordination Committee

As the "Rally of the Marxist Left" is no more than an appendix endorsing the policy of the Coordination Committee, and has no independent political activity, in the editorial in the latest issue of its publication "The way of the left" (Number 39, August 2012), it has the headline "Against the violence of the opposition" where it announced that the regime has managed to push opponents into "using arms" to "make the opposition lose its moral influence and make it look like the regime". At a single stroke, the armed popular resistance of the masses to the killing of the dictatorship machine automatically becomes "morally decaying". In fact these remarks dramatically illustrate the intellectual failure of a certain Syrian left.

The editorial says that what is happening in Syria is the repetition of the tragedy of Hama in 1982, namely, a conflict between the Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood and the regime. It also says that the Muslim Brotherhood "is back, and with them many oppositionists look back thirty years af-

ter at the tragedy that had extended the longevity of the Syrian regime...". This miserable argument to justify the conciliatory position of the Committee and its partners of the "Rally of the Marxist left" is truly deplorable. Only a limited mind can equate the events of the 1980s - the armed struggle of the Muslim Brotherhood against the then regime - with the deep popular revolution going on in our country for eighteen months, where the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamists are only slightly influential despite the impressive media and financial support received from Qatar, the Saudi Arabia and Turkey. During the first months of the revolution they were absent from the revolutionary movement, having pursued truce and dialogue with the regime since 2006.

Thus we can understand the agreement of the "Parties of the Popular Front" with the opportunism of Kadri Jamil and Ali Haïder, who participate in the government of the dictatorship on the initiative of the Coordination Committee. As well as the ap-

proximation of their positions in the fact of the popular revolution, the consensus arrived at meetings of coordination between the Popular Front Government and the Coordination Committee at the beginning of September.

We are witnessing a realignment of the political "left" forces, with two rapprochements, that of the opportunistic and centrist forces, and that of the radical forces. This will lead to renewed pressure on the hesitant forces inside the Maan movement or the Watan Coalition, forces that quickly need to clarify their real political position. They must choose between a clear and radical position on the revolution or a rallying to conciliatory opportunistic policies.

In a context of radicalization of the Syrian masses against the dictatorial bourgeois regime, the conditions exist for developing a radical left cadre committed to the popular revolution, separate from these "left" opportunist and centrist forces.

IRAN

Sanctions or Collective Punishment?

MARYAM GILANI ·

The new EU sanctions, combined with intensifying US sanctions against the Central Bank of Iran and foreign financial institutions working with it, have already worsened the living conditions of the ordinary Iranian citizens who suffer as a result of the sanctions. The value of the Rial has been halved, inflation has increased dramatically and the purchasing power of the Iranians has diminished. Food prices, particularly for fruit, sugar, meat and poultry, have skyrocketed. Iranians are now forced to wait in long queues, as they did in the war years 30 years ago, to buy subsidized chicken.

Propagandized as an alternative to war and the only non-military measure available to stop Iran's nuclear program and authoritarian regime, the sanctions against Iran prove once again that sanctions are nothing but a form of collective punishment against innocent citizens. Sanctions are not a newly-discovered remedy for taming authoritarian regimes that are unpopular with the US and its western allies. Prior to the invasion of Iraq by the US in 2003, Iraqi citizens suffered terribly under thirteen years of US-backed sanctions that denied millions of Iraqis of access to clean water, medicine and vital technologies. According to the World Health Organization, in just the first four years of sanctions, the child mortality rate in Iraq increased 500%. Blocking international trade and access to finance does not damage the existence of the Iranian regime as much as it devastates the day-to-day living conditions of ordinary people. The black market as a rule owes its existence to the restrictions on the

legal market and it is highly controlled by political elites.

Sanctions have not only affected the lives of Iranians living in Iran. They have also been subject to 'unique' interpretations that have affected Iranians living abroad. In the US state of Georgia, for instance, Persian-speaking clients were refused service at an Apple computer store. In the Netherlands, the Foreign Minister announced – before the EU sanctions had even gone into effect – that the Dutch government would not renew the resident permits of Iranian researchers and specialists working in Dutch universities and research institutes. After protests, both from within and outside the Netherlands, this policy was revised to only apply to researchers working in the petroleum, natural gas and petrochemical industries in an attempt to keep "certain knowledge" from being transferred back to Iran. However, the boundaries of this "certain knowledge" is kept loose and researchers working in other technological realms are forced to prove their exemption from the law on a case-by-case basis.

Sanctions are often presented as an alternative to war and an effective means to bring authoritarian regimes into compliance with international demands. The history of sanctions, however, proves otherwise. Sanctions are not only often a prelude to war but are themselves a form of warfare perpetrated not against the governing elites but against ordinary people. The people of Iran have been struggling against their regime from the time of its founding. Destroying their basic living conditions and blocking their access to information, communication and technology will only strengthen the regime that they are struggling against.

RUSSIA

The government is preparing a massive political trial against the opposition. We need your solidarity!

RUSSIAN SOCIALIST MOVEMENT (RSD) ·

In Russia, the first half of October was marked by a tightening of repression against the opposition. For the moment, 19 people have been accused in the affair of the so-called "massive disturbances of public order" on May 6 [1]; most of them are at present in jail.

While arbitrary arrests of participants in the spring actions continue, it is already clear that a massive political trial against leaders of the opposition is being prepared. On October 5, one of the main Russian television channels, NTV, broadcast a film produced in the style "documentary investigation", containing unprecedented accusations against the opposition, especially against the best known figure of the left opposition, Sergei Udaltsov. In this propaganda film, done in the purest tradition of Joseph Goebbels, we learn that Udaltsov maintains links with foreign intelligence services and that the main activity of the Left Front which he heads is to scheme with external enemies of the country. As evidence, the film reproduced the recording of a conversation between Sergei Udaltsov, the Left Front activist Leonid Razvojaev, Russian Socialist Movement member Konstantin Lebedev and one of the closest advisors of the president of Georgia, Guivi Targamadze. The conversation particularly evokes a transfer of money from Georgia, in order to "destabilize" Russia. Although the faces are barely visible on the recording and the sound has been recorded and put on the video separately, barely two days later it was a pretext for a criminal action brought by the Investigating Committee of the Prosecutor's Office of the Federation - the body that is today taking the leading role in organizing the repression.

On 17 October, our comrade Konstantin Lebedev was arrested and Sergei Udaltsov was released after interrogation, subject to signing an undertaking not to leave the territory of Moscow. As for the third participant in "the case", Leonid Razvojaev, he applied for political asylum in Ukraine but was kidnapped in the centre of Kiev by employees of the Russian secret services. It should be noted that the Prosecutor's Office, although acting under the guise of a spy conspiracy, finally accused three individuals of "massive public order disturbances". The aim is to launch a potentially major trial, in which several cases will be treated together and all the activity of the movement's challenge to the regime will appear as a giant conspiracy.

It is important to note also that both the accused in the case of "espionage" and the majority of those arrested for their participation in "public order disturbances" on May 6 belong to different fractions of the left. On the eve of the implementation of new austerity measures in Russia, attacks against workers' rights and the pension reform, what frightens the Putin-Medvedev duo is the possibility of seeing the democratic movement that already exists unite with the elements of social protest.

The wave of repression that we are witnessing today is a stress test for the protest movement: either we will hold firm, or we will have to go through a new period of apathy and fear. Facing this unprecedented police pressure, we need the solidarity of our comrades in Europe and around the world. We ask for the organization of pickets for the immediate release of Konstantin Lebedev, the stopping of the criminal action against Sergei Udaltsov and Leonid Razvojaev and the release of political pris-

oners who took part in the protest on May 6 in Moscow. ?

The Russian Socialist movement was founded in March 2011 by two organizations, the Socialist

Movement Vperiod ("Forward"), Russian section of the Fourth International, and Socialist Resistance. It is part of the Left Front, an alliance formed during the protests against the falsification of the elections in 2011 and 2012.

GREECE

"The Greek people are currently at the epicenter of the capitalist crisis."

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

"We are now experiencing one of the worst crises of the worldwide capitalist system. But capitalism will not die a peaceful, natural death. Crises are part of the metabolism of capitalism. Only conscious action by the people can destroy and supersede capitalism in order to open the way to democratic socialism."

The Greek people are currently at the epicenter of the capitalist crisis. The way in which the Greek people mobilize to confront and respond to this capitalist crisis will be a crucial factor for finding a solution at the international level. You are at the epicenter of both the crisis and the solution to this crisis.

Seven years ago, the epicenter of the alternative to capitalism was located in South America: in Venezuela, in Ecuador, in Bolivia, when Hugo Chávez said in 2005 that he no longer believed in a third way; that he felt that there must be a worldwide socialism of the 21st century. Today, the epicenter of the alternatives – which have still not taken shape, as the title of this conference clearly indicates – has moved to Europe.

What the people of Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia have shown the world is that it is entirely possible to resist the capitalist offensive, that it is entirely possible to apply a policy of redistribution of wealth, to socialize the major strategic corporations; that it is absolutely possible and necessary that we take back control over common property such as natural resources. They have done it, and they are still in power in government; and let us hope that tomorrow, on 7 October in the presidential elections, Hugo Chávez will again be re-elected president of Venezuela.

We are living at a historic time in Europe today. Never at any time in the past 65 years have we experienced an offensive as brutal as the one we face today in the countries of Europe. Everywhere in Europe, the pretext of debt is being used – not only in Greece, but in all European countries – to apply policies of budgetary austerity. In Greece, we can clearly see the results in their most brutal expression, but Greece is only the start of an offensive that is already affecting the people of Portugal, Ireland, Spain, and other European countries as well.

That is why we must fight back and unify our efforts to suspend payment of, and repudiate, illegitimate debt. This is a fundamental goal for all of us on the entire continent.

The Greek people have taught Europe a great lesson in the past three years. First, they are resisting; they have organized and taken part in at least 14 general strikes. But, just as fundamental, and despite the electoral defeat, is the fact that the Greek people nonetheless voted massively for the radical initiative proposed by SYRIZA. It is a fundamental lesson for the rest of Europe – where too often the Left is far too timid. Greece's example shows the strength of a united Left, a Left that brings people together, that has created a coalition of 12 different political organizations and is endeavoring to unify them in SYRIZA. Greece's example shows that when a party or a coalition says "No", when it says: "If we are elected to govern, we will disobey the Troika", that courageous and combative attitude can win the support of the people. It is a lesson to all of us.

The reduction of the Greek debt in March 2012 is a swindle, and it is a trap. It is very important to

show international public opinion that the debt for which the Troika is demanding payment, which now represents 150 billion euros – that is Greece's debt with the Troika: 150 billion euros – to show that that entire debt is an illegitimate debt which must be annulled by the action of the people, through the disobedience of a government of the people.

They are trying to convince you that suspending payment will result in chaos in the country. But in the past 10 years, three examples totally contradict the idea that there is no possible salvation outside of debt repayment. Argentina suspended payment of its debt in December 2001, a debt of 90 billion dollars, and Argentina has experienced economic growth of 4 to 7% each year since 2003. Ecuador suspended payment of its commercial debt between November 2008 and June 2009 and succeeded in imposing a 65% reduction of the debt on its creditors. And Ecuador is doing very well economically.

Iceland, that model of neoliberalism, experienced grave difficulties in September 2008 with the collapse of its entire banking system. Iceland has refused, and still refuses, to repay the debt of its banks to the UK and Holland. Iceland is now doing very well, with an annual economic growth of 3%.

Clearly, Greece is not Iceland, nor is she Argentina or Ecuador. There are real differences, but the lesson to be learned is this: Here or elsewhere, and under circumstances that can differ greatly, if governments who have won popular support decide to suspend payment of illegitimate debt, they can achieve an improvement in living conditions for their people. It is an example that should be followed.

Clearly, cancellation of the debt is necessary, but not sufficient. Cancelling Greece's debt without changing the rest of the economy and the unjust social and economic model will not enable Greece to build an alternative that will be in the interest of her people. The cancellation, the suspension of payment of the debt is necessary, but socialization of the banking system, a change in the tax system so that the wealthy pay more taxes and taxes on goods and services of first necessity are reduced, are also an absolutely necessary part of an alternative model.

My dear friends, history is not written in advance. Several scenarios remain open to us. We can continue within the current chaotic situation, with more and more authoritarianism on the part of governments who are at the service of the banks. This can continue for years. Another scenario is possible, and is even worse – an authoritarian, neo-Fascist scenario. That is a grave danger and a very present threat. But there are two other scenarios: under popular pressure, there can be a regulated capitalism, a capitalism of the type that was practiced in the 1950s and 1960s, a capitalism of the Keynesian type. That is a possible solution. But the fact that there are so many of us gathered here this evening shows that we feel that there is no point in limiting our struggle to an attempt to discipline capitalism. We want to go beyond capitalism. We want a democratic, self-managed socialism of the 21st century. Long live international socialism. Long live self-managed socialism. Long live SYRIZA. Long live the Greek people. Long live popular resistance. Long live the revolution, comrades!"

Translation: "Snake" Arbusto and Judith Harris

URUGUAY

President promulgates law decriminalizing abortion

GUILLERMO C. COHEN-DEGOVIA ·

The Uruguayan President, José Mujica, promulgated this Monday an act adopted by the national parliament on October 17, 2012, which decriminalizes abortion up to the 12th week of pregnancy, by decision of the woman, provided that is carried out under the supervision of the state.

The draft had been voted for by the Senate and the Chamber of

Representatives (MPS). The President ratified the initiative, unlike his predecessor, Tabare Vazquez, who vetoed the bill.

The EFE agency explained that the new legal standard does not technically "legalize" abortion, but decriminalizes it, provided that certain procedures regulated by the state are complied with.

During the first 12 weeks, women must go to a medical consultation to discuss the circumstances and conditions ensuing from the conception, which include "situations of economic, social or family hardship or age".

Then, the doctor will take the case to an interdisciplinary team composed of psychologists, gynaecologists and social workers, who

will inform the women on the "risks" of abortion and the alternatives to this decision, such as "social and economic support programs", or "the possibility of giving your child up for adoption".

Women will have a period of five days of reflection before the abortion if that is their final choice. Abortions may be carried out at any public or private health centre in the country or, failing that, the centre must ensure that this is carried out by third parties, in cases of conscientious objection. Abortions that are carried out outside this procedure will continue to be illegal and therefore penalized.

For the law to come into effect, the Parliament and the authorities of the Ministry of Public Health will have to implement a regulation, which should be ready within a month.

The head of state explained that decriminalization was "very much more intelligent than a ban". Turning to sectors of society who reject the measure, he said that "from the point of view of principle it can be reprehensible, but from the point of view of historical practice, of what has happened, I think that many more lives are saved."

WOMEN:

Women are the real creditors of the public debt

CHRISTINE VANDEN DAELEN ·

Just as structural adjustment plans have exhausted and impoverished women in the global South, austerity will bleed the women of Europe dry. The same mechanisms, arising from same neoliberal ideology, are now everywhere at work. The privatisation, liberalisation and budget constraints that are on the menu of the austerity measures are eating away at the social rights of women, accentuating their poverty, hardening and exacerbating gender inequalities and undermining feminist gains. There is no doubt that the countless socio-economic regressions that are being tested on them today so that the capitalists do not have to pay for the crisis they have caused, will be tomorrow inflicted on all the popular classes, women and men.

A European overview of the social regression that is being imposed on women in the name of the debt

Among the main measures concocted for the governments of Europe, placed under the guardianship or the strong influence of the IMF and of European institutions, are: a widespread decline of wages and pensions, breaking down social protection, the destruction of public services, attacks on labour laws and the increase of taxation on consumption. At the end of the day, all these policies run counter to the emancipation of women in Europe.

I. A decrease in income from waged work for women

Well before the recession, the situation of women on the labour market was already far from egalitarian (compared to men). Female employment is characterized by strong gender segregation by type

of activity, wage differentials, a high level of part-time work and concentration in the sectors of the economy that are less well remunerated, undervalued, least protected by social security and tend to be casual. In such circumstances, it is not surprising that women are in a less advantageous position to face the crisis.

Several factors, directly related to the debt crisis and the macro-economic measures that are associated with it, exert pressure on income from women's waged work:

1. The rate of women's unemployment is increasing

If, in its first phase, the crisis severely affected sectors with a predominantly male workforce (for example, banking, the building industry, the car industry and transport), the sectors where women are in the majority (for example, services to people and businesses - catering, cleaning, etc. - sectors funded by the public authorities, as well as retail distribution and commerce) are at present directly and strongly affected. This gender-differentiated impact of the crisis on the employment of women and men is indicative of the widespread character of occupational segmentation (already underlined above).

Women's job losses are mainly due to the non-renewal of fixed-term contracts, the loss of purchasing power by consumers and users of services, and cuts in public finances imposed by austerity measures. Since women are, in Europe, very dominant in public services (they represent no less than two-thirds of those employed in the sectors of education, health and welfare), the financial restrictions demanded of governments affect them disproportionately. A considerable number of women are losing their jobs and seeing their already restricted incomes fall still further. Now, since we know that,

today as yesterday, it is women who bear most of the cost of food, health and education for the family, we can measure how much this decline in their purchasing power will affect children and dependants, but also the poorest women, who tend to put the needs of the family before their own. This has a direct impact on their physical and moral health: they eat less and/or less well, they neglect to take palliative and preventative health care, not to mention their deprivation on the level of cultural and social events, and of reading... This slide toward insecurity often leads them to seek a second or even a third job and to have recourse to credit to be able to ensure the needs of their families and their survival. It is no coincidence that micro-credit is growing in Europe, with as its favourite target women and their "consumerist cravings"!

If the losses of women's jobs are less sudden, less spectacular and therefore less visible than those that men have experienced and are still facing, they are certainly not less painful. In fact, the consequences of unemployment are more tragic for women in the long term. Insofar as they have on average less valued work experience than men, and as their careers are often based on part-time jobs with temporary contracts and periods of interruption, women are more vulnerable on the labour market and therefore have more difficulty in finding a job.

In addition, surveys show that women are more likely to be laid off when jobs are scarce, because men are still considered legitimate breadwinners. A study on the global level in 2005 [1] revealed that almost 40 per cent of respondents felt that, in a situation like that, men had more right to employment than women. But the right of women to work is a constitutional right in many European countries, starting with Belgium.

Finally, women migrant workers employed as domestic servants or in looking after children suffer the full impact of the decline in the purchasing power of their "employers". Because the latter are less and less able to pay for their services, they are compelled to dismiss them. Although the jobs of

women migrant workers are not in a big majority of cases synonymous with decent work, and they accentuate the differences between women, the economic immigration of these women allows them to compensate for the poverty that ravages their families in their countries of origin.

In conclusion, let us take note that while the effects of the debt crisis on women's employment are catastrophic, it is very likely that they are being underestimated. The reality is much worse than official reports suggest. In fact, people working part time are excluded from the unemployment figures. In Europe, in 2007, 31.2 per cent [2] of women were working part-time (four times more than men). We can say without any doubt that that fact that women start to work part time is rarely the result of a personal choice and is one of the direct consequences of the crisis...

Some examples of female unemployment in Europe resulting from the debt crisis:

In the Czech Republic [3], unemployment especially concerns mothers returning from maternity leave, mothers with young children in general, women over 50 and migrant women, while in a town in the North of Portugal, out of 17,000 inhabitants, 6,000 women are unemployed [4]!

In Poland, the mostly female textile industry found itself in crisis when the main sectors that it supplied in Western Europe collapsed: 40,000 jobs were lost [5].

2. The wages and pensions of women workers are being reduced

One of the main variables of adjustment consists of reducing the wages and the working time of workers in the public sector, composed mainly of women.

Wages are frozen [6] or reduced (in Estonia, between 2008 and 2010, wages in the civil service were reduced by 15 per cent [7]), pensions are cut (in Ireland, a 7.5 per cent tax is imposed on pensions [8]), workers' benefits such as bonuses or complementary payments like the 13th or 14th month are undermined, many full time positions

are converted to part time, the use of leave without pay is widespread (in Romania, workers were forced to take two weeks of unpaid leave in 2009 [9]),...

In Belgium, women working as domestic helpers or in office cleaning, in both the private and public sectors, while they already often work part-time, have seen their working time decrease even further [10].

These lost wages often force women to have more than one job or to alternate, as in England, their working time with their partners: while one works during the day, the others work the night shift to avoid having to allocate a portion of their revenues to have their children looked after...

The present precarious situation of retired women is being accentuated. More and more women will experience the hell of old-age poverty, whereas they have worked all their life. Not only is the level of pensions decreasing, but the retirement age for women will be raised, as in Austria where in 2014, women, instead of stopping work at 57 will have to wait until they are 60, while in Italy they will have to keep going until they are 65 years from January 1, 2012 [11]!

Let us note that in France, particularly because of the widespread use of part-time work (and when you say part-time work, you can say partial pension!), women's pensions are 40 per cent lower than those of men, while in Poland, women receive a pension that is lower than the minimum wage, which is already extremely low.

The decrease in wages and pensions amplifies the wage gap between women and men. At present, for equal work and equal responsibilities, European women earn on average 18 per cent less than their male colleagues. In some countries, such as Estonia, the wage gap is as much as 30 per cent [12]. In Belgium, it is currently 21 per cent [13].

3. The debt crisis accentuates the phenomenon of precarisation of female employment in Europe

The fall in household income engendered by the recession is pushing working-class people to accept

jobs that are well below their professional and educational qualifications, most often implying a worsening of conditions (working during breaks, night work, hours cut and changed, travel time not taken into account – for example in the service sector). This is particularly true for women (and more specifically for mothers) who have more difficulties than men in accepting jobs that do not allow them to reconcile work and family responsibilities (e.g. work that is far from their homes, not easily accessible or whose schedules are not compatible with those of school and extra-curricular structures).

So, today even more than yesterday, women predominate in precarious jobs (part-time jobs, limited-term contracts, temporary or even casual work) [14]. Not only is it precisely these jobs that are the first to go when there are lay-offs, but in addition they provide the women workers concerned with little or no access to the protection offered by labour legislation and social security. Often, precarious workers are deprived of conditions relating to protection during pregnancy and maternity leave, as well as the other main forms of social protection.

The deterioration of the working conditions of women highlights the precariousness of female employment. Pressure on and worsening of working conditions, intensification of the workload (attempts to abolish or reduce breaks, downsizing,...), increased flexibilisation of working schedules, which intensifies fear and stress due to the difficulty of knowing when you will be working, of being able to reconcile work and private life, a demand for polyvalence not accompanied by any training...All this leads to a real exhaustion at work that is not without consequences for women's health.

In the whole of Europe, the debt crisis is really in fact synonymous with the financial, physical and psychological precarisation of women's work, with an increase in the level of their poverty (a growing number of women workers have income below the poverty threshold) and loss of financial autonomy, a fundamental element of any real emancipation of women.

II. The demolition of social protection

A large part of the cuts imposed in the public sector in the name of the debt come from cuts in social benefits. But neither government revenues and public spending are gender-neutral: while men, because of their higher salaries, tend to be the main contributors to the tax revenue of the state, women have, for their part, tended to be the main "beneficiaries" of public spending through social services which are also gender-determined: childcare, care for dependent persons, public management of housing, education, health...

Therefore, reductions in public resources for social protection are much more likely to have a direct effect on women.

This observation is especially glaring in two areas:

1. The austerity measures block the family policies of governments

Reduction or outright abolition of certain social benefits which specifically affect women, especially mothers and among them, mothers who are "heads of families".

As an illustration, here are some measures that everywhere in Europe hinder any process of promoting equality of the sexes:

The Romanian government has reduced family allowances and those for maternity leave, as well as allowances for single-parent families (more than 90 per cent of these families are composed of a single woman and her children) and assistance to people with disabilities [15].

In the Czech Republic, social benefits paid to families with low incomes (and which are therefore often single-parent) have been abolished, the level of the allowance for parental leave has been reduced and conditions of access to it have been made more stringent. Allowances for new-born babies have also been reduced, as have been those concerning home care [16];

In England, the good health benefit during pregnancy, family allowances and tax credits related to the birth of a child have all been restricted or

frozen. Other reductions in social benefits, such as housing aid, affect women disproportionately. In fact, more women than men depend on these benefits. A study commissioned by the British TUC (Trades Union Congress) finds that following on all these measures, single mothers will lose no less than 18 per cent of their net income [17].

In addition, although women are often disadvantaged in terms of access to and level of unemployment benefit (in Germany, in 2010, out of 47 per cent of women who are unemployed, only 28% per cent receive unemployment benefits [18]) [19]; austerity policies envisage even further cuts.

Some countries have made their criteria for eligibility to social allowances even stricter, while others like Ireland reduce the level (by 4 per cent [20]) or even shorten the duration of benefits (Denmark has reduced by half - from four to two years - the duration of unemployment benefits [21]). In Belgium, a note by Elio Di Rupo, charged with forming a government, envisages unemployment benefits being progressively decreased even more than at present, the end of lifelong benefits and a hardening of the Policy of Support to the Unemployed [22].

All these examples show to what extent the austerity measures resulting from the "debt system" are contrary to any objective of the emancipation of women: not only do they undermine their financial autonomy, as well as any possibility of better reconciling the different aspects of their life - through, among other things, the use of public services - but furthermore, they want them to mainly pay the price for the crisis.

2. Austerity policies undermine programmes instituting equality between the sexes

Gender-equality policies

While measures to promote equality between the sexes should not be a "luxury" reserved only for periods of economic growth, it can be seen very clearly that the debt crisis is leading to a decrease both in the attention paid to the question by politicians and in financing for mechanisms of equality, as well as in the practical implementation of legislation. In Spain, the Department for Gender Equality

has been purely and simply abolished, while in Italy, the family policy budget has been reduced by 70 per cent [23]. But the importance of the existence of such policies is particularly glaring in times of recession.

Because of the austerity measures, services providing care for children and dependants are becoming less and less affordable, adequate, accessible and their quality is deteriorating. However, good care services are the guarantee for women to have a better balance between professional and private life, between productive and reproductive work, facilitating their participation in the labour market and encouraging gender equality.

In addition, quality public services play a positive role in the development of children.

In Bulgaria, the number of structures for the welcome and protection of children has been reduced; in Estonia, their hours have been reduced, preventing women from coordinating child care with their work schedules, while in Ireland, the price per child has been increased. In Dublin, it varies between €800 and €1000 per month! [24]

This decline of care services has already forced European women either to reduce their hours of paid work and therefore to switch to part-time work, or to abandon outright the job market. So in Europe, the rate of employment of women has fallen by 12.4 per cent when they have children (these figures are from 2009 - at the present time, the situation must be even worse) [25].

We can see to what extent austerity measures are endangering the achievements of feminist struggles and reinforce existing stereotypes of men as breadwinners and women as housewives.

The non-profit sector

Associations which provide help for women, such as family planning, homes for battered, raped and ill-treated women, telephone lines serving to listen to and help women who are in crisis situations, shelters for women and children, are also directly in the eye of the cyclone of the budget cuts imposed in the name of the debt.

Everywhere in Europe, whereas they have contributed to significant changes in favour of women and, indirectly, to the wellbeing of society in general, these associations are facing a reduction of their subsidies, both public and private. Indeed, under the effect of the economic downturn, private donors are contributing less and less in the spheres of solidarity.

Thus, although the crisis is synonymous with a feminization of poverty and an increase in the precariousness of women's existence, on the financial, psychological and physical levels (figures attest that domestic violence has increased with the crisis). Women's associations - which could offer them support and prospects - have become less accessible and will have to reduce the quantity and quality of the services they are able to provide to women.

The rest of the socio-cultural sector is also feeling the effects of austerity measures. Now, because it works primarily with impoverished populations, this sector brings assistance and support in priority to women. There is no mystery: if it decreases food aid, emergency shelter, permanent education workshops, cultural activities, women are the first to be deprived of these services

In conclusion, we can safely say that debt is leading to the deterioration, in a downward spiral, of all the policies and processes leading to the emancipation of women in Europe.

III. The destruction of public services

This affects women in the first instance and in three ways. Why?

Since they are a majority in the civil service [26], women are the first victims of the policies of mass lay-offs imposed by austerity plans. England intends to abolish 500,000 jobs by 2015, Romania already destroyed 100,000 in 2010 and France intends to eliminate 31,000 this year [27];

Women are also the primary beneficiaries of public services, whose existence is crucial for their participation in the labour market and for their economic autonomy. In fact, quality collective facilities and

services, in sufficient number and financially accessible, are essential levers of their emancipation.

Finally, it is women who will have to, through an increase in their unpaid and invisible work, take responsibility for care and education tasks abandoned by public services. So we are seeing a real substitution of roles and responsibilities, from the state to the private sector, and therefore to women, preventing them from fully participating in all spheres of life. In the name of the public debt, a transition is thus taking place: from the concept of "social state" we move on to that of "social mother". And all this is done for free, so as to reduce spending and repay the bankers: isn't the crisis wonderful?

Cuts in the health care system

The attacks against European health systems are structuring policies of austerity. Women are the first affected by these budget restrictions for three reasons:

As we have seen, women make up the bulk of the workforce in the health sector and are thus disproportionately affected by the job losses that are taking place there. Furthermore, they occupy positions that are less well paid and valued: there has been a precarisation of contracts and working conditions (e.g. fewer nursing auxiliaries are now being taken on a full-time basis and with permanent contracts, and more for short periods and for working part time).

Although the sexual and reproductive health of women enables them to exercise control over their own bodies and therefore, over their life, the austerity measures intend to reduce the necessary funding. But this specific sector of public health is absolutely fundamental for the effective promotion of gender equality. Fewer public subsidies are allocated to the prevention of HIV, to abortions, to family planning, to pre- and post-natal health services and to preventive health care for women;

The closing of health centres – such as has occurred in Bulgaria: since September 2009, 21 hospitals have been closed, mainly in small towns and

villages [28] - increases the share of care work and reproductive health care that falls to women.

Cuts in education

The budgetary restrictions practised in the field of education have an impact primarily on women as the majority of workers in this sector; they are, as in the field of health, the first affected by job losses (in Bulgaria no less than 50 schools have been closed, and in Latvia and in Greece school closures are becoming more widespread) and their working conditions are deteriorating (in Estonia, the number of pupils per teacher has already increased) [29].

In France, they are closing public and free pre-schools for children from the age of two in favour of "gardens of awakening" which are private and for which parents have to pay. This results in job losses in the public sector and increases the cost of child care.

Other austerity measures, such as the reduction of allocations for the purchase of books and school material (as in Estonia) or the decrease in grants for meals at nursery and primary school (two-thirds reduction in Hungary) increase the costs related to the education of children, which usually fall on their mothers [30].

The privatization of social services to the person

This is accentuated by austerity policies. The deficiencies in these services are compensated for by each woman individually but also and especially by migrant women without papers. These women, often undeclared and therefore without access to protection and to social and professional benefits, are highly exposed to working conditions which border on forced labour as well as to sexist and/or racist violence.

IV. Attacks on labour legislation

The austerity policies that governments want to impose, with the support of the IMF and European institutions, have as their objective a strong deregulation of the labour market that is synonymous with the dismantling of labour legislation and with a disintegration of the right to organise...Gradually, the

precarious work of women is more the norm than the exception. In the name of the repayment of the public debt in Europe, women are working more to earn less.

Flexible, precarious and casual work

Some employers, faced with a decline in profits resulting from the recession, are tempted to take the crisis as a pretext to further exploit women. Because of their low position in the labour market and, therefore, reduced bargaining power, women accept "more easily" than men conditions of precarious work, with a reduced salary and without social security. In order not to hire new personnel, managements flexibilise women's work schedules and do not renew their short-term contracts. To minimize social contributions and to avoid payment of taxes and other costs associated with regular employment, some employers do not hesitate to encourage women's casual work.

Increase in illegal procedures against women

In order to "save" money, some employers restrict policies and initiatives that favour women, or even adopt outright illegal practices such as the dismissal of pregnant women. The fact that gender equality no longer appears as a priority for governments of course accentuates this trend.

Although women have always been faced with the risk of losing their jobs when they are pregnant or after maternity leave, this risk is much higher in times of recession. Thus in England, the Equal Opportunity Commission recognizes that while the number of dismissals of pregnant women is 30,000 per year (2009 figures), this phenomenon will continue to increase with the [31] debt crisis.

This shocking consequence of austerity is not only immoral and profoundly contradictory to equality in the workplace, it is also illegal.

V. Increase in taxation on consumption – VAT

Austerity measures do not pressurize the rich and businesses, but the popular classes. The increase in VAT on items of current consumption (food, goods

and services) perfectly illustrates this reality. It particularly disadvantages women who provide for basic needs and food for the family and creates growing poverty in households. In England, VAT will be increased from 17.5 to 20 per cent [32]!

General grinding-down of women

Not only will austerity plans in no way deal with the real causes of the crisis, but they are plunging millions of human beings into misery and poverty. And women are at the forefront, undermined by the psychological impact of increasing poverty, ground down by overwork and by the stress brought on by being forced to take on multiple roles.

As we have seen, debt and austerity are not neutral from the point of view of gender. On the contrary, they are the cause of a feminization of poverty, of a precarisation of female employment, of a considerable increase in the burden of free labour provided by women to absorb their devastating effects; and in addition, they are destroying the achievements of feminism... However, while they bear the worst consequences of the crisis, women do not owe any debt, of any kind. They are the real creditors at the national and international level. A huge social debt is owed to them. Without their free work of production, reproduction and care, our societies would simply be in danger of collapsing!

The feminist alternatives to debt

All the forms of social regression imposed on women in the name of the "debt system" demonstrate how any real emancipatory process involves fighting against this debt, which together with patriarchy enslaves women and prevents them from enjoying their most fundamental rights.

All over the world, women's movements are working to strengthen the convergences between them. At the beginning of 2011 there was established, in Greece, the initiative "Women on the move against the debt and the austerity measures" [33]. This network which is being built hopes to contribute to the creation in Europe of a political space for reflection and coordinated action by women against the "debt system" and for the development of feminist alter-

natives to logic of financial capitalism, a logic which is deadly for human beings. It intends to take part, as a feminist initiative, in the European movement against the debt and the austerity measures and intervenes in various meetings and mobilizations whose focal point is the debt (for example the European Conferences against debt and austerity in Athens on 6 and 7 April 2011 [34], in Brussels on 31 May [35] and in London on October 1st, 2011 [[Speech by Sonia Mitralias at the London Conference against Austerity organized by the Coalition of Resistance (October 1, 2011), October 10, 2011, <http://www.cadtm.org/Discours-de-So...>]). The initiative thus intends to promote a European feminist campaign that will help to make the "debt system" crumble, this system which is

the enemy of any real emancipation of women and of all the peoples of Europe. Wherever debt audit processes are being organized (France, Ireland, Greece, Portugal, Spain), the initiative "Women on the move against the debt and the austerity measures" has the objective of preparing the feminist movement, so that it can support and participate actively in them. It thus reflects the determination of feminists to fight against a debt that is entirely subordinate to financial interests and to contribute to the development of a new mode of production and distribution of wealth, freed from capitalism and patriarchy.

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PAKISTAN:

Bosses' greed kills more than 325 workers

PIERRE ROUSSET ·

As is often the case, no safety measures had been respected by the bosses for whom only profit counts: windows barred, emergency exits locked, few or no fire extinguishers, doors and stairs blocked by goods, highly flammable products in all corners, packing in of staff and so on. Fires are common in these factories, but no authority cared... until the tragedy.

For Nasir Mansoor, Secretary-General of Pakistan's National Trade Union Federation (NTUF), in Pakistan "workers are treated more like slaves than human beings" [2]. During a street demonstration on September 12, the NTUF demanded a strict inspection of plants in coordination with organizations representing the employees, the registration of all industrial establishments under the Factories Act, the effective implementation of laws on health and safety, the abolition of the contract system, the issuing of a letter of hire to everyone at the time of their hiring and their inclusion in social protection systems [3].

What does the life of a worker matter to the wealthy? As Farooq Tariq, of the Labour Party (LPP) bitterly noted, if members of the elite had died in such a manner, the government would have declared a day of national mourning. Asif Zardari, president of Pakistan and co-chair of the ruling PPP, made a very brief visit to the Lahore hospital where victims of the fire at the shoe company had been taken, to the plant and to the families. He went after having promised compensation, and had, according to the press, given flowers to five hospitalized workers.

The tragedy has become an excuse for a polemical dispute between the two competing parties of the

elite, each accusing the other of negligence: the People's Party (PPP) which governs the province of Punjab (where the shoe factory was located) and the Muslim League of Nawaz Sharif (PLM - N) in Sindh (where the clothing company was located). In truth, in neither province was the inspection of enterprises authorized. Such inspections had been banned under the Musharaff dictatorship and this prohibition has only been formally lifted in Punjab (not in Sindh) after the death of 27 employees on January 4, 2012, at a pharmaceutical company in Lahore. However, the lifting of the ban did not mean authorization [4].

Charged (how could it be avoided?), the criminal bosses were immediately released on bail. They have sought refuge in Larkana bench, the hometown of the Bhutto family, which heads the PPP and, today, the country. The class injustice is obvious when we know that, for defending the rights of loom workers, trade union leaders in Faisalabad were each sentenced to 99 years in prison under anti-terrorism laws. "Not a single person", notes Farooq Tariq, "has accepted any responsibility of this great tragedy and no minister or adviser or any state bureaucrat has resigned. It shows a complete collapse of morality of the ruling class in Pakistan" [5].

In Pakistan, popular anger is great. Various trade union federations, notably, called for a "black day" on September 15, as well as political parties: the Awami Party of Pakistan (APP), Workers Party (WPP) Pakistan, Pakistan Peoples Party (Shaheed Bhutto PPP). At Lahore, this appeal was launched at a press conference held on September 13 at the Press Club.

On September 15, in the great textile centre of Faisalabad, most businesses were closed due to strikes. United events, bringing together trade

unions and left parties, took place, notably in Islamabad, Lahore, Hyderabad and Karachi.

On the international level the IndustriALL Global Union (IGU) federation and LabourStart immediately organized a protest campaign [6]. They joined Pakistani trade unions demanding wage compensation from the government of five million rupees for the families of the workers who were killed, and two million rupees for injured workers and the maintenance of the wages of the workers. The unions also asked the Government to arrest employers and charge them with murder. They are demanding sanctions against the Ministry of Labour and government authorities who have failed to ensure the safety and health of these workers. A petition is open online to support these demands. [7]

In a letter to the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Jyrki Raina, general secretary of the IGU, wrote: "The 2010 Pakistan Labour policy has among its objectives the following: Just and humane conditions of work be guaranteed to all workers. We very much would like to see this be finally applied to the garment and shoe-making workers in Pakistan who constitutes 30 per cent of the workers in the country and who have some of the most inhumane working conditions" [8].

The labour movement and left-wing parties are bringing together their forces so that the guilty employers do not escape justice and safety measures are finally imposed on industrialists. Thus in Karachi - where the most deadly fire took place - a new movement was formed: the Workers Right Movement (WRM). To this end, on September 22 more than 70 representatives of trade union federations, enterprise union sections, territorial agencies operating in the industrial areas, left parties, youth, student, and women's organizations, social

workers, and human rights activists, as well as individuals, gathered [9]. A rally was announced for September 29.

It is, obviously, not just in Pakistan that such tragedies occur. On May 10, 1993, Thailand experienced one of its worst industrial fires. It destroyed the Kader toy factory, leaving 188 dead and more than 500 injured, some remaining victims with disabilities for life (some paralyzed) after having jumped out of the second, third and fourth floors of the building. Asian Food Worker, the newsletter of the IUF [10] Asia Pacific, described the working conditions in this company, which recall those of Pakistan: "minimum wages were the norm, overtime was compulsory, work often extended late into the evening and amenities were lacking" [11].

According to this article published on the 18th of July 2007 by the Asia Pacific secretariat of the IUF [12], through a rather complicated business and family links network, the Group Charoen Pokphand (CP) - a major transnational - owned 80% of the Kader toy factory. After intense mobilization, it had to pay compensation to the victims of the fire and their families. The Thai Government for its part had to undertake to strengthen health and safety regulation. Ten years later, however, nothing has changed. Which did not prevent CP from participating in 2003 at a conference in Sweden entitled "Human rights and economic relations". [13]

These tragedies reveal the extreme contempt with which the ruling classes deal with ordinary people in these countries; but this was also the case in Europe before the struggles for social protection and a modification of cultures. This is a question on which the international labour movement must act with even more force.

SPANISH STATE

"Democracy kidnapped!", "Government resign!"

Manifest of Plataforma "¡En Pie!"

September 25, we encircle Congress. On 25 September, the people will be sovereign!

We are ordinary people, tired of suffering the consequences of a system conditioned and constrained by the markets, which in all respects cannot be sustainable and renders us victims of a huge scam called the "crisis". We unite to compose this manifesto and invite all citizens to join our claims.

We consider that the situation has passed all tolerable limits, and believe ourselves to be victims of an unprecedented attack of economic power that uses the crisis as a pretext to ruin our lives. The culprits are those who, with the complicity of all the political forces represented in Parliament, have constituted this untouchable oligarchy that manipulates all the powers of the state to maintain its privileges and its inordinate and illicit enrichment.

Today, it is no longer possible to conceal this gigantic social fraud, created from the systematic betrayal of election commitments and non-judicial punishment for the guilty bankers, politicians and big bosses. We see how the corrupt and immoral structure of power establishes policies endangering our rights and our lives, and how we suffer unjustifiable repression when we request a change.

We believe that the problem is of such magnitude and that these roots are so deep that the solution cannot come from reforms based on the current political system and this is why we demand:

- the resignation of the government in place and the head of state, as well as the dissolution of the Assembly, because of their premeditated treachery which led the country and all the citizens into disaster.

- the opening of a democratic constituent process, to draft a new constitution with the participation of all citizens, so that it belongs to them, because we recognize no democratic character in the current constitutional text, written without the involvement of the citizens, dedicated to the domination of the heirs of the Franco regime and of those who made the pact with them. It must be the people that determine the model of social organization in which they want to live, and not the reverse.

- the audit of Spain's public debt, with a moratorium on payment until it is clearly determined which parts do not have to be paid by the nation because they have served private interests using the country for their own purposes and not those of all citizens. We also demand the trial of all persons suspected of such manoeuvres, and the confiscation of their property if convicted.

- the reform of the electoral law for a new election process that truly represents the will of the people in each election, this being necessary to facilitate the development of a democratic process.

- the immediate cessation of all budget cuts and all the reforms which are contrary to the welfare state because they cause a restriction of the rights and freedoms of citizens: taken with the excuse of crisis, they are not only a disaster for the country, but increasingly they have been imposed by betraying the will of the people.

- a deep fiscal reform that would mean those who get most of society's benefits paying the most. We also demand the repeal of the tax amnesty decreed by the government, whose injustice is a real fraud on honest citizens.

- the removal of all the privileges of those who have political or public responsibilities, and the establishment of effective mechanisms for the control of the performance of their duties.

- the immediate cessation of all housing evictions, and the making available to the population, at the

price of social housing, of housing belonging to banks and funds that have been helped with public money.

– the creation of new jobs whose first condition is the sustainability and whose goal is human development. Thus, the coherent management of jobs should be carried out so that everyone can work for a living. The fact that we are forced to work still more is a huge deception, supported by the greed of major interests and contrary to the interests of most people.

For all the above reasons, we call for the citizens to assemble on September 25, 2012 outside the gates of the Assembly, for an unlimited demonstration until the resignation of the Government and the opening of a constituent process, through the unity of all the struggles for a fairer society.

"We are the majority, we are the people, we are right, and we will not allow you to pass!"

Manifesto of the Coordinadora 25 S

Democracy has been kidnapped. On September 25 we will save it. On September 25 we will surround the Congress of Deputies to save it from a kidnapping that has converted the institution into an unnecessary entity. A kidnapping of popular sovereignty carried out by the Troika and the markets, and executed with the consent and cooperation of the majority of political parties. Parties which have betrayed their electoral programs, their voters and all citizens in their promises and have contributed to the increasing impoverishment of the population. We will surround the Congress after more than a year of intense mobilization in all sectors of society, and after having verified that it is not democracy when institutions that supposedly represent act in interests that are not those of the majority.

For we have nothing to discuss with a regime that has been shown consistently to be blind, deaf and dumb to just demands for equality and social jus-

tice. We surround it to save politics from an unsustainable and predatory economic regime: the capitalist system.

We surround the Congress because we want to make a leap forward in social mobilization and we want to highlight the objective of recovering sovereignty and citizen power, that is, recovering democracy. We have created many processes of control, spaces of participation and discussion in social networks and in the streets, in neighbourhoods and workplaces, and we have started initiatives we want to continue to develop starting from below, without shortcuts and little by little. We believe that the time for decisions made by a small restricted group is over, because, against those who want to deprive us of our future, we have the means and collective intelligence to decide and build the society we want. We do not need false intermediaries, but resources and collective tools that actively encourage the political participation of all in affairs that concern us all.

We surround the Congress on 25 September to say no to those who tell us, to say that we disobey their unjust taxation, to pay their debt, and we defend our collective rights: housing, education, health, employment, democratic participation, income. To begin a process that means those responsible for the crisis no longer go unpunished, that the pyromaniacs who caused our crisis are not rewarded and begin, on the contrary, to be judged.

On September 25 we will demonstrate around the Congress because we want to retrieve the responsibility for our future without constraints. We endeavour to say to those who have kidnapped democracy that the time to leave has come, and to demand the resignation of this government in the first place, because we're going to replace it by creating a constituent assembly. This assembly will start a participation process which is direct and open, with which we will identify and create the political institutions, participatory tools and judicial and political mechanisms we need to ensure that collective decisions are totally effective. This process starts, but will not end, on September 25.

To save the Congress is to launch an invitation to the unity of other social movements, such as the struggle of public employees for the defence of public services, the different "tides" and other struggles for equality and social justice. To save the Congress is to refuse to accept the fear, powerlessness and disorientation resulting from the submission of politics to the economy and its consequences - fascist, xenophobic, racist and chauvinistic. And to

save the Congress means look for a way out in common.

We encourage all those who wish to accompany us to surround the Congress on 25 September, to say "enough!" and continue this way to save democracy and sovereignty.

We want rights, democracy, justice and freedom for everyone. We are getting there, we are not afraid. See you on September 25... and beyond!

GREECE

Organize – Occupy – Towards an Unlimited General Strike!

OKDE-SPARTAKOS ·

After 6 months of uproar against the government of the banker Papadimos, and following two consecutive elections in which the memoranda policies were spectacularly rejected, it seems nothing has change, except the audacity of the "Hrissi Avyi" ("Golden Dawn" - GD) fascists to kill immigrants and attack left-wing activists. The same disastrous downward spiral, the same terror, the same banal references to "hours of responsibility" and "critical decisions" while workers' lives are destroyed, the same slashing of wages, pensions and workers' rights, mounting unemployment, insecurity and despair, and the spread of the neo-Nazis who profit from the social misery and capitalist barbarism!

There is no doubt that Samaras, New Democracy (the ruling right-wing bourgeois party), and their coalition partners, the now toothless PASOK of Karamanlis, and the "left" crutch DIMAR under Karamanlis, have been telling blatant lies to the Greek people. There is no doubt that they have been sowing the seeds of racism, using fascist demagoguery and encouraging the formation of the new SA battalions (fighting units of the German Nazi party before 1933) of Michaloliakos and Kassidiaris (GD leaders) in order to distract attention from their own criminal policies. They claim that their "moderate and reasonable line" of re-negotiation of the memorandum might appease the creditors and thus avoid the worst scenario of an uncontrolled bankruptcy and the exit of the country from the euro-zone. Very soon, these tales will no longer persuade anybody. Then the ruling class will fall back on the GD

fascists and give them the green light to annihilate the workers' movement.

It is clear that ND, PASOK and DIMAR will remain the guarantors of the memoranda policies, until we give them the boot. They do not lack "political stature" or the ability to find better policies. Essentially they represent the pressing need of big business to destroy the social gains of the working class to save the euro and to fulfill the "international obligations" towards the creditors and interest profiteers of the troika. They are utterly loyal to the "national cause" of the Greek ruling class and are quite aware they are "replaceable" if necessary. The Greek bourgeoisie wants to remain in the euro club and to have at its disposal a broken, impoverished, starving and racially divided working class.

According to recent media leaks, the Prime Minister wanted to "take all necessary measures", even at the cost of his own downfall. He does not care about the "verdict of the people", or his campaign promises, or about the anger and despair of millions of people who suffer from deepening poverty and unemployment. The three-party coalition installed by the bankers, creditors and the owners of the television channels, to secure the interests of the Greek ruling class, continue their wretched policies. The burden of system failure is to be paid by the millions of working people, women, youths and immigrants. The vast majority of the population, who did not cause the debt, will now pay for the usury, and are thus the prime victims of the cannibalistic capitalist crisis.

The rulers think they can escape social rebellion and the danger of a general uprising, by directing the anger and hatred of the poor onto the poorest,

onto the most vulnerable, and towards those who never had rights. Thus they open the floodgates to the murderous hordes of fascists, the vilest instruments of the bosses, to suppress any workers' and social resistance. They spread the ideological fog of nationalism, macho behavior, and stupidity - in a society that has never stopped resisting the corporate agenda.

It is high time to draw the lessons from the painful experiences of recent years: It is not enough to say that we are against the Memoranda. Samaras was a liar and demagogue under the "anti-Memorandum" flag. Today, he abandons everything and is proud of taking anti-labor measures that surpass every crime committed by the Papandreou and Papadimos governments. Kouvelis (DIMAR) was supposedly against the memoranda and became later the "anti-memorandum" component of the government. Today he supports the barbaric horizontal cuts in salaries and pensions, the raising of the retirement age, as well as the rapid privatization of public enterprises.

The SYRIZA leadership also claims to be able to stop the Memoranda policies, while keeping Greece in the euro-zone. But if there is no alternative, submission to the will of Rompuy, Merkel, Barroso and Hollande (another so-called socialist and "friend of Greece" who has accepted the European fiscal pact and has inaugurated austerity measures in France) cannot be excluded. This shows that if you respect the rules of the rich and powerful, you are doomed to adopt their policies.

It is impossible to put an end to the memoranda policies and to the "measures - packets" imposed every 6 months, or to end the brutality of the loan conditions, if we do not oppose the fundamental dogmas of the ruling class, and especially repudiate the "bankruptcy" threat and the insistence on staying in the euro-zone. We shall not be able to free ourselves from the terror of the markets if we do not oppose the functioning of the market in Greece. We shall not get rid of the memoranda without targeting capitalism per se. And none of this will be

achieved without trampling the fascist snake and cutting off its head.

If we do not want our living conditions eroded daily, if we do not want to be reduced to standing in long lines to receive lower and lower unemployment benefits, if we do not want to leave the country as immigrants because the "boat is full" of unemployed, poor and "dangerous elements", as the mass media demagogues and fascists claim, we need to tackle the root of the problem. Our rulers must finally be forced, through a massive social uprising, to make their emergency departure by helicopter. We need to reject the slogans of the "ready solution of a new government" and the priority "of solidarity, and not of the struggles", and the "responsible parliamentary opposition". It makes no sense to sink so low as to beg the troika to grant Greece the "same terms as Spain and Italy."

For a political general strike!

The former governments were not chased away by elections. The present government will not be replaced by the hope for the next "anti-memorandum savior" who will eventually implement the Memoranda policies. The strikes in the municipalities, hospitals, and public transport should be generalized. The strikes and mass demonstrations of 26 September were a beginning. The mobilization of the workers in the communities and at the electricity company DEI, as well as the heroic invasion by the unpaid Skaramangas shipyard workers into the Defense Ministry, which humiliated the state, showed the next stage. The vindictiveness of the government and the courts, but also the barking of GD, and the dissociation of the "responsible" SYRIZA regarding such "extreme" actions of the demonstrators, were the result. But today there must be another outbreak, not a simple mobilization to polish the image of reformism, but the organization of a systematic strike struggle that must be coordinated nationwide by the rank and file membership of the unions.

Workers' control - self-organization in every workplace and in the neighborhoods!

We must challenge the control of the economy by the capitalists and their political staff. The public enterprises and services, and the big corporations need to be controlled by the workers and their assemblies. The pioneering example of the "Dodona" and VIOMET (enterprises under self-management of the workers) should become the rule. Hold meetings in all districts to forge solidarity and to coordinate the fight. Launch anti-fascist committees in every city and district in order to isolate the fascist GD gang.

Down with the Samaras government! For a Workers' Government!

We need a government that is accountable to the workers and able to break with the system, to reject the debt and interest charges, to free society from the parasitism of the banks through their nationalization without compensation, and to nationalize the strategic sectors of economy and trade. This government has to be accountable to the democratic councils we can ourselves build in the plants, offices and in the service sector. Nothing has ever been, or ever will be produced without us. The only solution will be provided by the workers, farmers, women and youths, seniors and immigrants — that is, by all of us together.

SPANISH STATE

Something rotten in the kingdom of Spain

MANUEL GARÍ ·

Is it imaginable that, after the death of Marx or Durruti or Rosa Luxemburg or Che, their political enemies would hail their intellectual, political and moral stature? No, obviously. During these events the bosses, the military, the politicians and the oligarchs did not shed tears on their tombs but on the contrary spat on them and denigrated them. The antagonism of the class struggle has never left any room, now or in the past, for compassion or lyrical expressions from the bourgeoisie.

But why is it that in this kingdom of Spain nearly all sectors, with the exception of those who are openly and publicly pro-Francoist, have participated in a concert of praise with respect to the Communist Santiago Carrillo after his death? The eulogies which have filled the airwaves, Internet and newspapers have come from persons such as the monarch — who said he was Carrillo's friend — and the presidents of the Cortes and of the government (both belonging to the Popular Party, which has launched the most significant offensive against the Spanish working class since 1977). The leaders of his majesty's sterile loyal opposition (the Socialists, supporters of the Union Progreso y democracia party — UPyD, created in 2007 — and the Basque Nationalist Party) have joined in, as have even the Catalan Republican Left and supporters of Basque independence.

Are they all agreed then in valuing a "declared" disciple of Marx and Lenin? I fear not. The praise is not addressed so much to a disturber of the social order (who has moreover ceased to be one for a long time), nor to the combatant for liberties in the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) who played a role in the anti-Francoist struggle, but rather to the man

who directed the manoeuvres intended to deactivate the workers' movement in the face of its enemies, to the artisan of the consensus which built the restricted democratic regime which emerged from the Transition.

It is undeniable that Santiago Carrillo occupied a significant role and space in the workers' movement and in Spanish political history. But it is useful to elucidate the result, to evaluate the actions which filled a long and intense militant life of someone who had a great influence on the Spanish left and had so many possibilities of advancing the workers' movement but who, in practice, bore much political responsibility for the defeat of the latter after the death of the dictator in November 1975.

What the bourgeoisie and its parties admire in Carrillo — characterised as a moderate and support of order, with all that means in their mouths — is precisely that he helped them in the democratic transformation from the old regime. The false myth of a peaceful and exemplary Transition has led to the mythologizing of the role of figures like Carrillo, but also the criminal Francoist minister Fraga Iribarne.

However things are simpler and less glorious. The PCE leader was the inspirer and executor of the "amnesty in exchange for amnesia" which was made concrete in the pardoning and forgetting of the transgressions of the Francoists and the abandonment of the cause of the victims. The loss of memory is the current cause of the loss of roots, origins and references of the old and new social left. It is this loss of memory which allows the right to remodel the historic discourse.

The logic of the process of political thought which replaced the class struggle by national reconcilia-

tion has transformed the democratic rupture into a negotiated rupture, the struggle as creator of new relations of force by consensus at any price, by negotiation as sole scenario in the transition between dictatorship and democracy. The final result was a limited and restrictive Constitution which today is revealed as being clearly unpopular. An example of this slide of the "negotiated rupture" of concession without counterpart was the acceptance of the Francoist (monarchical) flag. This was not simply a renunciation of the tricolour: it implied embracing the cause of normalisation under Juan Carols. This in agreeing to some concessions, Carrillo won respectability among the de facto powers, but lost it in the eyes of thousands of militants.

The years of the Transition ended in a setback for working class consciousness, political disorientation, and the electoral rise of social democracy, massive "disenchantment" and the division and marginalisation of the powerful Communist Party. But this policy of consensus at any price was not an isolated fact. On the contrary, it represented the concretisation of the Eurocommunist adventure in the Spanish case. The triad of Santiago Carrillo (PCE), Georges Marchais (PCF) and Enrico Berlinguer (PCI) succeeded, in their respective countries and parties, in a rapprochement with social democratic positions, making it increasingly difficult to identify alternatives to the latter.

That is why opinions on the question of Eurocommunism and by Carrillo among his former comrades of the PCE or in the leadership of Izquierda Unida stretch from uncritical defence to bitterness, but without any capacity of detachment. The current world of the PCE (as well as Carrillo's successors) is hostage to its vision of the story of the end of Francoism. Communist activists were the active protagonists of it and have ended up believing, in their majority, that the consensus was a historic necessity, as if it was the only road possible. The world of the PCE continues to oscillate between aspirations of social transformation on the one hand and social-democratisation and institutionalisation of its horizons and criteria on the oth-

er hand. That forms part of the heritage of Carrillo, like the demobilisation of his party.

Santiago Carrillo was a Stalinist, like thousands of Communists in the 1930s and 1940s. That is where we find the roots of his logic. But even if, after the 20th Congress of the CPSU in February 1956, Carrillo, like so many others, distanced himself from the figure of Stalin and the Stalinist period, he never revised his conceptions of social and political struggle. He never questioned his conception on questions as significant as the assassination of Trotsky or Nin (to mention only the most significant figures among many others in the CPSU or PCE). Nor did he modify his conceptions on internal democracy within workers' parties, or on the necessity of socialist democracy as an essential vector in the construction of socialism. There was not a word of political self criticism and, more seriously still, no moral reconsideration.

The years of clandestine struggle or Carrillo's dignified attitude in the face of Tejero during the attempted coup of February 23, 1981 cannot be avoided, but they cannot hide the damage caused by the "Carillist" policy inside the workers' movement. What rings false in the funeral ritual is the praise for his role in favour of the working class while he is characterised at the same time as a "statesman". It is a contradiction in terms, because under capitalism statesmen are men of the state of the exploiters whereas combatants for the working class are the defenders of the exploited and oppressed. No shared space exists between one and the other.

In conclusion, all the praise addressed to Carrillo by his self-styled class enemies and political adversaries recalls the lines of Marcellus in Hamlet, that there is something rotten in the kingdom. That said, at the end of the day and unlike those who have poured so much praise over Carrillo or those who in a sectarian fashion rejoice over his passing, I genuinely regret his death, despite his advanced age, and I sympathise with the sadness that his friends and family members feel at this time.

Death, as natural as it is, seems to me the failure of nature.

BANGLADESH

Abdul Karim – An Obituary Message

BADRUL ALAM ·

He is survived by his wife, two sons and one daughter along with a host of relatives and associates. He came of a very simple family with a very poor background but with his spirit of struggle for the interest of the downtrodden people in society he enjoyed a huge popularity that took him to a peak stage in the northern part of Bangladesh. As a result, the people who lost their illegal interest around the land as well as the people who fell envy due to his vast popularity become desperate to kill him and ravage his works successfully accomplished in favor of the landless peasants, peasant women and destitute in the locality for the last couple of years.

We, leaders of Bangladesh Krishok Federation and Bangladesh Kishani Sabha extremely shocked at

the atrocity of killing of Abdul Karim who was our comrade in the tough struggle for a genuine agrarian reform for food sovereignty in Bangladesh. Although he is not alive physically his work will be remembered among us for ever and inspired the people in the world who are fighting for the land rights, food sovereignty and their very existence. We expect that the people who are engaged with his sincere work will translate the condolence into power for the benefit of the common people. And may his bereaved family have much strength to carry the sudden blow on them.

We are planning to have a series of programs to be performed around his post burial ceremony. It includes a morn procession, meeting of condolence, protest rally demanding exemplary and capital punishment to the assailants and national level discussion on the current trend of killing of those who are land defenders.

IBERIAN PENINSULA

Massive mobilisations against austerity

JAN MALEWSKI ·

The government of Mariano Rajoy (Popular Party, PP) decided on confrontation. The leaders of the PP compared the initiators of the demonstration — Coordinadora 25S and Plataforma ¡En Pie! — to the fascists responsible for the failed coup of February 23, 1981. More than 1,300 special anti-riot police officers were mobilised. They charged, firing rubber bullets, leading to confrontations which continued through the night, leaving more than 60 wounded with at least 35 arrests.

However, next day on September 26, thousands again gathered before the Parliament. And the government, conscious of its growing social discredit, began to see that neither its campaign nor the police deployment had succeeded in intimidating the tens of thousands of people who denounced the sequestration of the presumed "seat of popular sovereignty" by the "dictatorship of the markets".

In Portugal, on Saturday September 15, 2012, a million people demonstrated against the austerity imposed by the troika and applied with zeal by the government led by Pedro Passos Coelho. A mobilisation on a scale not seen in the country since May 1, 1974, forcing the government to manoeuvre by announcing the withdrawal of the recent tax measures (to prepare others, equally vicious, aimed at workers, pensioners and the unemployed).

The challenge of the new movements

These two recent events show the mounting of popular rejection of the austerity measures. In Portugal and Spain, these great popular mobilisations have been initiated by new social movements and not by the big trade unions or political parties of the tradi-

tional left. This represents a significant change. Already on May 15, 2011, the indignant of the Spanish state had raised the slogan: "no party, no union represents us". This was not a passing phenomenon. It is not about a "crisis of the party form" or the "trade union form", or even the "organisational form". On the contrary, the appeals of the initiators of the mobilisations mentioned stressed the indispensable need to organise. But this amounts to a new stage of the rupture with the historic organisations of the workers' movement, locked into conservatism and increasingly clear in their heated defence of the status quo, and thus, in the eyes of a growing mass of those in revolt, useless if not hostile organisations.

It is also a challenge for anti-capitalist activists and organisations as for all those in the traditional workers' movement who do not accept this situation. Their history and experience, in short their savoir-faire is rooted in the past. With the current crisis of capitalism, this past becomes ever more obsolete. Not that past experiences are not useful today. In particular, the power of the dominant class, increasingly losing its legitimacy, appears every day more reliant on brutal force. The apparatuses of domination — the states and their national and international institutions — indicate clearly that they cannot be "improved" or "reformed". The very term "reform" has changed side — today it increasingly means challenging the gains made by the masses.

But what is also changing, with variable speeds according to the country, is the links between the masses and the "workers' organisations". The legitimacy of the latter declines, following the loss of legitimacy of the institutions in which they are installed. There is then a growing space for the new social movements. The challenge for committed ac-

tivists is to be capable of helping to build them, without preconceptions or attempting to impose "solutions" derived from books, starting from their starting point: indignation. As Daniel Bensaïd put

it, "indignation is a beginning. A way of rising up and starting a journey. You are indignant, you rise up and then you see what happens".

When will we see tanks in Barcelona?

ESTHER VIVAS ·

In the current verbiage that some politicians have adopted, these statements are not the only ones that we might call "undemocratic", "putschist" and "anti-system". After the demonstration on September 11, [1] the UPyD spokesperson [2], Rosa Díez, called on the government to suspend the autonomy of Catalonia if the region used money from central government aid "to finance its secession". Not to be outdone, the MEP (representing the Popular Party, in power in Madrid) and vice-president of the European Parliament, Alejo Vidal Quadras, requested that a brigadier-general, preferably from the Civil Guard, take charge of the "Mossos de Esquadra" [3] to curb the independence process.

The *El Mundo* newspaper, in its editorial of September 27, demanded from the government "a penal response to the challenge launched by Artur Mas" who has called for a referendum on self-determination in Catalonia. *El Mundo* urged the government to amend the Criminal Code to "punish by imprisonment any call for an illegal referendum". And for good measure, the extremist "Reconversion", platform, whose leaders are Alejo Vidal Quadras and José Antonio Ortega Lara, demanded that if such a referendum were to be held the government place Catalonia under tutelage, on the basis of articles 161.2 and 155.1 and 2 of the Constitution.

And that's not all. The Spanish Military Association (AME), composed of former members of the army, has threatened Catalan president Artur Mas with a Council of War and has warned those who promote "the breaking-up of Spain" that they will have to

answer before a military court on charges of "high treason". Nothing more than that! It speaks volumes about the present situation when a conservative politician such as Artur Mas, enmeshed to the marrow of his bones with the powers of finance, especially with the La Caixa and Aberti banks, who is leader of a party as un-subversive as the CiU [4] elicits such reactions. What will happen then when it comes to someone on the left, who is opposed to the interests of the employers and is a sincere defender of the right to self-determination?

In the light of the above, I ask myself a question. If all of this was happening, for example, in a Latin American country, how would it be characterized? The BBC has published a long report that makes the link between the threats to Catalonia and the "pact of silence" introduced during the Transition [5]. And this is quite right. The Amnesty Law of 1977 guarantees immunity to those who committed crimes against humanity under the Franco regime and during the Civil War. These individuals are still there, and today they are raising their heads again, without any restraint.

At a time where the Hispanic Titanic is taking in water on all sides, with a crisis which worsens each day and scaffolding that is creaking everywhere, it is the true nature of the regime that is revealing itself. And so are the limits of a transition that has been so beatified that it has prevented people from seeing the reality for decades.

All of a sudden, the mask of "democrat" has fallen from their faces. Crises have at least the advantage of clarifying things.

According to them, democracy is a good thing as long as it does not go beyond a certain framework. As a result, all those who disturb things, whether it is these "hooligan" Catalan independentists or

these "dangerous" 25S activists, must be quickly silenced. Broadcast television images of police charges? What a scandal! People will become indignant and will demonstrate even more. Solution: limit the right to demonstrate and the right to be informed and the business is settled. The president of the Popular Party group in the European Parliament, Jaime Mayor Oreja, and the Delegate of the Madrid government Cristina Cifuentes have understood this well.

The current crisis is not only an economic and social crisis, but really an unprecedented regime crisis that calls into question the state model that came out of the Transition, its "pacts of silence" and the very shaky democratic system that we have today.

In the middle of this mess, we must support all democratic demands that come up against the monarchical corset of the Transition, starting with the right of the Catalan people to decide its own future. Who is afraid of such a referendum in Catalonia? Those who are not willing to accept its result. We

should not, however, let the Spanish chauvinist fury against Mas make us take such a politician - whose only achievement in government is to have reduced social rights and taxes for the rich - for a herald of democracy and freedom. On the contrary, we, Catalans, will have a better life when we get rid of Mas, his squire Felip Puig and their team.

Infantry lieutenant-colonel Francisco Alaman Castro said that "the current situation resembles that of 1936". That is quite a declaration of intent. Today, as then, our democracy, our rights and our future are threatened. What is at stake is important. When will we see tanks in the streets of Barcelona? It would not be the first time. But there is one thing I am sure of: the people will not remain silent. The most important thing will be not to make any mistake about who the enemy is, and while we fight against the badly recycled Francoists, we should remember that the interests of the majority of the Catalan people have very little to do with those of the Messiah Artur Mas.

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PORTUGAL:

The demand of the people now has a goal: the resignation of the government

LEFT BLOC ·

1. The gigantic demonstration on 15 September, which cannot be compared to any other mobilization in recent decades, turns the page of Portuguese politics. This was the response of the social majority to the government offensive, adopting a clear position against the Troika and demanding a break with the policy of impoverishment, austerity and destruction. The demonstration by the people in the streets did not demand time to slow down austerity, or the protection of the Troika: it demanded the end of the Troika in Portugal.

This was a signal sent to all the oppositions, to the financial markets, to Merkel and the IMF, to the ECB and the European Commission.

The Left Bloc salutes the organizations that took the initiative of this popular demonstration and expresses its esteem for the million citizens who saved democracy against the Troika.

2. The mass struggle is the path to confront the government and the Troika. One year after the beginning of the protectorate, with the government of the PSD - CDS, record levels of unemployment, debt and poverty give the picture of the country. The people responded to the provocations of theft of wages through an increase in the TSU paid for by workers, and its transfer to the employers, as to all the forms of reduction of wages and pensions or new increases in taxes, with democracy in action.

3. Before the announcement of this measure by Passos Coelho, seconded at once by the Minister of Social Security, a CDS member, the Bloc presented on September 8 its agenda, around three proposals: first, support for urgent popular mobilization; sec-

ondly, support for a general strike which would unite the whole trade-union movement and broaden out socially; and thirdly, recourse to the Constitutional Court, to a motion of censure and a fight in Parliament to present clear alternatives.

Neither the internal contradictions of the government and of a coalition that is fragmenting nor the help of the President of the Republic will answer the single essential question in Portugal: to refuse the theft of wages and pensions, to refuse financial manipulations, it is necessary to refuse the Troika and to dismiss the government and open the way to general elections. Only the people can defend labour and social justice.

4. Social mobilizations will intensify, from the forthcoming trade-union demonstrations to other forms of popular action, as has been seen in the gathering of thousands of people before the Council of State. The Left Bloc will work fully for the success of these mobilizations, supporting the general and unitary struggle of trade unions and social movements.

5. To respond to the emergency situation that the country is going through, the Left Bloc participates in convergences in Parliament against the assault on salaries and pensions through the TSU or against the confiscation of the income of those who work.

In this sense, the Left Bloc expresses its full readiness for the junction and the confluence of the opposition, expressed in a motion of censure.

This new signal in Portuguese politics shows that the rout of the government and of the recessive spiral is the path to the recovery of the economy, to ac-

countability and to respect for workers and taxpayers.

6. The Left Bloc is engaged in the regional elections in the Azores, presenting the result of its intense parliamentary and social work and mobilizing a socialist alternative, based on the defense of workers,

reforms and young people, promoting regional autonomy while refusing all solutions of austerity or poverty. The National Board welcomes and supports this campaign and sends its wishes for electoral success to the regional organization of the Azores.

PORTUGAL

A million-strong revolt in the streets

RUI PEREIRA VIANA ·

Rui Pereira Viana

Resignation, a characteristic of the Portuguese people?

In recent years, apart from some minority demonstrations of social organizations and movements, the Portuguese population has endured the austerity measures in a spirit of resignation.

This resignation is not the product of a "national (or cultural) characteristic", any more than it results from congenital stupidity. No, it comes from decades of massive propaganda campaigns which have led Portuguese workers, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, to give credit to the most dreadful tales. As a result of campaigns to make the population believe it is responsible for the government deficit or for public debt and that its salvation depends on that of banks and financial speculators, that there is no money to pay for public services or the workers who run them, the population accepted the intervention of the Troika.

This gullibility comes in a country where the minimum monthly net wage has been in recent years less than 400 euros (this figure should be compared with those of Spain, Greece and other European countries), which gives rise to two conclusions:

1. It is easier to dominate a people accustomed to poverty for generations.
2. In the course of the last thirty years, capital and the parties that have alternated in government (PS, PSD and CDS - PP) have concentrated most of their forces and their resources on hiring communication consultants and on absolute control of the media.

There is a limit to all resignation

However, from time to time discontent and revolt have made themselves felt in some sectors. Since March 12, 2011, there have been two general strikes and several big demonstrations. On September 15, we saw massive demonstrations of angry people. It is estimated that these demonstrations mobilized more than a million people across the country.

The slogans of the call for the demonstration summarized in an exemplary way all the reasons for the present revolt: "Out with the Troika!"; "We want our lives!"; "We have to do something extraordinary!" Everything is implied in these three sentences: the urgency of bringing down the government, putting an end to the policy of austerity, reconnecting with the social functions of the state, suspending the payment of the illegitimate debt that benefits capital and dispossesses workers.

On the eve of the demonstration, several representatives of the police and of sergeants of the armed forces sent a clear message: the Portuguese people have good reasons to rebel against this state of affairs and political leaders will not be able to count on them to repress the people that they swear to defend.

What can a million people signify in the present context?

The present governing coalition (CDS -PP + PSD) obtained the support of 29 per cent of registered voters on 5 June 2011. But that was:

- before workers lost between one and three months of salary per year;
- before the implementation of the cancellation of collective bargaining agreements;
- before the increase in the hourly, weekly and annual workload;
- before workers were obliged to work unpaid additional hours (and even days);

- before the increase in VAT;
- before the cuts in the spheres of sickness and disability, health care, education, culture, of unemployment and minimum income benefits;
- before the massive dismissal of teachers;
- before the dismissal, an express reform and the re-hiring on a precarious basis of doctors and nurses in the national health system;
- before the drastic reduction in the number of beds available in public hospitals;
- before the reinforcement of educational measures aimed at transforming children into workers accustomed to be reduced to slavery from the age of five;
- before some police brigades came to kill people in the poor neighbourhoods on the edge of urban centres;
- before more than a hundred protesters were taken to court for protesting peacefully against the violent and illegal actions of the municipal authorities;
- before the closure of websites that announced demonstrations and rallies;
- before activists who were trying to help the people in the shanty towns were severely beaten by plainclothes police officers;
- before indignant unemployed people were arrested and taken to court for attempting to enter an employment agency in order to seek employment and distribute leaflets;
- before the abrupt increase in the hourly workload of teachers;
- before the Minister of Education announced that classes will now have a maximum of 30 students, against 24 two years ago;
- before patients on dialysis in the countryside who had no money were abandoned to certain death, which can already be considered to be a new massacre of modern times;
- before the government decreed the closure of the largest maternity hospital in the country, which was also a centre of education for the sector;
- before a cut of 100 per cent in the culture budget...

It should be known that this demonstration saw the participation of tens of thousands of activists and supporters of political organizations, parties and unions whose organizations had begun by condemning the demonstration. It should be known that throughout the preceding week and up until two hours before people began to assemble, the media campaigned intensively to dissuade the population from demonstrating, citing possible police attacks, infiltrated agents provocateurs or masked extremists with bad intentions, thereby contributing to prevent hundreds of thousands more people from being involved in the demonstrations. Under a veil of apparent neutrality, the media did their best to demobilize potential protesters.

Sudden and unpredictable, the last straw that broke the camel's back

With an obvious lack of a sense of timing, two days after the calling of the demonstration, the Prime Minister announced the most offensive measures that workers could remember: an increase of 7 per cent in the social contributions paid by workers accompanied by a cut of 5.75 per cent in employers' contributions and additional cuts in the social functions of the state. This measure comes on top of the previous austerity measures and involves a new wage reduction of at least 8.5 per cent.

A large number of demonstrators (perhaps the majority) have no other weapon of struggle - because many are temporary workers who are unable to have the "luxury" of distributing of leaflets or going on strike, on pain of immediate dismissal and of being put on the blacklist of the employment agencies. Today, a large number of people are afraid to appear in a demonstration, to be photographed and recognized publicly, and of losing their jobs as a result. We live in a climate of fear similar to that prevailing under the dictatorship.

For these reasons, more than for the number of demonstrators, this demonstration on September 15, 2012 was a clear illustration of the spirit of revolt which is shaking the country. In strict terms of numbers, the only demonstration of this magnitude

that we can remember was May 1, 1974 when a million people came out into the streets of Lisbon (which had almost twice as many inhabitants then as compared to today). However, there is a significant difference between the two dates. On May 1, 1974, when a million people invaded the streets of Lisbon, what was striking was the way people laughed and hugged each other, after the fall of the Salazar dictatorship, which had taken place on 25 April with the Carnation Revolution. On September 15, 2012, it was this joy that was missing in the streets of Lisbon and Porto.

This mass mobilization cannot be an accident in the desert

Of course, it is not enough to take to the streets and say "enough!" A change in the political relationship of forces is always the result of more than good intentions or slogans. Harder forms of struggle are needed to force the government to retreat. In this

sense, faced with the great potential shown in the country on September 15, the unions and organizations of the Left have an even greater responsibility in the organization of the struggles against austerity and the established power. They can no longer justify their lukewarm attitude by expressing doubts about the state of mind of the workers - independently of the political views of individuals, it is clear that there is an awareness and a willingness to put an end to austerity measures and to put an end to the government and the interference of the Troika.

From now any action of trade-union or political organizations that does not clearly take this demonstration into account and that tries to calm things down and abandon commitments could only be regarded as an execrable act of treason.

Lisbon, September 16, 2012

This article was first published on the site of the CADPP <http://cadpp.or/node/338>

PORTUGAL

"We have done something extraordinary"

ANA CARLA GONÇALVES ·

Comrades, today, we have done something extraordinary. We are doing it now. This demonstration is all of you who are here. It began with a call from a group of citizens from various sectors of intervention and various political currents, who wanted to contribute to a strong and broad mobilization against the Troika, the Troikists and the austerity policies that they are imposing on us. The strength of those who have taken to the streets across the country shows that, together, we can change what is wrong. We can do something extraordinary.

We are in the street, here, in Angra do Heroísmo, Aveiro, Barreiro, Beja, Braga, Bragança, Caldas da Rainha, Cascais, Castelo Branco, Castro Verde, Coimbra, Covilhã, Évora, Faro, Figueira da Foz, Funchal, Guarda, Guimarães, Lamego, Leiria, Loulé, Marinha Grande, Mogadouro, Moncorvo, Nazaré, Nisa, Odemira, Peniche, Ponta Delgada, Portalegre, Portimão, Porto, Santa Maria da Feira, Santarém, Setúbal, Sines, Tomar, Torres Novas, Torres Vedras, Viana do Castelo, Vila Real, Viseu, and also in the world, in Barcelona, in the United States and Canada, in Fortaleza (Brazil), in Macao, London, Paris, Brussels and Berlin.

According to the information that we have, nearly a million people have taken to the streets. We are at this moment in the streets, doing something extraordinary and with a clear message: we want our lives, without negotiation, without warm clothing, simply a dignified life.

It's extraordinary to show them that no, we are not resigned. We do not believe that the misery that they want to impose on us is inevitable: the misery of the lack of bread, lost housing, the misery of pre-

carious work, of the work they steal from us, of the right to a decent job that is denied us; the misery of transport services, whose prices are increasing to the point where we can no longer pay them, and which we need to go to work or school - our public schools that they want to rob us of, just as they want to rob us of the right to be sick and to have decent treatment in the public health service that belongs to us.

And culture? And water? And all the rest?

This demonstration is the beginning of many other things.

We need a citizenship that is awakened and mobilized.

It is urgent that we take change into our own hands.

Our protest and our coming together can and should be expressed in all areas of our lives: at work, in the neighbourhoods, at school, at home.

Once and for all, we will show that we know how to unite. We will actively participate so that never again will anyone govern us badly.

It is urgent to disobey.

When there is no respect for people, when there are only taxes and lies, when there are only measures implemented in defiance of the will of the people and when non-elected institutions decide everything, it's time to say: no!

Every struggle and every battle will be vital.

We were already close to boiling point, but the absurd and very violent character of the communication from the country's Prime Minister and the disastrous and very serious measures announced by the Minister of Finance have exceeded our patience

and our tolerance for political lies, social injustice and the destruction of the economy.

For this government, it doesn't matter that its policies only serve to cause misery. For this government, the lie is the reality. Their technical manuals and their theoretical models say that we have to be poor, we have to be cheap, we have to be delivered to the law of the jungle. That we must be sacrificed so that they - this abstract entity that can do everything with our lives – can meet a mandatory programme, which serves only to stifle the economy, increase unemployment and inequality, destroy common goods.

We will concretise our protest and demand in union that this government of the Troika - this government that is more Troikist than the Troika - resigns!

But it cannot stop there.

We do not want to replace this government of the Troika by another government of the Troika, not even in a softened version.

The Troika does not help. The Troika does not save. The Troika crushes us, kills us, overwhelms us. The Troika and its austerity measures do not work. They do not work here, they do not work in Spain, they do not work in Greece, they do not work in Ireland, they do not work in Italy. They do not work in Cyprus. They do not work in Latvia. They have already been tested and have never worked. Austerity has never succeeded in the world and it will never work...

Our demonstration - our demonstrations - are a red card for all the austerity policies of this government, but also of every government that purports to implement such measures, even if it were to change their names and the way they were implemented, even if it made them completely insipid.

Today, we have come together to demand that the agreement with the Troika - cynically called protocol of agreement - be torn up.

Today, we say that we will not allow measures of austerity and pillage to steal our lives in order to save the banks, to increase the accounts kept in tax havens, to inject millions into the big economic groups.

United, we demand that, once and for all, the Memorandum of the Troika be refused, because it leads us to poverty, to bankruptcy, to chaos in our lives. And the rejection of European austerity is the demand for a different Europe.

And we are not alone. In Spain too, they are now shouting in the streets "Basta!" ("Enough!"). And tomorrow, the choir will be even more deafening: Greece, Spain, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, all the voices together to shout to the world that there are people inside the offices who have names and that they are enacting measures that enslave us and kill us, that govern against us, as if it was in our name.

People who as Father António Vieira would say "don't come here to seek our good, but come here to seek our goods."

Tomorrow, we will be present in different actions of protest of Portuguese society. At this stage of our struggle, it is essential to give force to a general strike. A strike by which, everywhere, people from all sectors of work, office workers, precarious workers and the unemployed, will stop the country and say once and for all: "Enough is enough! We are not figures with which to inflate bank accounts. We have our lives. We are not a tame and quiet herd. Stop playing with us. Stop robbing us of our work and our dignity! »

And it is important that this is a popular strike. A strike by people, for people, who are threatened and subjected to blackmail to not stop working, as if they were machines. So we will make every effort to help build a popular general strike, driven forward by the trade unions with the population and civil society, which will be able to stop the whole country in a united way against this disaster that they want to impose on us.

But even more: it is our duty to resist. To do less would be to give up our lives. We must organize resistance. We must organize ourselves accordingly. At the local level, among friends and neighbours, with collectives, with organizations that exist and with organizations that will be created by the strength of our rebellion and our determination. We commit ourselves to support this strike, this resistance and this fightback, and to demonstrate, as we have done today, that people who do not agree on everything can unite for a cause. And today the cause is our lives. It is important that this struggle

ignores borders and that it assumes, as today, an Iberian, European, international dimension.

On 21 September, in the evening, a State Council will be held, convened by the President. It is important that, on this occasion, we gather at Belem to remind them that we demand the resignation of this government and that we accept no 'solution' that follows the commandments of the Troika. Government: out! Troika: out!

Out with the Troika! Out with the Troikists! We want our lives! And we will have them, because today is the first day of our struggle.

PORTUGAL

"Out with the Troika! We want our lives!"

We have to do something extraordinary. We have to take over the streets and squares of the cities, and our countryside too. To bring together our voices, our hands. This silence is killing us. The noise of the dominant media system echoes our silence, it reproduces it, it weaves the networks of lies that send us to sleep and annihilate desire. We have to do something against submission and resignation, against the narrowing of ideas, against the collective death wish. We must call again on the voices, the arms and the legs of all those who know that it is in the streets that the present and the future is decided. We must overcome, once and for all, the fear that is skillfully disseminated, realize that we have almost nothing to lose and that the day is coming when we will have already lost everything because we remained silent and alone, we had given up.

The pillage (the loan, the aid, the relief - these names that they give it, depending on the type of lie they want to formulate) came, and with it the implementation of devastating political measures involving a colossal rise in unemployment, insecurity, poverty and social inequality, the sale of the majority of state assets, with cuts in the budgets of social security, education, health (where the plan is to privatize the national health system), culture and all public services that are essential for the population, so that all the money can be channeled to pay and enrich those who speculated on sovereign debt. After more than a year of austerity imposed by outside intervention, our perspectives, those of most people who live in Portugal, are only getting worse.

The austerity that they are imposing, and which is destroying our dignity and our life, does not work

and is destroying democracy. Those who govern in accordance with the Memorandum of the Troika are handing over the basic instruments for the running of the country to speculators and technocrats, applying an economic model which is based on the law of the jungle, the law of the strongest, despising our interests as a society, our living conditions and our dignity.

Greece, Spain, Italy, Ireland, Portugal, the countries held hostage by the Troika and financial speculation, are losing their sovereignty, like all the countries on which this regime of austerity is imposed.

It is against the inevitability of this death that is being imposed and announced that we need to do something extraordinary.

We must build alternatives, step by step, taking strength from the mobilization of the people of these countries, so that Greek, Spanish, Italian, Irish, Portuguese citizens and all people come together, coordinate their actions, fighting for their lives and joining their voices together.

If they want us to bend and force us to accept unemployment, poverty and inequality as a way of life, we will respond with the force of democracy, freedom, mobilization and struggle. We want to take the decisions of the present into our hands in order to build a future.

This is an appeal from a group of citizens from various sectors of intervention and various political currents. We are talking to everyone, to all the collectives, movements, associations, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, political organizations and parties that share the basics of this call so that they will join us in the street on 15 September.

They have divided us in order to oppress us. Let us unite to free ourselves!

Signatories: Ana Carla Gonçalves, Ana Nicolau, Antonio Costa Santos, António Pinho Vargas, Belandina Vaz, Bruno Neto, Chullage, Diana Póvoas, Fabiola Cardoso, Frederico Aleixo, Helena Pato, Joana Manuel, Joao Camargo, Luis Bernardo Magda Alves, Magdala Gusmão, Marco Marques,

Margarida Vale Gato, Mariana Avelas, Myriam Zaluar, Nuno Ramos de Almeida, Paula Marques, Paulo Raposo, Ricardo dead, Rita Veloso, Rui Franco, Sandra Monteiro, São José LapaTiago Rodrigues.

Contact.

PORTUGAL

The Left Bloc in the face of the crisis

"We are experiencing an economic coup d'état"

The Prime Minister has presented to the country "a set of measures that will change the Portuguese economy and the social reality of the country" and he has done so "without presenting the accounts", without any guarantee that, by 2013, we will be at the beginning of the end of the crisis, said Francisco Louçã.

In reality, "with these measures, in 2013 Portugal will be a much smaller and more ravaged country, with far fewer options and less ability to make choices, as a result of the savage taxing of this economy by the Troika and of the memorandum which has been implemented", he said.

The Bloc leader stressed that we are faced with the plans of "Talibans of the economy who, with flat-tery and cruel proposals" present measures that correspond solely to the interests of big business but "never to the suffering of the population".

Francisco Louçã has accused Prime Minister Passos Coelho of lying to the country by stating that the measures presented flow from the decisions of the Constitutional Court and from its pressure, that they strengthen social security, that all Portuguese will be treated equally and that Portugal was not Greece.

"The Prime Minister has brazenly lied by saying that he took measures to respond to the Constitutional Court, because the Constitutional Court said exactly the opposite, demanding equality for work and a stop to the protection of capital and speculation. The government has transformed interim measures into permanent ones, continuing the attack against workers and against reforms; in other words, violating the principles of the

Constitutional Court in a grotesque manner" said the Coordinator of the Left Bloc's Political Commission.

"The poor are treated with great cruelty" said Louca, unlike those who "avoid being taxed", and are favoured.

As regards the alleged differences between Portugal and Greece, Francisco Louçã pointed out that in both countries it has always been clear that "wage reductions have never been a solution to the crisis".

Louca said, referring to patent inequities in the proposals submitted by the government, that the taxation from the 3,466 million euros which, as has been recently discovered, have been deposited in accounts offshore, corresponds to wage reductions for civil servants and reductions in retirement pensions, and even exceeds them. The Coordinator of the Left Bloc's Political Commission added that the lowering of the Single Social Tax (TSU) "favours only big companies" and that on the other hand small companies are disadvantaged by the decline in household consumption.

"We are experiencing an economic coup d'état" which is leading to an "economic depression" stressed the Bloc MP, warning that the Socialist Party will have to choose, and to decide whether it continues to support the policies of "insensitivity, dementia and cruelty" of this government which has been transformed into "an embassy of financial interests or whether it is willing to break with this memorandum and to oppose this "economic coup d'état".

The Bloc will be, said Francisco Louçã, "ready for every struggle, for every form of unity and convergence in the framework of all the democratic measures that enable us to oppose this savage economic coup d'état".

"We are at a time when Portugal must stand up again and when Labour needs to know how to defend itself, when democracy must include everyone. This is a struggle that will lead to a government of the Left, capable of breaking with the troika, of restructuring the debt, of defending the economy and Europe against the Talibans of the policies of financial speculation" he concluded.

September 8, 2012, <http://www.esquerda.net/artigo/esta...>

Convergence of the oppositions for a motion of censure

At a press conference this Saturday, Francisco Louçã announced that the Left Bloc is "ready for a convergence or a confluence of all the oppositions around a motion of censure" of the government, which would represent "the voice of the country against the attacks on wages and pensions". This was the main proposal approved - unanimously - by the National Bureau of the party, which discussed "the dramatic worsening of the economic and social crisis" in the country and "the political failure of the government".

The Bloc MP pointed out that the demonstration on September 15 was the most convincing and determined response to the Prime Minister's announcement of that all workers had to offer the bosses a month of their salary. The demonstration mobilized so many sectors that "the Prime Minister has found himself all alone", he said.

It appears, nevertheless, that the government is considering new ideas on how to take from workers one or two months' more salary, or pension in the case of pensioners, either by means of a new tax increase or through new taxes and surcharges or by other similar attacks. "All of these measures, over the past year, show that this government is totally incompetent and non-viable from the social point of view, and unreasonable economically", Louçã said.

Support for a general strike

The Bloc has presented an agenda around three proposals, as indicated in the statement presented to journalists: firstly, urgent support for popular mobilization; secondly, support for a general strike which would unify the entire trade union movement and broaden out socially; thirdly, appealing to the Constitutional Court, with a motion of censure and a fight in Parliament to present clear alternatives.

After its crushing defeat, which forced it to abandon the changes to the TSU, the government again wants to impose measures as severe as a huge tax increase, said the Coordinator of the Bloc. "So, let us have the courage to say that the only response that Portugal expects is the resignation of the government". To this end, the Bloc affirms to all the forces of the opposition that it is completely ready for a motion of censure which will reflect this popular clamour and this demand. "Everything for a fightback against austerity. Everything for a fightback against the troika. Everything for a country which lives decently," concluded Francisco Louçã.

22 September 2012, <http://www.esquerda.net/artigo/bloc...>

Louçã insists on a motion of censure

"In the course of this week we will see what the government wants to do. We will discuss and we will not give up, we will not let our guard down. I will speak with the leaders of the opposition parties, to insist on the obligation that the country has given us, so that Parliament may hear the million people who have been censored by the government and the troika," said the Coordinator of the Political Commission of the Bloc to journalists, this Monday morning, after a journey on the Green Line of the Metro to demonstrate the constraints imposed on travellers by the reduction of trains to only three carriages.

This descent into the Metro fits into the Bloc's campaign against budget cuts and privatization of transport. "With this government, it's the end of the line".

Although the Socialist Party has argued that it was premature to present a motion of censure of after the government of Passos Coelho has apparently abandoned the changes in contributions changes to the Single Social Tax (TSU), Louçã insisted on the fact that "we must not withdraw or give up".

"After the first responses of the Socialist Party (PS) and the Communist Party (PCP), I think that we should discuss further. In our opinion the motion of censure is still necessary. If the government's policy is to increase unemployment, reduce wages, raise taxes even more, whereas they have promised that they will not increase them, what people said in the street must reach Parliament and force the opposition to be consistent. That is why the Bloc has invited everyone to be consistent and to respond to the country's difficulties," said the leader of the Bloc.

To the question about what he expected from the Social Concertation meeting, which began this morning, Louçã replied that the government is preparing "a colossal attack on wages" and that it is preparing to ask workers to pay for "the incompetence and the inefficiency of the budget and the destruction of the economy that it has caused".

"The government is completely addicted to wage-cutting, it is drugged by attacks on pensions and it thinks that the only thing possible in the Portuguese economy is wage-cutting and reforms. This only causes crisis", Louçã criticized.

The Member of Parliament and leader of the Bloc stressed that the alternative is "to be serious in the field of the economy" and that it is for this reason that the opposition should unite around a motion of censure. For Louçã, it is time to move from words to acts and to take on one's responsibilities.

"We want to unite without wasting time. We are not prepared to turn our back on the country. It's already as bad as it could be," he said.

September 24, 2012 <http://www.esquerda.net/artigo/louca...>

João Semedo: "Struggle is the only way to defeat the policy of austerity"

Esquerda.net interviewed the MP João Semedo on the retreat of the state with regard to the TSU and the measures announced on Monday by Passos Coelho.

Esquerda.net: What do you think of the measures announced by Passos Coelho?

João Semedo: Under the pressure of the gigantic demonstration on 15 September and the concert of protests across the country, the government has been forced to withdraw the amendments to the TSU and is trying to fool us by claiming that it is relieving us of austerity, whereas it will in reality intensify it by a general increase in taxes on income from work, for all workers, including retired people and those on benefits. The people took to the streets against the austerity imposed by the troika and the government, against even more unnecessary and unequal sacrifices, whether they are called TSU or IRS (personal income tax). The Portuguese people is tired of always being victims of the troika and the government, while at the same time the government accords advantages to banks, financial groups and employers. What will the CDS do this time? (this party centred its election campaign around the slogan, against any increase in taxes). Will it keep silent about a tax increase, as it has always done since it has been in government with the PSD? I cannot remember a government that has so much increased the taxes of those who work for a living as the government of Pedro Passos Coelho and Paulo Portas has.

Esquerda.net: The Bloc has called for a motion of censure, is it maintaining this call?

João Semedo: On Saturday, the Bloc considered that it was necessary for the parliamentary opposition to censure the policy of austerity and that this condemnation could and should take the form of a convergence around a motion of censure of the government. The measures that have been announced now confirm the worsening of austerity and therefore show that the Left Bloc's position was right. If

the whole opposition converged around a motion of censure, it would have great importance for the fight against the government's proposals. I think we can say that what we already know of the government's intentions reinforces the validity of the position of the National Bureau of the Left Bloc.

Esquerda.net: Beyond this call, what should be done now?

João Semedo: I think that the key now is to intensify the social protest, the social movement, social struggles in all the forms that they can take, from big demonstrations, big street protests, up to a gen-

eral strike. Neither the Council of State, the employers, nor the financial groups can stop the government offensive against the wages of those who work, or the reforms to the pensions of those who have spent their lives working. The only brake to this policy, the only way to defeat and overthrow this government is by the social struggle; now, by demonstrating on September 29 at the call of the CGTP. The Bloc will mobilize all its forces to contribute to a big demonstration that will once again show the government the door.

September 25, 2012, <http://www.esquerda.net/artigo/joã...>

VENEZUELA

"October 7: Elect Chavez President – October 8: Get rid of the bureaucrats"

CARLOS MIRANDA ·

The presidential elections in Venezuela will take place in a few days. President Chavez is aiming for a third re-election and faces Capriles Radonski, the single candidate of the opposition organised in the Mesa de Unidad Democrática (MUD), who personally participated in the April 2002 coup.

All polls show Chavez as the winner, although in the last days they show the gap between the candidates shortening significantly. After a triumphalist beginning, the leaders of the PSUV are calling on the population to widen the gap and secure victory for Chavez.

The relaunching of the Social Missions

The Chavez campaign rests on three fundamental measures taken in the last year and a half. They are the launching of two big Social Missions and the reform of the organic labour law, a promise pending since the coming to power of the Bolivarian Government 14 years ago.

The Gran Misión Vivienda [Big Housing Mission] launched a year and a half ago has already built and delivered more than two hundred thousand decent housing units across the country as part of a projected plan of two million for the next government. And the Misión Amor Mayor [Greatest Love Mission] has given retirement benefits to nearly a million people who had no social security.

Thirdly, last April the reform of the organic labour law was passed, which incorporated some advanced measures in the employment field such as for example immunity from dismissal by organic law, six months post natal leave for the mother and two for

the father, the end of employment outsourcing, reduction of the probationary period for new workers from three months to one month, and other measures seen as progressive for the majority of workers.

In this context the campaign of the opposition is based on a discourse that says it will maintain the social conquests of Chavism and is aimed primarily at the Achilles heel of the government: the abuse, inefficiency and neglect affecting the population.

The state bureaucracy, cancer of the revolutionary process

The fourteen years of Chavista government have seen important advances in the standard of living of the people made possible by exceptional prices per barrel of oil. On the other hand these advances are insufficient.

In the absence of a break with the logic of capital, the main beneficiaries of oil revenues have been the local bourgeoisie and sectors of multinational corporations. This bourgeoisie, coupled with a new business sector of state contractors, known in the country as the "boliburguesía" (ie. Bolivarian bourgeoisie), has worked closely with the government bureaucracy. Ministers, officials, leaders of the PSUV, function as the state aspect of the logic of capital with a mixed economy model, enjoying huge and obscene privileges. Meanwhile outstanding major debts to workers remain, for example discussion of the collective agreement for public employees and for health workers has been delayed for seven years.

To these privileges is added the mistreatment of the Bolivarian people. Persecution of Union leaders and trade unions. Impunity for hired killers.

Discrimination against beneficiaries of the Missions. Promises unfulfilled in relation to business improvements. And among many other things, an inefficiency which hides corrupt procedures in the management of public enterprises and that puts them in crisis or at the edge of paralysis.

This is the basis of weariness, disillusionment and harsh criticism in a sector of the population which is one of the engines of the revolutionary process and the social base of Chavism. Affection for Chavez, who embodies the Bolivarian people, is now marred by the management of the bureaucracy protected by the President himself.

A new phenomenon is taking shape

The most dynamic social process in the country is the developing rupture between sectors of the vanguard of the working class and the popular movement, and the bureaucracy. While defending Chavez, it is a fact that criticism of the PSUV has grown and that this is no longer the party of the fighters in the process.

Closely associated with the state bureaucracy, its main leaders are at the same time, governors, mayors or deputies, the party has lost its original impulse and it has been emptied of rank and file militancy.

Along with this process there is the beginning among the Chavista activists of a phenomenon of renewal in the unions and among middle-level leaders of the popular and community movements. There is growing criticism of the undemocratic methods of the traditional Chavista trade union leadership and there is a strengthening of democratic practices among rank and file workers and community movements that directly confront the bureaucracy. In recent months the conquest of a majority in the SIDOR steel company trade union by Alianza Sindical, as well as the victory in the Chrysler union by a platform headed by Marea Socialista, show that a change that is taking place. These leaders are capable of confronting Chavez as seen at SIDOR where José Meléndez, leader of Alianza Sindical and Marea Socialista, has demand-

ed on one of Chavez' live TV and radio broadcasts, that the president fulfil the commitments he had made (see box at end of article).

The campaign of Marea Socialista

Marea Socialista, as a critical current of the PSUV, has for some months been waging a significant electoral campaign with a different content from that of the official campaign of the government, the party and the Gran Polo Patriótico. Resting centrally on the critique of the state bureaucracy, mobilizing workers, youth and members of the communities, it has raised in the streets the slogan: 7-O Chavez Presidente, 8-O A limpiar de Burócratas la Revolución ["October 7, Chavez President – October 8, For the cleansing of the bureaucrats from the revolution"].

Distributing hundreds of thousands of flyers and tens of thousands of posters, the campaign has found an echo among critical sectors of the PSUV. That can be measured in the current significant growth in membership of the Marea.

Workers from different sectors, communities, members of the social missions, and students, have joined in the denunciation of the bureaucracy of the party and the state. The Venezuelan people face many problems and although they don't want to go back to the past represented by Capriles Radonski, and therefore will again vote for Chavez, they openly reject the neglect, abuse and obscene privileges of the bureaucracy of the party and the state. After the elections and a triumph for Chavez, the fight against bureaucracy will become a demand made by the Venezuelan people of its President. The need for the construction of a democratic and therefore revolutionary alternative is being felt across the country.

SIDOR workers urge Chavez

At a campaign rally, held in August and broadcast on national TV, in which the complete elimination of labor outsourcing in basic industries was announced, workers from the state-owned SIDOR

steel company urged President Chavez to enforce the collective bargaining contracts and other agreements the company management has been postponing for two years. They also raised the transfer of the pipe factory from PDVSA to SIDOR among other demands.

Jose Melendez, leader of Alianza Sindical and the National Coordination of Marea Socialista, with all the respect and affection he has for the president, with whom he has had direct contact since the nationalization of the steel plant, urged him to meet

these commitments . The opposition has tried to portray this event as an example of a process of rupture between the workers and Chavez. In fact it is the maturing of a sector of the Chavista political union leadership reflecting the feelings of the rank and file, that in the heat of important struggles against the state bureaucracy and the government itself is becoming committed to the method of democracy and the consistent struggle to defend the rights of workers.

EUROPEAN UNION:

Greece-Germany: who owes who?

 ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

While the government's debt to private banks was reduced, there was an increase in what it owes to the Troika resulting in new measures of phenomenal injustice and brutality. This agreement to reduce the debt aims at burdening the Greek people with permanent austerity; it is an insult and a threat to all peoples in Europe and elsewhere. According to the IMF research unit, in 2013 the Greek public debt will amount to 164% of GDP, which shows that the debt reduction announced in March 2012 will fail to provide any actual relief of the debt burden weighing on the Greek people. It is in this context that Alexis Tsipras visited the European Parliament on 27 September 2012 and underlined the need for a genuine reduction of the Greek debt, referring to the cancellation of a large portion of the German debt through the 1953 London agreement. Let us take a fresh look at this agreement.

The 1953 London agreement on the German debt

The radical reduction of the debt owed by the Federal republic of Germany and its fast economic recovery so soon after WWII were achieved through the political will of its creditors, i.e. the United States and its main Western allies (United Kingdom and France). In October 1950 these three countries drafted a project in which the German federal government acknowledged debts incurred before and during the war. They attached a declaration to the effect that "the three countries agree that the plan include an appropriate satisfaction of demands towards Germany so that its implementation does not jeopardize the financial situation of the German economy through unwanted repercus-

sions nor has an excessive effect on its potential currency reserves. The first three countries are convinced that the German federal government shares their view and that the restoration of German solvability includes an adequate solution for the German debt which takes Germany's economic problems into account and makes sure that negotiations are fair to all participants." [1]

Germany's pre-war debt amounted to 22.6 bn marks including interest. Its postwar debt was estimated at 16.2 bn. In the agreement signed in London on 27 February 1953 these sums were reduced to 7.5 bn and 7 bn respectively. [2] This amounts to a 62.6 % reduction.

The agreement set up the possibility of suspending payments and renegotiating conditions in the event of a substantial change limiting the availability of resources. [3]

To make sure that the West German economy was effectively doing well and represented a stable key element in the Atlantic bloc against the Eastern bloc, allied creditors granted the indebted German authorities and companies major concessions that far exceeded debt relief. The starting point was that Germany had to be able to pay everything back while maintaining a high level of growth and improving the living standards of its population. They had to pay back without getting poorer. To achieve this creditors accepted: First, that Germany should in most cases repay debts in its national currency (mark), and only marginally in strong currencies such as dollars, Swiss francs, pounds sterling. Second, while in the early 1950s, the country still had a negative trade balance (importing more than it exported), they agreed that Germany should reduce importations: it could manufacture at home those goods that were formerly imported. In allowing Germany to replace imports by home-manufac-

tured goods, creditors agreed to reduce their own exports to this country.

As it happened, for the years 1950-1, 41% of German imports came from Britain, France and the United States. If we add the share of imports coming from other creditor countries that participated in the conference (Belgium, Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland) the total amount reached 66%. Third, creditors allowed Germany to sell its products abroad and even supported such exports so as to restore a positive trade balance. These elements are all present in the aforementioned agreement: "The payment capacity of Germany's private and public debtors does not signify only the capacity to regularly meet payment deadlines in DM without triggering an inflation process, but also that the country's economy could cover its debts without upsetting its current balance of payments. To determine Germany's payment capacity we have to face a number of issues, namely, 1. Germany's future productive capacity with special consideration for the production of export commodities and of import substitution; 2. the possibility for Germany to sell German goods abroad; 3. probable future trade conditions; 4. economic and tax measures that might be required to insure a surplus in exports." [4]

Moreover, in case of dispute with creditors, German courts were declared competent. It was said explicitly that in some cases 'German courts may refuse to enforce a decision of a foreign court or of an arbitral body,' for instance when the enforcement of the decision would be contrary to public policy' (Agreement on German External Debts, Article 17, (4)).

Another significant aspect was that the debt service depended on how much the German economy could afford to pay, taking the country's reconstruction and the export revenues into account. The debt service/export revenue ratio was not to exceed 5%. This meant that West Germany was not to use more than one twentieth of its export revenues to pay its debt. In fact it never used more than 4.2% (except once in 1959). In any case, since a large

portion of the German debts were paid in deutsche marks, the German central bank could issue money, or in other words monetise the debt.

Another exceptional measure was that interest rates were substantially reduced (between 0 and 5%).

Finally we have to consider the dollar grants the United States made to West Germany: USD 1,173.7 million as part of the Marshall Plan from 3 April 1948 to 30 June 1952 (i.e. about USD 10 billion at today's value) with at least 200 million added from 1954 to 1961 (about USD 2 billion today), mainly via USAID.

Thanks to such exceptional conditions West German economy was able to recover very fast and eventually absorbed East Germany in the early 1990s. It is now by far the strongest economy in Europe.

Germany 1953 / Greece 2010-2012

If we attempt a comparison between the way Greece is treated today and the way Germany was treated after the Second World War, the differences are obvious and the injustice is flagrant. Here is a non-exhaustive list:

- 1.- Proportionally the debt reduction granted to Greece in March 2012 is far smaller than the one granted to Germany.
- 2.- Social and economic conditions associated with the plan (as well as with previous 'rescues') do not support economic recovery whereas they largely contributed to restore the German economy.
- 3.- Greece must privatise its assets to foreign investors whereas Germany was prompted to control key economic sectors along with a fast-expanding public sector.
- 4.- Greece's bilateral debts (to countries that participated in the Troika 'rescue') have not been reduced (only debts to private banks) whereas Germany's bilateral debts (starting with those towards coun-

tries that had been invaded or annexed by the Third Reich) were reduced by 60% or more.

5. - Greece must pay in euros while its trade balance with European partners (particularly Germany and France) is negative, whereas Germany paid most of its debts with strongly devalued deutsche marks.

6. – The Greek central bank is not allowed to lend money to the Greek government while the Deutsche Bank did lend to the German government and ran the printing press (though moderately).

7. – Germany was allowed not to use more than 5% of its export revenues to pay its debt while no limit has been set for Greece.

8. – The new securities on Greek debt that have replaced the previous set of securities owned by the banks are no longer within the jurisdiction of Greek courts, but of courts in Luxembourg and the United Kingdom (and we know how sympathetic they are to private creditors) while the German courts were declared competent.

9. - In terms in paying external debts, German courts could refuse to enforce decisions of foreign courts or arbitration bodies when they were contrary to public security. In Greece the Troika obviously will not have Greek courts invoking public security to suspend payment. Now as it happens both the huge social protests and the rise of neonazi groups are the direct outcome of measures imposed by the Troika and by the country's repayment of debts. Whatever the outcry in Brussels, the IMF and the 'financial markets' the Greek government could legitimately invoke the state of necessity and public security to suspend payment of debts and cancel the antisocial measures imposed by the Troika.

10.- In the case of Germany the agreement contained the possibility of suspending payments while conditions were renegotiated in the case of a sub-

stantial change that reduced available resources. Nothing similar is mentioned in the case of Greece.

11. – The agreement on the German external debt explicitly mentioned that the country could produce goods it formerly imported so as to achieve a trade surplus and support local producers. But the philosophy behind the agreements forced upon Greece and the rules of the EU prohibit such support, whether in farming, manufacturing, or services, since this would contravene 'fair competition' with other EU countries (Greece's main trade partners).

We could add that after the Second World War Germany received substantial grants, notably, as mentioned above, through the Marshall Plan.

We can thus understand why the Syriza leader, Alexis Tsipras, refers to the 1953 London agreement when he calls upon European public opinion. The utterly unfair way in which the Greek people is treated (as well as those other peoples whose governments enforce the Troika's recommendations) must raise a fair amount of public outrage.

But let us face reality: the reasons that led Western powers to treat West Germany the way they did after WWII do not apply for Greece today.

A genuine solution to the tragedy of debt and austerity will require massive social mobilizations in Greece and in other EU countries as well as the accession to power of a people's government in Athens. The new government (backed by popular support) will have to decide on a unilateral act of disobedience, such as suspending repayment and cancelling antisocial measures, to force creditors to major concessions and finally impose the cancellation of illegitimate debts. A citizens' audit of the Greek debt must prepare the ground on which such decisions will be made.

Translated by Christine Pagnoulle and Judith Harris

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PHILIPPINES

Struggle for Self-Determination of the Bangsamoro Revolutionary Fronts: A Historical Perspective and Current Realities

R.S. SOLIS · 22 October 2012

INTRODUCTION

In the neo-liberal stage of global capital, the internationalization of the dominant mode of production has facilitated the formation of one global market and established an interdependence of nations. The financialization of capital and the advent of information technology and some of its basic characteristics has increased the intensity of unifying the world materially and spiritually and even suppress the bases for national conflicts and antagonisms between and among nations and peoples.

The current stage of capitalism today has even blurred the relationship of the social classes in countries and nations. It has been manifested in the diminishing role of the superstructure-nation-state- in almost all of the countries. Neo-liberal policies and programs have been implemented in the recipient countries by the un-elected and unseen technocrats behind the multi-lateral institutions thus rendering hollow and irrelevant the role and functions of a nation-state.

The classical understanding that the ruling class in any given nation used the state as their political instrument to dominate the people has become subject for profound discussion and serious rethinking.

In a peripheral country like the Philippines or in Mindanao in particular, the process of making the island as one feasible market has been started in the late eighties but especially in the mid-nineties

during the period of President Fidel Ramos who had signed the 1996 peace agreement with Nur Misuari of MNLF. But the process has also created uneven, backward and combined development of capitalist mode of production in the different areas in Mindanao. The economic exploitation, political marginalization, and cultural alienation of most of the peoples in the island has intensified as the global capital with the direct cooperation of the island's bourgeoisie hungered for more profit at the expense of the toiling masses. The development of political consciousness of people especially in the far-flung areas has been stunted and hence created a situation susceptible for fundamentalist and ultra-left infiltration and influence.

The broadest section of the dominant nationality also known as Christian settlers, the Moro people and the Indigenous peoples or Lumads in Mindanao and the neighboring islands have been struggling for democratic, social and national emancipation and liberation from the unending greed of the global capital and its local partners. They have been suffering from the same problems and struggles against the same cause of their suffering but they have not reached a higher level of solidarity. In fact their differences and peculiarities have been used by their enemy to divide them while the global capital and its local partners have treated them as one entity as a productive force and as a viable market.

The struggle for self-determination of the Moro people should be seen as the struggles of the Lumads and the toiling masses of the Christian settlers. The struggle of the Lumads and the Christian settlers should be seen by the Moro people as part

of their struggle of democratic, social and national liberation. But this kind of outlook can be best understood if one should put the struggle in its historical perspective and contextualize it in the current realities. The following then is an attempt to read and understand the struggle for self-determination of the Moro people.

1. PUSH FORWARD: The GRP-MNLF and GPH-MILF TALKS

Currently, the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GPH) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) peace panels had just concluded their 30th Exploratory Talks in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In their (Government of the Philippines-GPH and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front-MILF) joint statement, they identified the positive developments of the talk especially in the discussion on power and wealth sharing through the creation of Technical Working Committees (TWCs). They also condemned the latest attacks by the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) to the different villages in the province of Maguindanao to derail the peace talks. It is expected that the final signing of peace accord is in the offing in a very near future. Initiatives have been started already with regards to Constitutional Change from both houses of Congress and from the certified allies of the current administration in Congress precisely to prepare for constitutional accommodation of the peace accord.

Sixteen years ago today, the government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) had signed a final peace agreement. The peace agreement between the GRP and the MNLF is the second agreement that was signed, the first one was signed in 1976 or twenty years earlier and famously known as the Tripoli Agreement. The 1976 peace agreement was signed by the GRP under the Marcos dictatorship and the 1996 peace agreement was signed between the GRP headed by President Fidel V. Ramos a former general and the Chair of the MNLF, Nur Misuari (who also signed the 1976 Tripoli Agreement in behalf of the MNLF).

Thirteen (13) years after the Tripoli Agreement (1976) and during the period of President Corazon C. Aquino (the mother of President Noynoy Aquino) a law Republic Act (RA) 6734 creating the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was integrated in the 1987 Philippine Constitution but after several years that the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) had separated from the MNLF. After the signing of the final peace agreement between the MNLF and the GRP in September 1996, the RA 6734 was amended and became RA 9054. It had defined the nature and characteristics of the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao where the key players were given by then the Ramos administration to the MNLF headed by Nur Misuari who ran unopposed in a regional election in the later part of 1996 as governor of ARMM under the ruling party (Lakas NUCD). In November of 1996 or less than three months after the signing of final peace agreement between the GRP and the MNLF, the government opened up talks with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the stated main objective is to resolve the Bangsamoro problem. For almost sixteen years now the talks have not reached anything except agreements in principle. Meanwhile, the MNLF have been divided several times effectively weakening their position in pursuing the fulfillment of the incomplete implementation of the agreement. The MILF has been divided too even before the signing of an agreement with government. The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighter or BIFF which accused the MILF current leadership to be too compromising with the government. After creating the BIFF, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Movement (BIFM) was formed as a political front of the BIFF under the leadership of Ombra Kato, the former commander of the MILF Base Command 105.

Meanwhile the government of President Benigno Aquino (PNoy) had enacted another law RA 10153 to postpone the May 2011 ARMM election to 2013 synchronizing with the national elections and gave authority to the President to appoint the Executive

and Legislative bodies of ARMM. The law (RA 10153) specified that its purpose is to have the present set up of ARMM to act as transition mechanism for the "new" autonomous set up as a preparation for the expected result of the talks to constitutionally accommodate the MILF – that is if the aforementioned talks will not go nowhere. But already, both houses of Congress have announced that they want to have some amendments to the country's constitution so that economic policies can be changed favorable to the foreign businesses and intentionally hiding the accommodation agenda for the MILF. PNoy has distanced himself from this congressional initiative but both leadership of the houses are identified with the administration and definitely such initiatives are not just circumstantial to the current phase of the GPH-MILF peace talks.

This early, signs of constitutional accommodation like the MNLF, are already becoming visible with the outcome of the GPH and MILF talks.

The abovementioned and the succeeding narratives are intended to serve as historical framework of the peace talks between the government and the Moro revolutionary fronts which have opted to resolve their struggle for national self determination on the negotiating table and the government's framework in the engagements with the Moro fronts.

For almost fifty years of the Bangsamoro struggles and more than one hundred fifty thousand lives lost, millions of people dislocated, billions of properties destroyed and priceless opportunities lost, one has to ask if all these efforts and sacrifices are really worth it at least in terms of the concrete gains achieved especially of the basic Bangsamoro masses. At this point it is very important to take into account the role of the different sets of leadership of the different revolutionary fronts with regards to the gains and victories as well as the opportunities lost and threats which have unfolded their way in the protracted process of negotiation as the main stress these fronts have opted. It is also very important to have a glimpse to the class background of the key responsibilities on the leadership of the

Fronts. And it will be helpful to know the attitude and role of the Bangsamoro ruling class in the different processes of the peace negotiations. Lastly, but definitely not the least, is the attitude of the Fronts regarding the struggles for self-determination of other non-Moros specifically the Indigenous Peoples or Lumads.

On the other hand, it is very important to know the constant framework used by the government in dealing with the different Moro fronts. One can easily notice a consistently of the government peace framework towards the struggle for self-determination.

Having said this, we have to look on the nature of nationalism the fronts have been struggling for self-determination. In the process we have to know the role of the masses and democratic forces within the Moro people in whose name the fronts have struggled for self-determination.

And in the last part, we will try to analyze in whose peace that they (Fronts) want to achieve, "peace among the diplomats or negotiators or peace among nations and peoples."

2. THE STRUGGLE FOR SELF-DETERMINATION OF THE MORO PEOPLE – A Brief Historical Perspective

The struggle against colonial power by the Moros has started more than five hundred years ago. The economic, political and social structures of the Moros then had reached higher level especially in the southern part of the Philippines vis-à-vis in the central and northern parts of the country. So the opposition against colonial powers specifically against the Spanish occupation was very strong in the southern part of the country. The Spanish colonizers gained footholds in key areas in Mindanao but they had never gained full control of the interior areas occupied by the fighters of the Moro Sultanate defending their territories. The colonizers had used religion and the religious Christian missionaries to help in the colonization of the inhabitants including the non Moros and Moros as well in these areas. During this period, monotheism was

already predominant within the sultanate since Islam was already introduced centuries earlier by the Muslim traders and missionaries to the area. The Islamic faith had helped in the resistance against the colonizers who made use of religion (Christianity) to further their colonial interests. The remnants of the Spanish churches and fortresses can still be seen even today in key areas of Mindanao especially along the water routes e.g. Tamontaka in today's Datu Odin Sinsuat Municipality, Dulawan the present day Datu Piang both part of Maguindanao province and Pikit part of North Cotabato to mention a few.

The struggles against the Spanish colonizers were led by the Sultanate in the south and by the intellectuals in the North. The latter, was the generation that was the product of the new class which emerged in the new system of economic, social and political structures imposed by the Spanish colonizers e.g. *encomienda* and *hacienda* systems. Agricultural crop production intended for the needs of the colonizers and their countries and not for the local needs or the colonized inhabitants. Some families from such generation had sent their sons to study in Europe (the colonizing country such as Spain) and were influenced by the prevailing thoughts of equality, fraternity and liberty. These students and intellectuals brought back these new ideas to the country and led the struggles under the leadership of Katipunan against the Spanish colonizers at the same time of the struggles were continued by the Moros in the southern part.

At the eve of the defeat of the Spanish colonial power in the country at the end of 19th century, the new colonial power, United States of America came in to fill in the vacuum of the Spaniards in a historical buy off also known as Treaty of Paris in 1898. The defeated colonizer sold the territory they never fully subjugated to the new colonizer. And the rest would be a painful and bloody history of the new colonial brutality and occupation to neutralize and defeat the struggles for national liberation of peoples from the north to the southern part of the country.

In the 1930's, with the Sultanates of Maguindanao and Sulu effectively neutralized and rendered ceremonial and the leadership of the Katipunan and the local revolts literally decimated while the new working class movement (the Communist and Socialist Parties of the Philippines merged in 1938) had still on its early stage, the United States Imperialist power had consolidated the young national bourgeois class to form a colonial government. The first constitution of the country was formed in 1935 has been patterned letter by letter to the US constitution. The process was actively participated by representatives of the new ruling classes of the dominant nationality and the Moro people from the mainland of Mindanao as well as from the islands like in Sulu.

The life of a new national government was disrupted when the Japanese imperial power had tried to attack and subjugate the whole country and its people. A national united front for the defense for the fatherland was organized together with the defeated US army and also the Moro fighters who joined with the Filipino forces from the North and the central part of the country including the newly merged Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (Communist Party of the Philippines), to put strong and credible guerilla warfare against the Japanese occupying forces. It is important to note that the old Communist Party was playing an important role based on the call of the Third International (post Lenin/Trotsky period) to defend the Fatherland against fascism. The Hukbalahap (Hukbo ng Bayan laban sa Hapon or Army of the People against the Japanese) was formed on this purpose.

After the Second World War the new Republic of the Philippines (1946) was formed with the new bourgeois and ruling class from the North to the South participating. The US imperialist power had ensured its influence in all spheres of life of the Republic by enshrining it in the Constitution.

The development of industrialization of the country was ensured by the US imperialist to fit the role which the imperialist power would want the colonies to play. It had to make sure that it supplied

the foreign colonizers with raw materials and to receive the goods coming from the latter. This kind of import oriented and export dependent economy made a one sided development for the foreign interest with the development of the new national bourgeoisie making sure that their policy is implemented and the development and orientation of the political superstructure – the nation-state had been tasked to do just this policy.

Peasant unrests and uprisings in the North and Central parts of the country were superficially solved by transferring these people to the South – Mindanao – the new place of hope and fulfillment of the peasants to own the lands they till become a reality according to government propagandists. In all these struggles which had happened mostly in the northern part of the country, the Communist Party of the Philippines (PKP) in most part were playing a decisive role against the US imperialist and the puppet government. In the 50s, the US imperialist thru the puppet government had made sure that the PKP would be defeated and annihilated if they refused to surrender. In response, the HUKBALAHAP was transformed into Hukbong Magpapalaya ng Bayan or HMB building a strong peasant army and almost defeated the puppet government if not for a direct but covert imperialist intervention.

Mainstreaming and integration of all peoples in this colonial set up by US imperialism was made possible thru Religion and Education. And the Moro and the non Moro peoples in Mindanao were not spared with this policy and program. Their political set up like the Sultanate and Indigenous Power Structure were in a subtle manner becoming powerless and the western concept and method of resolving conflicts and governance were taking over. In the main, the ruling class of the Moro and the non Moro peoples had participated in these explicit and implicit processes in the exploitation, marginalization and integration of their people to one nation-state framework of the dominant nationality and its own ruling class.

The ruling class of the Moro people reacted seriously when their interests (both economic and political) were directly threatened. In the late sixties, when the puppet Philippine governments were exposed and became unpopular, a new nationalist movement headed by the newly established Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) in 1968 and intellectuals were fighting for the national and democratic interests. In some of these movements, the Moro intellectuals were actively involved.

During this period there was, somehow, a convergence of interest of the traditional political leaders and the intellectual Moro professionals and students to fight for the people's national interests. Thus they formed the Mindanao Independence Movement (MIM) in 1969. In the later period of same year the first batch of young Moro intellectuals and students were sent to Malaysia to have military training. It would be followed by several batches later. It is very important to note that the first batch of trainees was headed by the Nur Misuari a Moro professional teaching in the University of the Philippines and who got involved in activism together with Jose Maria Sison who became the chairperson of the new Communist Party of the Philippines.

The Islamic countries which financed the military trainings of the young Moro fighters hired British mercenaries and tapped Malaysia to host the activities. It should be remembered that a year before (1968), there was a Jabitah massacre where young Filipino Muslim recruits were massacred by the Philippine military when they refused to go on mission to infiltrate Sabah for the interest of the Philippine government. This mission is called as OPLAN MERDEKAH, which was intended to get back Sabah from Malaysia. Hence, Malaysia was more than willing to host the military trainings of the young Moros against the Philippine government.

Together with Nur Misuari were the sons of prominent ruling families of the Moro people. And with its Islamic connection in the Muslim countries the MIM got financial support notably from Libya and

Saudi Arabia where Hashim Salamat was studying and became active in the national struggle.

The foreign donors were not actually at ease with the Moro traditional leaders leading the young movement because they might collaborate with the puppet government in the process as history would prove it. Obviously these donors were convinced by the argument of the young intellectuals and students to give the financial support directly to them. With this arrangement the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was formed in the late sixties and early seventies. It was mainly composed of young intellectuals who had studied in the universities inside and outside the country. At early stage, there were several sons of the ruling class of the Moro people but later they were the first ones to give up and go back to the mainstream or to the government. Revolutionary and guerilla lifestyles were too much for them to sustain.

During this period a consciousness for a truly national identity was beginning to form and consolidate. Before this, the Moro people were those independent ethnic groups found in different areas/territories in Mindanao. The territories which were once comprised the Sultanates of Maguindanao and Sulu had effectively weakened, disorganized and disintegrated. The MNLF had started to help in consolidating a national consciousness among the Moro people and start a national political movement of the struggle for self determination. This was done outside the traditional political structure and led by the non-traditional intellectuals.

The political movement headed by the MNLF aimed at political secession from the Philippine nation-state arrangement. The national oppression perpetuated by the majority nationality referred as those Christians in Luzon and Visayas who controlled the national government personified this kind of oppression which the MNLF also called as Manila colonialism. The active role of US Imperialism in the puppet government and orientation of the bourgeoisie were never factored in.

The main form of the struggle which was directly and indirectly supported by the Islamic countries (mostly members of the organization of Islamic countries – OIC) was armed struggle and had combined guerilla and conventional warfare on the ground.

President Ferdinand E. Marcos declared Martial Law in 1972 to effectively suppress and neutralize the young movements led by both CPP and MNLF. A loose coordination was established between the two groups in fighting the same enemy.

The massacres and massive dislocations of the Moro civilians made the OIC to aggressively help both overtly and covertly the MNLF. They even facilitated the escape and having a safe base of Nur Misuari in their respective counties.

The intervention of the OICs had dual effects to the MNLF. First, it helped the organization survive and be projected in the international level and second it also helped the MNLF become very dependent on them. In fact the impact of this arrangement was the neglect of the MNLF leadership of consolidation works of its forces and continuously raising of their political consciousness to understand their struggle for nationalism.

The MNLF leadership was literally forced to sit down by the OICs with the Philippine government to have peace talks in mid 1970s. The talk led to the so called Tripoli Agreement in 1976. Disagreements and divisions among the leaders of the MNLF broke up after the signing of the agreement. As a direct result of these political uneasy arrangements disorientation and demoralization seeped in among both leadership and rank and file within the organization. Surrenders of some of the leadership had occurred making easy for the dictatorial government to inflict serious damage to the organization. Never again did the MNLF reach the high level of struggle after the Tripoli Agreement. The main stress of the weakened leadership of MNLF became the peace negotiations where the Marcos government had an upper hand and controlled set up. It was a political trap which the bourgeois leadership

of the MNLF took and the direction of the process from that time on is the mainstreaming of MNLF to the nation-state arrangement of the Philippine government. The 1996 final peace agreement was just the formalization of this process of political accommodation and mainstreaming.

3. MNLF DIVIDED

The division which had occurred within the MNLF was obviously the result of the serious weakness with regards to the internal organizational consolidation. It was also a direct result of external interventions both by the OICs and the Philippine government through massive and intensified militarization of the latter against the ground forces of the MNLF and peace negotiation with the foreign based leadership of the MNLF with the active cooperation of the host countries of the OICs. The abovementioned reasons made the divide and rule tactics of the Marcos dictatorial government a success in weakening and neutralizing the struggle for national liberation of the Moro people led by the MNLF. In fact, the main basis for the MNLF division was along the ethnic differences and particularities. Differences in ideology and orientation (secularist vs Islamic) and leadership styles (Misuari's self-centeredness vs Hashim's collectivists/consultative) had played substantive role in the serious division of the Fronts. The national consciousness of a "bangsa" or nation was not consolidated and never consummated and ethnic conflicts and division had dragged down the Moro people once again. The consciousness of a national identity of the Moro people has been a result of the historical process of persecution and oppression of the ruling system dominated by the majority nationality which created the necessity to form a national political movement like the MNLF. The political consciousness of people's struggle for the right to self-determination should be consolidated and should reach the broadest section of the people to effectively and sustainably eliminate the national oppression of the dominant system. In the case of the MNLF, there was a clean neglect of consolida-

tion of the national consciousness of the Moro people and specifically the rank and file of the political movement and its organization. With the peace negotiation with the Government of the Philippines, it had opened itself up exposing its weaknesses and the physical or geographical distance from the ground of its leadership (foreign basing) had contributed to its alienation from its own political movement and organization. Eventually, the Maguindanao ethnic group formed the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) whose leadership was composed mainly by the intellectuals and professionals of the Maguindanao tribe. The MNLF reformist group formed their own separate organization and was headed by the Maranao professional and intellectual members of the Maranao ethnic group. And this made the original MNLF as headed by the ethnic group in Sulu called the Tausugs to negotiate with the government while other groups negotiating separately.

During this period the consciousness of national identity of Moro people and the national political movement started by the original MNLF for a national struggle for self determination was stunted and co-opted and began to disintegrate again.

The formation of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front which had started after the Tripoli Agreement but was only formalized in 1984 was a manifestation of the failure of internal consolidation of the MNLF and the intense pressures from the other countries (OICs) and massive Philippine military assaults on the ground.

4. THE MILF: The Bangsamoro and Its Struggle Redefined

The emphasis put on the Islamic aspect was to differentiate the opposition of the MILF founder, Hashim Salamat (acted as foreign minister of the MNLF during the Tripoli Agreement) from the emphasis on the nationalist aspect put up by Nur Misuari who was accused as non-religious and very secular. This kind of orientation immediately attracted the support of OIC individual members like Saudi Arabia and the MILF became official member of the Muslim Brotherhood because MNLF was still

recognized by the OIC as the only legitimate representative of the Moro people. The Muslim Brotherhood connection was not really projected but there was a strong belief among the inner circle of the MILF, that Hashim had a very important task in it before his death.

The MILF started a movement to unite the Moro people especially the 13 ethno-linguistic groups into one national consciousness and identity thru Islam and from the Sunni tradition like its principal patron- Saudi Arabia and the Muslim Brotherhood which recently won the elections in Egypt after Mubarak.

In the later stage, MILF defines the bangsamoro people refers to those who are natives or original inhabitants of Mindanao and its adjacent islands including Palawan and the Sulu archipelago at the time of conquest or colonization and their descendants whether mixed or of full-bloodied. It is revealing here that the basis for Bangsamoro nationhood is on the superficial and mechanical aspects rather than the historical and collective experience of people whose consciousness as distinct people and identity is a result of the process of a national political movement towards achieving political objective. The definition does not even consider the individual and collective acceptance or non-acceptance of people to become or not become part of the nation and identifying themselves with the struggles for social and national liberation.

Furthermore, such description of a people may as well refer to the Indigenous people since before the Muslim traders and Islamic missionaries to Mindanao, it was the Indigenous people who resided in the islands with their animists and polytheists beliefs.

The abovementioned description was reinforced by its slogan of "one nation, one faith" the fear of external imposition of one's faith to others. In fact, it will be ironic to even think that the struggle for national liberation as led by the MILF to resolve the national contradiction and the national oppression

with its own kind of oppression even during the period of its struggles.

It is worth noting that the MILF has never considered and recognized the rights of the Indigenous Peoples (IPs) as distinct people with distinct history and ancestral homeland and therefore a distinct aspiration. Their definition states clearly that the IPs are part of the definition of Bangsamoro and their ancestral domains are also integral part of the Bangsamoro homeland as mentioned above.

It is very obvious that the Philippine government through its negotiating panel does not point out this objective reality out or do concrete steps to correct such obvious neglect amidst the most logical results of such framework will invite another level of conflicts. From its nation-state framework, this is favorable so the government can effectively rule the divided peoples. But most importantly, genuine struggle for the democratic right to self-determination and its direction will be determine by the broadest participation of the people in whose name the struggle has been launched and can only be sustained. The respect and support of other democratic forces can be realized if in return their democratic rights and aspirations are respected and supported. The truth about a nation which oppresses other nation cannot be genuinely free will be tested in the concrete situation of the Bangsamoro and the Lumads.

5. LESSONS FOR LEARNING – CORRECTING IDENTIFIED ERRORS

As things stand today, one can have a glimpse of what will be the nature of political arrangement which can be reached by a compact peace agreement between the GPH and the MILF. In one of the mutually agreed principle, it is stated that the present set-up of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), which is the product of series of peace agreements of the MNLF since 1976, 1989 and 1996 with previous governments, is not acceptable and therefore should be replaced. It is obviously a blatant way of saying that the previous talks between the government and the MNLF

are a failure but the reasons for such failed project have never been mentioned. Nevertheless, it is like saying that the laws created for the constitutional bases for the existence of the political entity called ARMM should be replaced or amended. Clearly, it is not saying something on the framework behind the government's position of enacting such laws in the past which will be the same framework in having another arrangement albeit different actors today.

It should be pointed out that the government has been an active participant in these failures because it (government) wants to manifest today that it is the MNLF which is at fault why the project failed. The current so-called tripartite review of the 1996 peace agreement and its implementation between GRP and MNLF while there is an on-going talks between the government and the MILF is more to please the OICs rather than understanding the reasons behind the failures and correcting them. The importance of objectively identifying the reasons of the failed peace project between the government and the MNLF will have great implication for the success of the current peace process between GPH and the MILF. For instance, it is very clear that the government has been consistent in its one nation-state framework and so far one can clearly see that this framework has been the one utilized by the government in all the peace processes including the present one. If there are changes, they are just in the forms or shape but not in substance. The GRP or the GPH has never changed its position and its framework in any peace negotiations – that is Constitutional accommodation and mainstreaming of revolutionary groups. It has not gone to the "out of the box" solution in dealing with the different national liberation movements.

It is very important to note here that some scholars are saying that changing the box, which is the Constitution, to include the results or the outcome of the peace negotiation between the GPH and the MILF can essentially change the framework of the agreement. But in a multi-nationalities nation states like the Philippines, it will be the voice of the

majority nationality which will always prevail as against the principle of the right to self-determination of the minority nationalities.

It is therefore very imperative to learn lessons from the GRP-MNLF peace process in order not to repeat the same failures.

In the experience of the MNLF with regards to the role of the International bodies and mechanisms, the manner and characteristics of the level of the International interventions should be moderated especially by the MILF. Dependency on the above-mentioned bodies should be avoided at all times. The tempo and substance of the talks should be dependent on the capacity of the MILF to engage. It is very difficult to gauge the reasons and sincerity of the International bodies in their engagements with the talks but one thing is sure that they are there not without interest of their respective governments of their countries. Malaysia for instance has been consistently involved in the talks even during the times of the MNLF and now as the third party directly engaged in the talks has its own interest in Sabah. This is the obvious reason why the MILF has never touched the issue of Sabah in their claim of the ancestral domain of the Moro people. All stakeholders should be very critical on the involvement of these International bodies because more likely their framework is not different from the nation-state framework of the Philippine government because they need for instance the mechanisms to develop the very rich resources in Mindanao and create a viable market for their neo-liberal globalized economy. Besides if they will be involved in the political outcome of the national liberation led by the MILF, they can be pressured to do the same by the oppressed people and ethnic groups in their respective countries. The role of the US should be contextualized in its regional interests especially with the rising influence of China and the corresponding threats in the balance of power in the changing geopolitics in this part of the world.

The setting up of a new autonomous political entity should not only be new in terms of replacing the old people in the ARMM or adding new structures

but building mechanisms and infrastructure for political and economic empowerment of the broadest section of the people in the specific identified areas. The political set-up should be inclusive and will be more than the structure of the MILF and should be pluralist in its framework. In fact, MILF should re-define itself in this changing context and therefore it will have different role in the new political entity. The new autonomous political entity comprises all the elements and structures within the former regional autonomous government which will be beyond the MILF framework and mechanisms. This means that the MILF will either broaden its framework and be part of the new political entity but maintain its specific orientation or merge itself with the broad political arrangement in the new context and tasks. It is worthwhile to note here the concrete experience of the MNLF when it signed the final peace agreement and entered with the ARMM arrangement as defined by R.A. 9054. It had tried to play in both aspects in maintaining its political organization as MNLF and as part and actually leading the new political entity – The ARMM. So, Nur Misuari had maintained his position as Chair of the MNLF and as governor of the ARMM and events would show that it failed in both precisely because both mechanism and instruments are two different entities with different frameworks and much broader constituencies.

It is also very important to study the role of the existing Indigenous/traditional political structures e.g. sultanate and Timuay system in their role and contributions to the new autonomous political entity, which the MNLF had intentionally sidelined in the political process.

The strengthening and consolidation of this super-structure is very important because there is no independent economic system developed in the Bangsamoro. The neoliberal phase of globalized capitalist economy has made the whole country as one economic entity and part of the global market. The global capital with the active participation of the ruling classes of the dominant and dominated nations in the country has united their interest at

the expense of the great majority of the peoples both Moro and non-Moro in the region. The MILF should have at this stage, its own economic agenda and program with all the peoples within the region in mind and that this program will not be part of the current neo-liberal globalized economy of capitalism. Substantive reforms in favor of the majority of peoples should be placed in all economic and fiscal policies otherwise the process of the opening up for the global capital interest the vast natural resources and wealth of the region will just create situation for intense exploitation of both its human and natural resources. This economic framework is very imperative since it has been proven that "an autonomous nation does not enjoy rights equal to those of a sovereign nation". Failure to appreciate such arrangement will be another phase of accommodation and mainstreaming of the MILF and a more radical group and movement will emerge to take over and continue the struggle for right to self-determination in the name of the Moro people.

The role of the basic masses of the Moro people should be decisive in all phases of the peace process. The struggle of self-determination is not only political but democratic as well. The consciousness of a national identity should be translated into a political movement with clear democratic aspiration of the whole communities as represented by the MILF. The active role of the people in the peace process will ensure the sustainability of the success of a political settlement between the negotiators. Periodic but mechanical consultations with the people, who have also been involved in the previous peace negotiations, will not be democratic and sustainable. Participative process and transparency are both decisive aspects in any transformative peace process.

This process will definitely involve a continuous consolidation of activities in terms of raising the political consciousness of the Moro people and especially the rank and file of the MILF. It should be considered that the foremost consideration of achieving the basic democratic right of self determination in the respect of the historical and basic

right of other oppressed nations and peoples like the Indigenous people. Because while the right of self determination of the Moro people is indispensable concretely applying it in territories and areas where nations and peoples are thoroughly mixed without setting off battles, massacres and ethnic cleansing, seem to be next to impossible. But this historical reality should not stop genuine revolutionaries to explore possibilities and find sustainable solution in building and pursuing sustainable peace.

One feature which has played a very important role in the peace process between the GPH and MILF is the role of the non-government organizations or NGOs. One could not see this kind of participation during the previous talks.

NGOs especially the local-based NGOs, can contribute positively in the success of the peace process like institutionalization of memories of the previous talks and development of skills of the personnel of MILF involved in the talks or in preparation for the eventual signing of a compact peace agreement. NGOs can also help generate the needed funds and financial requirements needed for the technical needs of the talks, in terms of enhancing the management skills and machineries in the development of the communities involved. On the other hand, the NGOs can lead the MILF farther away from the basic masses and in the day-to-day struggles for economic and political empowerment of the basic masses of the Moro people. NGOs tend to deal with projects rather than the needs of the political movement of people in the communities. NGOs (especially the International NGOs) generally are not grounded on the actual activities of the communities and therefore do not feel the actual needs of poor people in terms of reducing the level of their poverty even if they (NGOs personalities) attend all kinds of conferences (local and international) on poverty. They become experts in packaging the poverty of the people and making project proposals for them and can make beautiful reports afterwards without substantially touching the lives of the peoples. They have already started to package the

peace process and surely the dynamism of the political and peoples' movements will be subtly downplayed and can only have a mechanical end of signing a peace agreement. Institutionalizing any process will lost its dynamism and vitality. But most importantly it should be pointed out that NGOs are not neutral, they represent the interests of their donor partners which are usually from the most developed countries which funded institutions which have appropriated the neo-liberal policies in the communities through the NGOs. The NGOs of these type are the implementers of neo-liberal program of global capital from below. In this context, the danger NGO-izing the peace process is worth a serious consideration.

The current phase of neoliberal globalization of capital has created one people and one market but also unevenness and backwardness of economic system creating conflicts among and between peoples which all the more intensify the economic exploitation, political marginalization and cultural alienation of the majority of people from both dominant and dominated nations/peoples in the country in general and Mindanao in particular. The deteriorating situation has added more fuel to the already burning fire of the national liberation movement such as the MILF. The Lumads in Mindanao just like the MILF has been struggling for self-determination based on historical fact of distinct development of people and the current realities of their own indigenous political structures. In the negotiation with the GPH, the MILF should not only respect but support the Lumads struggle of self-determination. Both their nationalism are coming from the same level and principle. Genuine peace can never be achieved in Mindanao if the democratic rights of all the oppressed and marginalized peoples are not respected and social inequities are not corrected in favor of the broadest section of the peoples

Peace should never be compartmentalized so as to have peace with MNLF, MILF, BIFM or the Indigenous Peoples. Peace should be holistically

approached and the root causes of its absence be concretely identified and addressed.

CONCLUSION

The struggle of the Bangsamoro for self-determination has been one of the longest national liberation movements in the world. It has started with the Indigenous Political Structure of the Sultanate to the formation of nationalist and revolutionary political organizations which has been the product of the increasing level of consciousness of a national identity. A political movement has been developed and strong religious bonding helped in the collective struggles with its ups and downs in the different stages of the movement.

There have been obvious weaknesses in terms of consolidation of a national consciousness as a nation and its ethnic peculiarities have been used by the government to divide them and weakened their position in the negotiating table.

The role of the International solidarity has been very helpful to the liberation movement especially in the internationalization and projection of its situation and aspiration and the excesses of the government in the suppression of their rights as peoples. Logistical, material, political and financial supports have helped the Moro people in sustaining their struggles but too much reliance on these external factors have made the Moro liberation movement dependent on them and basically neglect the internal needs for consolidation and forego relying on its internal consolidating capacity to further the movement on the next higher stage without the external pressures. One should be very careful with solidarity coming from above they tend, as past experience would show, to be in solidarity more with those nationalism from above practitioners. Solidarity coming from below should be encouraged and developed for they are proven to be genuine and sustainable. The nationalism from below practitioners have the same situation, same aspirations and the same struggles with those who are involved in political movement for social and national liberation and emancipation for all kinds of oppres-

sions and exploitations. Solidarity among the basic masses of the Moro people, Lumads and the toiling masses of the dominant nation will bring the struggle for self-determination into genuine democratic and national liberation. Any genuine liberation movements should internalize this framework as basic obligation in order not only to attain national liberation but also eliminate the basis of conflicts and antagonism amongst the people we proclaim to struggle with.

The concept of peace which should be agreed upon will not be exclusive. This means that it will include the other peoples' democratic interests in the identified region so that the other non-Moro people will not only be supportive of the right to self-determination struggle of the Moro people, they will even struggle together with them. In order to be sustainable and participative, a successful peace process should get the support of not only the Lumads but the dominant nationality as well. Democratic issues and the nationalism of the broadest number of peoples from both nations and peoples should be struggled together as common good and interest of the people. While the organized section of the toiling masses from the dominant Christian settlers and the Lumad support, the struggle for self-determination of the whole Moro people, there should be a solidarity relationships among the toiling masses of these people to ensure that the whole struggle for national liberation, the democratic and social issues should be integrated to the struggle. This is solidarity from below which should be strengthened and developed in all the stages of the peace process. This will ensure that the struggle for self-determination will result to peace to all nations/peoples. But most importantly, the historical biases, mistrust and antagonism among the three peoples will be minimized if not totally eliminated in their common struggle against the common cause of their exploitation and oppression.

It has become crystal clear by now that the peace framework employed by the government towards the Moro Revolutionary Fronts is mainstreaming and constitutional accommodation. It is always

within the Philippine Constitution framework. It has not changed this framework from the first peace talks with the MNLF which by this time the government in the nation-state outlook would always want the MNLF or the MILF to remove from their political demand, the concept of cessation or territorial separation from the country, which is a blatant disrespect of the principle of self-determination. It should be understood that only the freedom to secede makes possible free and voluntary union, between nations.. for without the right to divorce – to have a separate state – there can be no truly free marriage – unity or federation among nations.

Hence, unless the government should be bold and daring enough and think an "out-of-the-box" solution to the right to self-determination issue of the Moro and Indigenous peoples, it is bound to perpetually have peace talks between the Moro and other Revolutionary groups. Because unless the root causes of the problem are identified and concrete but sustainable solutions will be taken then the country will disintegrate and Mindanao might

end up to the direct control of the global capital and its agents in the region outside the nation-state framework of the Philippine government. This kind of peace will be peace among the negotiators or their principals while the majority of the people will have peace of the graveyard.

And lastly, but not definitely the least is the profound understanding of the historical economic and socio-political context of the global capital within which we are pursuing to build sustainable peace. The dominant feature of pursuing the unification of nation and peoples as one market for its never ending greed for profit seems to eliminate national contradiction and antagonism within the nation and among its people.

But on the other hand, such global context and the process of disempowering of peoples and abolishing the basic role of the nation-state to its people, should make democratic and political movements and organization like the MILF to pursue genuine peace beyond the neo-liberal framework of the global capital.