

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV458 March 2013

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Greater than the Might of Armies

GREECE:

An equilibrium that is precarious and full of dangers

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Cyprus

Tunisia:

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Latin America

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

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From the World Social Forum to the Arab revolts

ESTHER VIVAS ·

It is a new cycle of protest which has emerged on an international scale, determined by a systemic crisis and debt and austerity policies, in particular in the countries of the periphery of the European Union subjected to harsh measures of adjustment.

The "Arab Spring" brought a fresh wind in the long night of the crisis. It made it possible to recover confidence in collective action, in "us". In January 2011, Tunisian president Ben Ali fled the country under the pressure of the street. One month later, in February 2011, history was repeated; Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak threw in the sponge and resigned, forced and constrained by social mobilization. The Arab world, so long stigmatized in the West, offered a lesson of democracy to us.

Today, two years later, the World Social Forum is being held in the epicentre of these revolts, where it encounters political processes of open, unstable and chaotic change. In Tunisia, last February, the assassination of Chokri Belaïd marked a turning. A lawyer and militant Marxist, he was one of the leaders of a Popular Front which brings together various left organizations which assert in their programme not only more democracy, but also social justice. The first political assassination of the young Tunisian democracy represented a hard blow for society and started new mobilizations against the rise of violence in the country.

Both in Tunisia and in Egypt, the revolutionary processes which have emerged are today still open, but their outcome remains dubious. The democratic conquests are fragile and still limited and there have not yet been significant economic changes. An open fight is going on between those who consider that the revolution is finished and those who want

to deepen it and to carry it through until its ultimate consequences. The youth and left activists show daily that they are not going to let anyone confiscate their revolution, whether it is the vestiges of the old regime or the Islamists who have come to power.

Beyond the debate on the situation of the "Arab Spring", to which all the seminars and the activities of the second day of the WSF are devoted, other themes will have a particular centrality. The feminist struggle, for example, with the assembly of women, right before the beginning of the WSF, which will be devoted partly to the analysis and the sharing of experiences on the important part played by women in the Arab revolts, as depicted by Leil-Zahra in her documentary series "Words of Women from the Egyptian Revolution". The international movement for climatic justice will organize a "Climate Space" within the WSF in order to discuss its future strategies, convergences and prospects on a key question for the future of the planet and humanity.

Since the World Social Forum organized its first meeting in January 2001, at the same time as the celebration of the World Economic Forum of Davos and as a counterpoint to the latter, much water has passed under the bridge. The WSF was born from the movement against capitalist globalisation, later converted into the anti-war movement, and as a meeting point for a new total resistance against the disasters of neoliberal globalisation. After having played an important part in struggles during its early meetings, it lost its political centrality in spite of a continuing high participation and it gradually died out in parallel with the movement against capitalist globalisation. The context had changed and, consequently, so had its *raison d'être*.

Today, with the opening of a new cycle of protests born following the "Arab Spring", with the movements of the indignant and Occupy, the World Social Forum is perceived to some extent much more as an instrument of the past than of the present and the future. But its existence highlights one of the main weaknesses of the new social movements of protest which have appeared in the context of the systemic crisis: their fragile international coordination. The movements are faced with the challenge of creating new space of articulation on the world scale allowing advance in the common struggle and the exchange of experiences. The offensive of austerity policies in all countries is truly intense and requires such an effort of national mobilisation that external coordination is weakened.

Although these new movements feel themselves part of the same global wave, coordination between the different actors of the movement has remained rather weak, despite the organisation of global days of action and some meetings.

Currently the axis of mobilisation is no longer in Latin America, where the WSF was born. It is now in the Arab world and in an old Europe boiling with protest and "third worldised" as it is struck by crisis. the challenge now is to learn from these struggles which in the not so distant past have emerged against debt, evictions and privatisation in the countries of the South. And to advance towards the indispensable coordination of resistance which can face up to the implacable organisation of capital.

GREECE

International anti-capitalist meeting in Athens

FRANÇOIS SABADO ·

Among those present were leaders of the left of Syriza (which got more than 25 per cent of the votes at the last conference of the party), trade unionists from all over Europe (including Giorgio Cremaschi, from the leadership of FIOM, the Italian Metalworkers Federation, which is part of the CGIL confederation), economists (including Michel Husson, Daniel Albarracín and Kostas Lapavistas), delegations from the MPS in Switzerland (including Charles-André Udry), Sinistra Critica from Italy, Izquierda anticapitalista in the Spanish state (including Josep Maria Antentas), from Portugal, the United States (including Ahmed Shawki of the ISO) and France (activists of the NPA including Olivier Besancenot). Among those present from Greece were Christos Laskos (member of the secretariat of Syriza), Panagiotis Lafazanis (member of the secretariat of the central committee of Syriza, who is also a member of parliament, Antonis Davanellos (member of the secretariat of the central committee of Syriza and of DEA). These last two are the main coordinators of the Syriza left.

This meeting was the occasion of a very interesting discussion on the situation in Greece and in Europe, as well as on the tasks of anti-capitalists in the trade union movement, public services and the anti-fascist struggle. The meeting ended with a discussion on the Arab revolutions, introduced by Gilbert Achcar and Ahmed Shawki.

The discussion on the situation in Greece is of particular importance, not only because Greece remains the weakest link in the offensive of the ruling

classes in Europe but also because the acuteness of the crisis in that country puts discussion of a series of strategic issues on the agenda.

It is not a question of erecting Greece into a model, because the content, forms and rhythms of the Greek crisis are not transferable. Nor of thinking that we can now generalize the example of Syriza throughout Europe, because we cannot grasp the uniqueness, the strength and the hope that it symbolizes without taking into account the depth of the Greek crisis. But learning from Greece and from the problems that revolutionaries are facing there is decisive in order to enrich the tactical and strategic reflection of the revolutionary forces in Europe.

The Greek collapse

Greece is experiencing a crisis from the collapse caused by the policy of austerity of the European Union and the diktats of the Troika (EU, IMF, ECB). It is marked by social destruction unprecedented in Europe since the Second World War. The country has been demolished. The popular classes are being bled dry: the official unemployment rate is nearly 30 per cent, wages have been cut by 30-40 per cent, or even more, hospitals are without medicines, which are overpriced or sold on the black market. In Athens thousands of shops have closed down. What remains of social legislation is in the process of being dismantled. The whole of southern Europe is being attacked, but on the scale of austerity-driven destruction Greece arrives at the top, ahead of Portugal and Spain. So we must take stock of the process of dislocation that Greek society and the Greek economy are experiencing. Greece is at the centre of a new confrontation between the central powers of the European Union and its periphery. Some people evoke the situation of Greece as being that of a neo-colony. Leaving formulas aside,

the Greek people are experiencing the politics of the Troika as a real humiliation, which gives new strength to the national question, which risks cutting across the processes of reorganization of the Left. The questions of national sovereignty coupled with popular sovereignty are becoming decisive, hence the importance of articulating the national question and the social question so as not to fall into nationalism. The battle of the Left must combine radicalism and internationalism. But beyond the social and economic crisis, the country is suffering political decomposition, with a crisis of political representation and a loss of legitimacy of institutions, linked to widespread corruption and a collapse of the traditional parties, in particular PASOK, which has lost millions of voters. This crisis of political decomposition is accompanied by a rise of the fascist extreme Right, embodied by the neo-Nazis of Golden Dawn.

An exceptional revolt

Despite all this, the Greek people lives, survives, resists. Social and political fatigue is making itself felt, after 29 days of national strikes since the beginning of the crisis, but the mobilization is there, with its potential, but also its difficulties. The last strike on 20 February was still very big. The trade union movement is resisting. Hard hit by the crisis, it is not growing very much. It is even retreating in some sectors that have been destroyed by the attacks of the government and the employers, but the Greek unions remain one of the important bases of the mobilization. Initiatives such as those of "indignant Greeks" have not been on the same scale as this movement in other countries, but they have made their mark on the situation. Resistance and the organization of an anti-fascist movement are decisive in the present situation in Greece. Even though initiatives such as that of a "European manifesto against the fascists of Golden Dawn" underline the importance of the battle on this terrain, there is now a race against time with the neo-Nazis, both in the working-class districts and in defense of immigrants. Beyond social struggles, it is everyday

resistance and basic solidarity - food, health... - in neighborhoods, villages, families that allow the popular classes to survive.

The unique character of Syriza

It is in this context – the collapse of Greek society, a general political crisis, unceasing austerity against the popular classes, social resistance which is maintained, but which is unable to block the capitalist attacks, the growing influence of the fascists - that the present strategic discussion is taking place. You cannot understand the Syriza coalition by simply starting from the analysis of the Greek crisis.

It is the exceptional circumstances of a "thoroughgoing national crisis" which have propelled Syriza to be the first party of the Left. Its election results have increased from 4.6 per cent to 26.89 per cent! Without this national crisis, there would not have been Syriza. But its present political weight is also the result of the history of the Greek Left, of the crisis of the Communist movement, of its splintering: Synaspismos, the majority current in the coalition, comes from the Eurocommunist currents of the 1970s. It has experienced a series of internal crises and of moves to the left, under the pressure of the young generations. Syriza has also worked with the anti-globalization movement. It is therefore the product of the accumulation of a series of experiences, of debates, of frameworks of unitary action and confrontation, which have made it possible for Syriza to be the political expression of Greek social resistance. Unity played a key role in this dynamic of Syriza.

The KKE, an ultra-Stalinist party, was more organized and better implanted than Syriza, but it was characterized by a policy of dividing the workers and by a profile situating itself in the continuity of international and Greek Stalinism. It has been marginalized in recent years.

Since its last conference, Syriza has constituted itself into a party, but in fact, at this stage, it is a coalition of currents, parties and personalities. Pluralistic, it is the most unitary framework of the

Greek Left, but also the object of a battle between currents which range from reformism to the revolutionary Left.

The references of many leaders of Syriza are those of the Eurocommunist incremental approach of the 1970s, of the strategic perspective of transition to socialism by gradual reforms and the transformation of the state. Currents inspired by left Eurocommunism demand the gradual transformation of institutions and the intervention of the mass movement. They oscillate between a clear rejection of austerity and the temptations of alliances or the search for agreements with sectors of the ruling classes.

The anti-capitalist or revolutionary left currents are working for a confrontation with the austerity policies in the perspective of a break with the logic of capitalism. At the last national conference, the "Left Current" and the "Left Pole" presented a separate list which obtained 25 per cent of the votes.

Although the majority of Synaspismos remains on left reformist positions, the instability of the coalition, its sensitivity to the mass movement, its ability to attract anti-austerity forces, the place occupied by the revolutionary Left within it, all this, in an exceptional environment, contributes to giving Syriza a radical role very different from the Left Front in France. There is not, in Syriza, as strong a crystallization of reformist bureaucracies such as those of the PCF, the PCE or the Greek and Portuguese Communist parties!

"The government of the lefts"

The essential strength of Syriza and its dynamic come from its radical opposition to the memoranda of the Troika, its rejection of the policies of austerity and its defence of a programme in favour of social rights, public services, the cancellation of illegitimate debts, nationalization of the banks under social control. In the present situation of acute confrontation, these demands have a transitional role. Syriza has pursued a policy of unitary proposals towards the KKE and Antarsya – who have rejected

them – and has actively committed itself alongside sectors involved in struggles. Syriza is the expression of the anti-memorandum movement. It has also popularized the proposal of a government of the lefts on an anti-austerity programme, whose content is the object of debate between the left and the right wings of the coalition.

It is in this context that the discussion in the meeting was organized around the tasks involved in moving from the present mass mobilization against austerity to the building of a social and political movement to overthrow the Samaras government and establish a "government of the lefts" against austerity: a transitional government representing a break with the austerity policies of the European Union, a government of the lefts without PASOK or bourgeois forces. As Antonis Davanellos, a leader of DEA, explains, it is a question of fighting for a "government of the lefts"- Syriza, KKE, Antarsya – which "defends the popular classes" and not a "government of salvation or of national union with capitalist representatives" as defended by some leaders of Syriza in recent weeks. Seeking alliances for national reconstruction with sectors of Greek capitalism can only be opposed to a programme of defence of the interests of the popular classes. At this stage, the strength of Syriza has been to combine social resistance and the political perspective of rejection of the austerity-driven diktats of the European Union. In fact, a left government only has any meaning on such a basis: the refusal of the memoranda, the cancellation of illegitimate debts, nationalization of the banks and key sectors of the economy in order to reorganize the economy around the "elementary" social needs of the population.

In this situation of acute crisis, the struggle for the elementary demands - which are not so elementary as that, but rather vital – poses the problem of a confrontation. Because to defend employment, stop the decline in wages, refuse privatization measures, reject the diktats of the European Union, it would be necessary to finance such a policy by a different distribution of wealth and a reorganization of the economy which must involve the nationalization of

the banks and of key sectors of the economy. This means preparing for a confrontation with the ruling classes and with European imperialism. Therefore these demands have a transitional character: they pose the problem of a government which can implement them and of beginning an anti-capitalist transformation in a perspective of socialism. To go as far as possible, this perspective must rely on mobilization and social self-organization. "We must hold firm on this line", the Syriza left explained to us.

No sacrifices for the Euro!

It is also within this framework that the debate on leaving or not leaving the euro is taking place. A whole series of sectors of the Greek Left – the KKE, the dominant sectors of Antarsya, other currents of the Greek Left – have come out in favour of leaving the Euro. Leaving the euro under capitalist conditions would be tantamount to a brutal devaluation that would further worsen the situation of the working classes, without reviving, even from a capitalist point of view, the Greek economy, given the weakness of the country's exports. Syriza – and particularly its left wing – defends another point of view: they accept no sacrifice to defend the euro. The central problem is to apply an anti-austerity programme and not to give in to the blackmail or the diktats of the European Union. Emergency social measures should not be made conditional on an agreement on the euro, which means defying the EU. It is not a government of the lefts which should leave the euro but the EU that will have to take responsibility for a break, faced with a government that defends measures for the defence of the living conditions of the working classes. This will not be so easy for the EU, both from the point of view of

the legal forms – in the treaties, there is no provision for the expulsion of a country – and more fundamentally, on the level of taking responsibility for the social and economic strangulation of Greece. The popular reactions in Europe and the contradictions of the ruling classes themselves can give time to a "government of the lefts," on condition that they hold firm on a line of confrontation with the EU and the Greek capitalist class. Not taking the initiative of leaving, defying the EU but being prepared for any attack. This is the tactical response of Syriza to one of the most difficult problems. There again, the pressures of the EU are considerable, the blackmail total, but for the moment, Syriza is sticking to its course.

Everything is possible!

The situation is critical. The stakes in Syriza are considerable. Nothing is decided. Political struggles are taking place or are being prepared around how to formulate this or that demand of the programme of Syriza.

The temptations of this or that leader are great but, at every stage, the popular pressure and the pressure from the rank and file of Syriza are still pushing to the left, while the pressure of the EU and the ruling classes pushes to the right. The dominant reformist orientation and the disproportion between its electoral strength and its organic weaknesses limit the capacity for action of Syriza. But in counterpoint, the unity of the radical and revolutionary Left, self-organization and social mobilization can play a very important role, especially in creating from the rejection of austerity the conditions for the first steps towards a break with the capitalist system.

CYPRUS

Are there vegetarian lions in the EU?

DIMITRIS HILARIS ·

Has the EU become a fan of the Soviet economy?

The Russian prime minister Medvedev said that "The EU in Cyprus is like Bolsheviks in Soviet Russia". It is paradoxical indeed to listen to the EU's officials to speak about the hypertrophy of the Cypriot banking system; the very same people who have been speaking about the supremacy of the free market. It is even more paradoxical to listen to EU ministers speaking about the casino-economy of Cyprus and saying that the bankers should pay for their defaults; the very same people who encouraged the banking bubbles and saved the European banks with public money.

The left has no reason not to welcome the decision that the banks' stakeholders, the big investors, the off-shore companies should pay for that. But still this is not the essence of the EU policy; and in any case it is not at all a kind of socialist policy. Firstly, because the critical question, where the "erased money" will go, remains. In the case of Cyprus it will not go to the social services or anything like that. It will just go to the abyss of the Eurozone for covering the huge monetary-credit bubble. It is not a redistribution of the wealth. It is once again the very classic recipe of the Troika to reduce the economic cycle of one country. Secondly, it is because this reduction of the national income at the end of the day will hit the working class. If the big capital funds lose about 40% of their investment, the insurance funds of the workers will collapse together with a number of small-medium enterprises. The unemployment will rise. And the upcoming memorandum will reduce the workers' wages for a second time. Thirdly, the competition between various

capitalist interests is part of capitalism. Medvedev and the Russian capitalists should know that.

In fact the case of Cyprus indicates a new tactics for the EU. Since 2008 it is the first time that EU has charged the bank stakeholders in such a climax. This is not because of their social sensitivity. It is just because the crisis in Eurozone is still there and the competition is still increasing. No matter whether the statement of Dijsselbloem ("The Cyprus deal is a template for the future") is true or not, the case of Cyprus is a *de facto* recognition that the so-called rescue mechanisms like the EMS have failed. It is obvious that this is a new stage where the inter-capitalist and inter-imperialist conflicts will grow.

The dream of Jean Monet of a European federation based on a functional harmony of the European states is again at stake, because no functionality can override the class character of the current imperialist EU. And that is not because EU is very soviet, but because it is very capitalist.

Is renegotiation with the capitalist institutions a good tactic for the left?

In the name of realism, the majority of the European left keeps at the hard core of its programme the idea that the peoples' resistance and the change of the balance of the political forces could lead to a successful negotiation with the EU and thus challenging –or at least shaking– its neoliberal agenda. On 18 March 3 2013 Yannis Milios, responsible for the Economic Policy of Syriza, stated "One negative vote of the Cypriot Parliament will bring "war" inside the European institutions. The neoliberal centres of power will be forced to retreat and it is likely that a reversal course of the negative march of the last 5 years will begin". [1] The next day the Cypriot Parliament said "No", but

this did not really force the EU institutions to change their mind. In fact there was not even a (re)negotiation. The initial EU plan (and an even worse) came the following week and was approved by the very same Cypriot Parliament. All the supposed Messiahs like Russia, China, the alliance of the European South, etc. were proved to be illusionary.

Should the left continue to reproduce the idea of effective negotiations with the capitalist institutions or should it focus on the development of a political alternative beyond these institutions? Cyprus is surely a strong example against the first hypothesis.

Is euro a currency that can be reformed?

Once again in the case of Cyprus the entire debate concentrated on the question of the euro. The blackmail of the EU was based on that. The Cypriot government used it as a pretext to cover its acceptance of the current agreement and of the future memoranda. M. Sarris, the Cyprus finances minister, stated "Indeed, we cannot say that we have won a battle. We have avoided though a disastrous exit from the Eurozone". [2]

The Communist Party of Cyprus (AKEL) argued for a solution "without Troika but within the Eurozone". Does AKEL really not know that one component of the Troika is the ECB that controls the euro? Does really AKEL ignore that the final agreement was achieved on the basis that ECB would stop providing any euro to the Cypriot banks? The obvious answer is no. Akel is fully aware that all the blackmail of the Troika was based on the euro. Nevertheless the respect of AKEL towards the Eurozone is the limit of its political willingness to propose an antisystemic alternative.

Some leftist economists in Europe claim that a probable exit from euro would mean a devaluation of 50 per cent and would be worse than a 7 per cent haircut on the deposits of the working class people. Posing the question in this way is the worst method for the left, simply because in the end it will lead

the left to agree with the finance ministers like Sarris, Stournaras, Guindos, Gaspar, etc. that "at least we save our euros". However the working class people do not just have the option of choosing either hard austerity or disaster. Getting out of this false dilemma is not an economic issue but a political struggle and the left that is not ready to identify the political role of the euro, it is simply the one which cannot give this struggle.

The exit from euro is not a good economic idea as well. Yet it is a necessary political step for an anti-systemic and workers' alternative. It is the only way that the argument over the public control of the banking system can be implemented. It is an inevitable condition for the left who is actually fighting to change the balance of forces now and does not postpone the fight for one remote and uncertain future.

The case of Cyprus shows us that respecting euro (regardless it comes from the right-wing Dissy or the left-wing Akel) can have only one result: accepting the austerity. It shows us also that there are various interpretations for the exit from euro (middle-class, nationalistic and capitalist as well). An anticapitalist approach should not ignore that. But it is still essential for the anticapitalists in Europe that there can be no radical answer if we do not state in a clear way that euro is part of the weaponry of the enemy. And still one anticapitalist answer to the blackmails of the capitalist class (bank run, devaluation, etc.) should be the mobilization of the peoples' movement and not a recapitulation to the euro framework.

Is a left government always a left solution?

One additional particularity of Cyprus is the fact that the country was led to the memorandum and Troika by a so-called left government led by Akel. Akel is a party that in Greece is affiliated with both Syriza and KKE. Especially for Syriza, the left government of Cyprus was presented as a model for its respective proposal, some leading economists of Syriza almost justified the first Cypriot memorandum (as a fair negotiation with the Troika) and

Syriza supported the policy of Cyprus on the energy issue in Eastern Mediterranean (although it was based on a strategic alliance with the State of Israel and against the interests of the Palestinian people). [3]

Certainly the political system and the social background in Cyprus are very particular and not really comparable with the rest of the European countries. But still there are some lessons to be drawn from this experience of Akel governance: to speak in the name of communism or other radical declarations is not enough. A left government can exist as such only under the condition that it paves the

road of rupture with the ruling economic and political framework. And this requires an extra-parliamentary and extra-institutionalist action that can produce new structures of workers' self-organization.

"To be radical is to grasp things by the root." The root of a political answer defending the workers' interests is to start challenging capitalist property and the hegemony of their institutions. Shortcuts are not likely to exist. And in any case we must be aware of our enemy: in the capitalist jungle the lions are not vegetarian.

TUNISIA:

A common front of political organisations against the debt is born

PAULINE IMBACH ·

Organised at the call of the Popular Front (a coalition comprising left radical political parties, associations and independent personalities in Tunisia, one of whose leaders, Chokri Belaïd, was assassinated on February 6, 2013), this meeting brought together around twenty political formations from the Mediterranean including the Front de Gauche and NPA (France); Izquierda Unida and Izquierda anticapitalista from the Spanish state, Sortu from the Basque country, CUP from Catalonia; from Greece, the OKDE ; from Portugal, the Left Bloc; from Italy, Sinistra Critica ; Al Mounadil from Morocco and political formations from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Algeria and Palestine. There were also organisations present from Belgium, Haiti and Venezuela. It is the first time that these parties and political organisations have met at the scale of the Mediterranean region to struggle for the cancellation of the illegitimate debt.

This gathering ended with a big meeting of representatives of the political parties in an electric and passionate atmosphere of anger, joy and collective force with each affirming the will to work around the debt, against the dictatorship of the creditors and for the emancipation of the peoples.

More than 1000 people were present, including many young people and women. The speeches were interspersed with slogans chanted in Arabic (although it was unfortunate that only three women spoke). The activists in the room displayed their determination to sweep away the capitalist system

and to found a new world order in the service of the peoples.

Tributes were paid to different leaders, revolutionaries or progressive activists. A film tribute to Chokri Belaïd was shown. Chokri remains a very popular figure of the Tunisian revolution, a source of inspiration for many. Later another short film paid tribute to Hugo Chavez. For more than three hours, speakers hailed the Tunisian revolution and more broadly the Arab spring which overthrew the dictatorships of Ben Ali and Mubarak. At this historic turning point, it is necessary to add an international dimension. The Tunisian revolution is, for several generations, the concrete demonstration that revolution is far from being a rhetorical formula and the people can take their destiny in hand. The public meeting ended with a vibrant intervention from the spokesperson of the Popular Front, Hama Hammami, who has developed a position on the debt aligned with that of the CADTM.

As stressed by the preamble to the declaration of this meeting, the fall of Ben Ali "allowed the disarming of the local neoliberal capitalist order without however overthrowing it. The social regime, which is the historic product of foreign domination and more recently of world neoliberal capitalist restructuring, is still there. But the revolutionary crisis opened up by the insurrection remains active. The victory of the social and democratic revolution remains possible in Tunisia".

In this context, it is necessary to get rid of the debt which remains a central tool of the domination and oppression of the peoples. An instrument for the transfer of wealth and political domination, this question was at the heart of the debate. The participants affirmed the deed for freedom from the dik-

tat of the creditors and the international financial institutions, the IMF and World Bank in particular. Several speakers cited the examples of Argentina, Ecuador or Iceland to show that it is possible to disobey the creditors so as to follow policies in favour of the population. The audit of the public debt was also posed as one of the possible strategies to identify and cancel illegitimate and odious debt, while the importance of mobilisation on this question was stressed.

It is the first time that a common front has emerged, and it is undoubtedly a historic advance in the struggle against the debt. This meeting echoed the call launched in 1987 in Addis Ababa by president Thomas Sankara, and concretised 26 years later by the creation of a common front against the debt: "the debt cannot be repaid because if we do not pay, the financiers will not die, be sure of it. On the contrary if we pay, it is us, who will die, we are equally sure of it". The parties who met in Tunis decided to set up a monitoring committee and meet again in Spain in 2013 or 2014.

CYPRUS

OKDE-Spartakos about the recent developments in Cyprus

OKDE-SPARTAKOS ·

In any case, the risk has not vanished for Cypriot workers. The Greek Cypriot ruling class has been found on its own responsibility at a dead end, between the Troika and the blackmail of Russia which requires access to the island's resources. Whether in the name of stability of the euro, or in the name of deposits of Russian oligarchs, employees and workers are likely to be forced to pay the bankruptcy of Cypriot banks and the "Cyprus development model", by sacrificing their rights, wages and pensions and by mortgaging the natural and energy sources of Cyprus to lenders and to the capitalist energy giants.

We have no reason to feel sorry for this development because:

1. The plan is reactionary and unjust, because it doesn't charge the big capital and the big incomes, but distributes the weight of the crisis in all classes and social groups. Neither all deponents are capitalists, nor are all responsible for the crisis. Even relatively large deposits may not originate from capitalist activities, but by labor income - e.g. lump sum from pensions.
2. The plan is profoundly bourgeois, because it doesn't amount to some kind of redistribution of wealth in favor of the poor of the society, but to a direct value transfer for the bank bailout, for the benefit of bank capital. In fact, the Eurogroup within the monetary union implements the socialization of losses by charging workers and by increasing the debt for the benefit of bankers.

3. The eurozone and the EU have been against the interests of workers from their origins and intertwined with the interests of the Greek capital. The destabilization of the enemy is to our advantage - the dedication of SYRIZA and AKEL to the euro is therefore absolutely absurd.

But we have no reason to believe that the rejection of the plan in Cyprus parliament is a victory for workers either in Cyprus or in Greece. This is not a "heroic no" of "the people of Cyprus", because:

1. The "people" of Cyprus include not only workers and oppressed, but also employers, the church, bankers and bosses who are trying to dominate the eastern Mediterranean. The government of Anastasiades and the bourgeois parties who voted against the plan do not represent the "people" in general, but the bourgeois classes and their interests, which are also struck by the project and threatened by a collapse of the financial credibility, and, therefore the banking system.
2. The "anti-imperialist" opposition of the Cyprus parliament to the Eurogroup has another side: the pressures of domestic capital, and others equally capitalist and imperialist factors like the EU, such as Russia, the offshore companies, the international deponents. The plan was not only prevented by the massive demonstrations, (although we welcome the increase of militancy of the working class in Cyprus), but also by the pressure of these interests.
3. The Cyprus parliament, before rejecting the "haircut" of the deposits, had no hesitation to vote 32 memorandum-laws, which were proposed by the so-called "left" government of AKEL, and now AKEL dares to ask for a referendum! It is certain that if the movement does not stand massive resis-

tance, the Anastassiades government will soon promote and vote new measures (further cuts in wages and pensions, reductions in public spending and benefits), probably more injustice and bourgeois class oriented than the "haircut" itself. And last but not least, the entire political leadership is trying to get its hands on the 3 billions of reserves of pension funds.

4. The shady role of the Cypriot banking system is infamous. The workers of the island, north and south, have no interest to save this system of "black" money and "tax haven", which is actually bankrupt and therefore unable to cover deposits. One solution to the interest of the workers should begin on the demand of nationalization of the banks without compensation to a single public banking entity under workers' control, combined with the unilateral cancellation of the debt and the

nationalization of foreign trade, requests objectively leading to the rupture with the EU and the eurozone.

It is a fatal mistake for the Left to praise the national dignity and the determination of the Cypriot government and of the parliament. The only language they know, is the language of the capital and the money. The workers in northern and southern Cyprus, like their colleagues in other countries, have nothing to expect from the so-called anti-imperialist bourgeois parties and international allies. They do not need any common struggle neither with Anastassiades, big depositors and Putin, nor with the EU and with Samaras. Whatever workers are to win, they will only win it with their own independent action.

21 March 2013

VENEZUELA

Our Chavez

CLAUDIO KATZ ·

Chavez questioned capitalism and recovered an emancipatory project that seemed buried. He took up censured concepts, remembered the forgotten Marxists, denounced the bourgeoisie and declared his admiration for Cuba. He transmitted ideas of social equality and real democracy that caused an earthquake in the consciousness of the oppressed. He defended the dignity and the rights of the humble. He asked us to imagine a society without exploitation, competition, or profit.

This dimension is not uncomfortable for those who favour "serious capitalism". Also it bothers the sectarians, irritated by anybody who veers off the track of their prescriptions. They object to the distance between the project and its concretion, as if they had shown some capacity to shorten that breach. Chavez rescued socialism from the history books, to again locate it among the possibilities of the future.

He showed that this horizon is compatible in Latin America with revolutionary patriotism. He followed the trajectory of the anti-imperialist soldier who radicalized, converging with the social struggles. And he achieved a syntony with his people and a continental impact, which Torrijos or Velazco Alvarado had never obtained.

It is necessary to be careful in making analogies with Peronism. It is certain that he led the same irruption of silenced majorities and the same achieving of social conquests. But Chavez followed a road totally opposed to the conservative order. For that reason he never availed of regressive apparatuses such as "justicialismo". Instead of confronting the mobilized youth he invoked the Patria Socialista.

Chavez impelled regional integration, but did not idealize businesses and company profits. He ac-

cepted them as a given of the present scene and conceived them as instruments of recovery of sovereignty. His project was the ALBA: unity by means of cooperation. He began with the interchange of oil for teachers with Cuba and ended up supporting countless campaigns of solidarity with the abandoned ones of Haiti, the destitute of Central America and the needy of Bolivia. These initiatives were interpreted as "petro-diplomacy manoeuvres" by those who only conceive of actions as guided by greed.

The ALBA attempts another Latin American construction, with less bureaucrats and more social movements. Chavez conceived of it as drawing from the experience of Bolivar. If the War of Independence expanded to release the enslaved and eliminate servitudes, the present battle against the empire demands greater intervention from the popular subjects. In the preparation of that confrontation, he did not abstain from denunciations of the US superpower.

Latin America has lost the radical voice that was raised in all the forums, to pave an anti-imperialist strategy. A great regional emptiness has been created that does not have any substitute (at the moment). Those who discuss whether Cristina or Dilma have enough charisma to replace him forget the content of the vacant leadership. The comandante spoke the plain truth because he did not fear to defy the powerful. For that reason he made fun of the Yankee diplomats and the little European princelings who tried to silence him.

Chavez knew how to combine consistency with intelligence in the evaluation of the relationship of forces. That capacity was very visible in the last period, when he delegated the government, forging a team, positioning Maduro and weakening Capriles. Thus he dealt with the power vacuum that the right

had so much longed for. But he accelerated his own end, with the energies expended in the electoral campaign.

The result of those elections has been indigestible for those guardians of the republican order who serve the powerful. They question the terrible authoritarian, who won 13 crystalline elections and the frightful censor, who was always being insulted by the mass media. The debate over deepening or congealing the Venezuelan process has become more uncertain. There is a daily tension with bureaucrats who use the Bolivarian guise to enrich themselves, recreating exporter-rentier and unproductive consumption. Blocking the construction of an industrial economy, efficient and self-sufficient in food. Accumulating fortunes through oil fund currencies, increasing the fiscal deficit and preserving the cycle of devaluation.

Meanwhile many opponents now recognize the great change in the distribution of oil revenues. Accepting that these resources were usefully channelled into food, education, health and housing.

Never explaining why no previous president materialized that transformation.

The gains made are obvious and very significant. But they are not enough and could be lost if the radicalization of the economic process is postponed. There is no longer a conductor and it is time to form a more collective leadership elected by the rank and file. This is made possible by the unexpected nature of historical processes. Ten years ago, for example, nobody imagined the turn that would be made by the Bolivarian movement.

Chavez enters history through the front door to occupy a place together with Che. Guevara was the symbol of an ascendant revolution that raised high expectations of the immediate expansion of socialism. Chavez appeared in another context. He expressed the rebellions that shook South America at the beginning of the 21st century and embodied the victories over neoliberalism. Two outstanding figures for two moments of the same journey towards equality, justice and emancipation.

LATIN AMERICA

Unasur, Mercosur, ALBA and integrationist initiatives after Chavez

GUILLERMO ALMEYRA ·

Unlike Rafael Correa, Cristina Fernandez, Dilma Rousseff or Jose Mujica, he was anti-capitalist and tried, from a position of power, to produce — and to control — a still vague "popular power" (which the armed forces and the apparatus tried to asphyxiate). Unlike Evo Morales, he was not a builder of a more modern, developmentalist and extractivist capitalist State, so although he applied a policy in which everything was based on the export of oil to the United States and although he promoted industrialization, he sought, without however obtaining it, a non-capitalist state, structured on more democratic bases, the vaguely denominated "21st century socialism" that was different simultaneously from neo-developmentalistic politics and from the Soviet, Cuban, Chinese and Vietnamese bureaucratic systems. For that reason his death will be felt not only in Venezuela but across Latin America and, in particular, in the organizations he impelled.

Mercosur, semi-halted by the rival interests of a big country — Brazil — which sees a much weaker one — Argentina — as a market and not a partner and also by the vain efforts of Buenos Aires to resist this, could emerge from this quagmire if Venezuela with its oil surpluses played an important role inside it in spite of the Brazilian reluctance before the Chavista project of BancoSur that Brasilia sees as competitor to its own Banco de Desarrollo.

If, in order to cling to power, the new group, which depends on the nationalistic and conservative Chavismo of the armed forces, chooses to reinforce

clientelism and total dependency on the oil rent (which are ballasts of the Venezuelan economy that Chavez fought) to follow a policy of subsidies, welfareism and indiscriminate imports, it is possible that this sector would manage to maintain a popularity that Chavez sought through measures of renewal, but it will fortify the Boli-bourgeoisie and corruption and will put a damper on efforts at integration at the Latin American level.

That danger also threatens the ALBA, relations with the Caribbean countries, and support for Cuba so that it has cheaper fuel and it can buy foods. Mainly because in the ALBA no country can replace Venezuela in its locomotive role and no political leader has the stature or prestige necessary to replace Chavez as political leader of that organization.

As for UNASUR, it is based on the Brazil-Argentina-Venezuela trio which, and would be reduced almost to bilateral agreements if a leg of the tripod was lost. In UNASUR, Rafael Correa, and above all Dilma Rousseff, are the strongest from the political point of view. But the first has a very weak and, in addition, dollarized economy and the second depends too much on a strong bourgeoisie which it satisfies continuously (which causes some to speak, stupidly, of a Brazilian sub-imperialism although Brazil has constant friction with Washington to preserve, precisely, its own margin of capitalist action).

As for Cristina Fernandez, most likely she will not be able to obtain the modification of the Constitution that authorizes a third consecutive term. Her government already seems a lame duck and any possible successor is likely to be more rightist than her. In addition, a right wing but con-

stitutional Paraguayan government would be readmitted to the organization, Chile is in political crisis but without great changes, and with a political crisis in Colombia causing problems for president Juan Manuel Santos, who opted for detente with Venezuela, in his fight against the return of the ultra-reactionary à lvaro Uribe, the panorama of UNASUR will change much with respect to what it was when Chavez was a driving force.

Everything therefore depends very largely on the outcome of official postchavismo in Venezuela and, above all, on the popular reaction to defend every inch of the achievements and participation of workers and the poor and to create and expand the so-called popular power giving strength and ideas to self-management, the struggle for trade union uni-

ty, the organization of municipalities to administer the territory and thus rid it of the pro-imperialist and oligarchic right, now quiet because it fears a hostile reaction but reappearing in the light as top-down and bureaucratic sectors of official Chavismo make concessions to that right and the Boli-bourgeoisie.

After the great mourning has finished, the best of Chavez's legacy - daring, insubordination – will be on the agenda as well as a discussion-balance sheet about what needs to change and what should be the strategy for the foreseeable future. Only the preparation of the foundations of socialism can maintain the national independence and material progress made in the time of Hugo Chavez.

ECOLOGY

Second ecology seminar at the IIRE 1-3 March 2013

MARIJKE COLLE ·

General introduction

The seminar started with a general introduction on the current state of the planet in respect of nine key elements of the ecological crisis, of which the current climate change due to global warming is the most important. Other elements of the crisis of the global environment which were discussed were: the acidification of the oceans, the evolution of the global stratospheric ozone layer, the nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, the loss of biodiversity, the usage of fresh water, the changes in land use, the increase of aerosol and dust micro-particles in the air and the chemical poisoning of the biosphere.

For each element, scientists have tried to establish the critical threshold and timing of future tipping points. This overview put concrete figures and time scales on the general idea that the ecosystems of the planet are not without limits. In the general discussion, participants looked into the question of demography and population, they discussed general aspects of different campaigns against climate change and for global justice, the fight against new form of extraction of oil ('extreme oil') and the resistance of indigenous people against the privatisation of their lands and territories.

You can listen to the audio file of the introduction and download the Power Point presentation here:

Friends and comrades from Belgium, Brazil, Euskadi, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, the Philippines, Quebec, Russia, the Spanish State, Switzerland and the USA participated and gave reports on specific ecosocialist struggles in their country.

Reports by the participants

The twenty minutes reports from the different countries were very diverse, reflecting activities and theoretical developments in different countries. There was a general introduction on ecofeminism. A history of the antinuclear movement in Germany explained why there is a large majority of the population in Germany that remains hostile to nuclear energy and, after Fukushima, obliged Merkel to close all nuclear power stations.

The experience of some successful ecosocialist struggles by indigenous people in Latin America stood in sharp contrast with the lack of struggles against deep oil drilling on the Brazilian coasts.

Most of the participants did not know much about the new ecological struggles by young people in Russia, which started in 2010 when the Putin regime wanted to build a motorway through the old forest of Khimki near Moscow. Two young Russian comrades told about other examples of the new struggles going on in Russia against pollution, against projects for mega dams etc. This movement has been criminalised by the regime, one Russian participant managed to get political asylum in Europe, he was being accused of terrorism in the struggles to protect the Moscow forest. The comrades also spoke about the plans to raise the water level on a major dam on the Volga and the dangers this posed in Russia but also for other European countries downstream.

The experience of ecological struggles in the island of Mindanao was fascinating. It combines the defence of the ancestral lands of indigenous people with the fight for food sovereignty against agribusiness, the reconversion from chemical farming to ecological-sustainable-organic farming in different regions and villages. This work has now been going

on for several years and thanks to this project, more than a hundred local varieties of rice have been saved and now methods of using organic fertiliser have been applied.

From Europe, we had reports on the fight against the privatisation of water in Aragon (Spanish State), on several victorious battles against dams and against nuclear plants over the last twenty years in Euskadi, on the current successful national campaign in France against the mega project of a new airport at Notre Dame des Landes, on the ecosocialist work in Geneva (Switzerland) and on the one million climate jobs campaign in Britain. This particular campaign was important because it showed the possibilities for working together with the big trade-unions linking social justice with the fight against climate change.

A young ecosocialist activist from the USA, member of Solidarity, explained that there is now a new generation of young people starting to fight against the big pipeline which is planned from the Alberta province in Canada to the gulf of Mexico, transporting heavy oil extracted from tar sands. The fact that Obama will probably approve this, will destroy any illusion some of those young activists still have in the Democratic party.

In the Canadian State, it is mainly the first peoples in those provinces where the tar sands are being extracted, who are entering into the struggles against climate change, against the Canadian state. Susan Caldwell called Canada the most important 'rogue state' attacking the global climate.

Sadly, a comrade from Algeria could not come to the seminar, so the ecological crisis in the North of Africa was not discussed.

General evaluation and plans for the future.

After two intense days of general discussion and reports from the different experiences, we took time out on Sunday to have a balance sheet of this seminar and to discuss out plans for the future.

We are now planning to have an ecology seminar every two years. We will reactivate the FI discussion list on ecology for exchange of information and planning activity between all of us and other interested comrades and friends. We will form a coordination group with Europeans and completed with one person for Latin America and one from Asia.

This coordination group will work on a list of questions about our involvement in ecological struggles in order to have a larger view on our activities in this field in different countries.

The ecosocialist group of Solidarités (Switzerland) proposes to organise a European conference on our vision of ecosocialism as a radical, anticapitalist, internationalist and feminist project.

French comrades propose to work in the perspective of a big demonstration in Paris during the UN climate summit in December 2014.

The comrades from the Philippines will be aiming at organising ecological seminars focused on the specific topics of the region.

The results of the seminar should be discussed in all sections of the Fourth International and in the leading bodies of the International.

Publication

If we find space and time, the reports will, together with additional articles, lead to an anthology of ecosocialist struggles.

Reports made at the seminar will be put on the IIRE website as audio files in the three languages here

SYRIA

The permanent insurgency

JACQUES BABEL ·

This process has unceasingly repeated its refusal of religious sectarianism and its determination to overthrow the regime in order to build a society that is democratic, social and without discrimination. The slogan "the Syrian people is one and united" remains present.

The countries which call themselves "friends of Syria" are manoeuvring. Some of them want to impose a solution from above (as happened in Yemen) maintaining the structure of the regime, supported by the allies of the regime, Iran and Russia. Others, led by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, want to transform the revolution into a sectarian war, out of fear that an extension of it would threaten their power and their interests. They are financing extremist Islamist groups such as *Jabhat al-Nusra*, which have a sectarian and reactionary ideology, and often try to reduce the role of the people's committees, sometimes by violence. The position of the United States reflects this situation: refusal to provide weapons to the groups linked to the Free Syrian Army, while agreeing that arms should be sent by the Gulf states to the extremist Islamist groups that are not linked to the Free Syrian Army.

A dynamic of self-organization

These threats are designed to prevent a radical change, self-organized by the revolutionary people. This people has developed the experience of the people's committees at the level of villages, neighbourhoods, cities and regions. They are the backbone of the movement and of the resistance, ranging from the organization of demonstrations, humanitarian assistance and looking after refugees to the education of children and adolescents. In the liberated areas, they are in charge of services to the

population. In coordination with the armed resistance, they are at the base of the popular resistance.

The people refuse outside manoeuvres that would maintain the structure of the regime: large demonstrations and numerous declarations reject the proposal of dialogue with the regime by the president of the Syrian National Coalition, Moaz Khatib. During the demonstrations on February 8, placards proclaimed "we will only negotiate about the departure of the regime". The people also refuses to submit to any form of authoritarianism imposed by groups such as *Jabhat al-Nusra* in some liberated areas.

The fact that their revolution lacks any real international support does not demoralize the Syrians, who continue their struggle against terrible repression. But solidarity with a people that is fighting for its emancipation remains an urgent necessity. Unitary initiatives are being taken in France and around the world from 15 March, for the beginning of the third year of the insurgency. The NPA is taking part in them, as well as in campaigns of humanitarian aid [1] and in defence of the right of asylum for Syrians.

For the right of asylum for Syrians!

Since the beginning of the year, the web sites of the French consulates in Lebanon, Turkey and Kuwait indicate that "starting from January 15 Syrian nationals travelling to a country outside the Schengen area via French airports will have to be equipped with an airport transit visa "(ATV).

This obligation objectively impedes the possibility for Syrians to escape persecution in their country, authorizes France to return to their country of departure Syrians who do not have this visa and restricts the possibility of some of them to file an asy-

lum application on the occasion of their transit by a French airport.

The community code on visas provides for the adoption of such a measure "in the case of an emergency due to a massive influx of clandestine migrants". Since Syrians trying to flee their country could not be assimilated to clandestine migrants, this decision is an infringement of the exercise of the right of asylum and also exposes these Syrians to danger in the event of deportation to a third country which would in its turn send them back to Syria.

The National Association for Assisting Foreigners at Borders (ANAFE) and the Group for Information

and Support for Immigrant Workers (GISTI) referred the matter to the Council of State. The judge rejected their request, considering that the French authorities had been capable of judging that the requirement of urgency to establish the ATV had been met "in order to avoid a massive influx of clandestine migrants "... The procedure will continue, the two associations having filed on 23 February a recourse for excess of power and a request for an interim suspension.

These articles were first published in Tout est à nous !, weekly paper of the NPA in France, No.186, 14 March 2013.

ANTIPRIVATISATION

Land for those who work it

ESTHER VIVAS ·

The oligarchy in power takes advantage and pulls the strings behind the scenes, negotiating shady urban development deals, redefining rural land to allow it to be used for construction. Corruption cases are multiplying. The culture of backhanders is the order of the day. So is a new despotism by big business at the expense of citizens and our territory. And elsewhere, history repeats itself. Corrupt governments are the best partner for investors who want to acquire land quickly and cheaply. According to an Oxfam report, every six days overseas investors sold an area equivalent to the size of the city of London. It is the fever of the land.

Privatization and land grabbing are the order of the day. What's more beneficial than what we need to live and eat? The food and financial crisis, which erupted in 2008, gave rise, as has been well documented by the international organization GRAIN, to a new cycle of land grabbing on a global scale. Governments of countries dependent on food imports, in order to ensure the production of food beyond their borders for their own population, as well as agribusiness and investors (pension funds, banks), hungry for new and profitable investments, have acquired fertile lands in the South. It is a dynamic that threatens farming and food security in these countries.

Indigenous people, driven from their territories, are spearheading the fight against the privatization of the land. This is not a new struggle – and is one that was spearheaded by Chico Mendes, rubber tapper, known for his fight in defence of the Amazon and who was murdered in 1988 by Brazilian landowners. Chico Mendes helped create the Alliance of the Peoples of the Forest, compris-

ing indigenous peoples, rubber tappers, environmentalists, farmers ... against multinationals demanded logging and land reform with communal land ownership and its use for the benefit of farm worker families. As he said: "There is no defence of the forest without the defence of the people of the forest".

Here in the Spanish State, the Union of Agricultural Workers (SOC), part of the Andalusian Workers Union (SAT) has been one of the key exponents in the struggle for land and the rights of farm labourers. For over a year, they have occupied and worked the farm of Somonte, in Palma del Río, in the southern Córdoba province, that the regional government of Andalusia was preparing to sell, even though 1,700 people in the small town are unemployed. The aim of the occupiers is that this farm is worked by cooperatives of the unemployed, rather than pass into the hands of bankers and landowners. Somonte is a symbol of the struggle of the SOC and the SAT, which is involved in similar efforts elsewhere.

In Catalonia, today, a clear example of how the use of land for private interests takes precedence over the social and the collective is Can Piella, a seventeenth century farmhouse with land attached that is one of the few remaining rural areas in metropolitan Barcelona. After being abandoned for ten years it was taken over by a group of youths. They created an association, which currently has about two thousand members, who have restored the property, resumed farming, revitalized the surrounding environment and opened it up to people living in the surrounding areas of Llagosta, Santa Perpetua de Mogoda and Montcada i Reixac. Now, after three and a half years of operation, an eviction order threatens the project. The owners who for a

decade abandoned the finca and have no plans for it, now claim it back.

In the early twentieth century, Emiliano Zapata, peasant and leading figure in the Mexican Revolution, demanded: "Land for those who work

it". It has been over one hundred years and this continues to be a topical slogan

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Article published originally in Spanish at Público.es
Translation/edit by Revolting Europe.

GREECE:

An equilibrium that is precarious and full of dangers

CHARLES-ANDRÉ UDRY ·

Ernst & Young "predict" a rate of 28 per cent for late 2013 and the research centre of the private sector union, GSEE, forecasts at least 30 per cent. The rate of unemployment in October 2012 is 56.6 per cent for the 15 to 24 age group. In 2010, it was 34.7 per cent, and 46.7 per cent in 2011. For 25-34 year olds, the evolution is as follows: 34.1 per cent in October 2012; and respectively 27 per cent and 18.9 per cent for the corresponding months of the previous two years.

"Recipes" for employment

The region of Athens (Attica) is the hardest hit: 28.3 per cent in October 2012 (20.4 per cent in October 2011). After that, the region of Epirus-Macedonia: 28.2 per cent (20.9 per cent in October 2011). The German government has announced that in the year 2012, 123,000 people from Greece sought work in Germany. This flow is part of the new configuration - between zones of the European Union - of the industrial reserve army, with its various components. It increases the competition between workers, along with the "flexibilisation" of "the labour market regulations".

It is true that in Greece, as in other European countries, one method of bringing down the unemployment figures is well-known: according to the newspaper *Demokratia*, in 2013, 60,000 jobs will be "created", in the form of so-called training courses. They will cater for those under 35 and last for six weeks, for which those participating will be paid 480 euros. They are to be financed by the European Union (ESPA) for a total cost of 35 million euros. Experience has already shown the sterility of this kind of measure, apart from its effect on the monthly unemployment statistics.

Admittedly, the social imagination of some leading politicians who remember history goes beyond these gimmicks. Thus, the former Minister of Finance Petros Doukas of New Democracy – who exercised his talents in 1992-93 when Konstantinos Mitsotakis was Prime Minister (from April 1990 to October 1993) and from 2004 to 2007 under Konstantinos Karamanlis (2004-2007) - has used his web site to launch a bold proposal that synthesizes a whole political culture. It proposes the establishment of "voluntary work", without pay. This is part of his "90 proposals for a Greek New Deal II". These "voluntary workers" would be at the service of the state, municipalities and also the private sector. Doukas refers to the RAD (*Reichsarbeitsdienst*) [1] experience, according to which "work makes you free". In less brutal forms, "experiences" of this type are starting to inspire projects among sections, admittedly a minority, of the ruling class. It would be a mistake to ignore it.

It is true that there are gaps in Doukas's memory: did he forget to declare at least a million euros (nearly two, according to some sources) in his tax returns? A case of slowness that has become the rule, according to him, with bank transfers!

This indolence is not isolated. The Bloomberg agency, on December 24, 2012, estimated the total of unpaid taxes at 54 billion euros, of which two-thirds was the responsibility of 1,500 Greeks. Bloomberg - using sound information - considered that the amount recovered would 20 per cent at best. "Forgetting" to pay social security contributions is also commonplace (and this is not a Greek specialty). Doesn't the boss of Real Media, Andreas Kouris, the former owner of the TV channel Alter, owe a debt of 9 million euros to the social security authorities?

Pauperization is on the increase

The increase in and the duration of unemployment, massive cuts in wages, pensions and other benefits, combined with a brutal increase of various taxes, has precipitated hundreds of thousands of people below the "poverty line" and towards "exclusion", to use the language officially employed by the World Bank and the OECD. For 2011, 21.4 per cent of the population is considered to be obliged to survive on less than 5,951 euros a year. The poverty threshold keeps going down, since it is measured from the median wage, which is declining. Thus, it was situated at 7,178 euro in 2010.

The ELSTAT report, made public on Tuesday, January 8, 2013, insists on the fact that the figures for 2012 will be much darker. The "shock absorber cushion" represented by various forms of "social assistance" no longer works, because they have been either abolished or reduced. The number of households "with a low intensity of work" – in other words, in which all members are unemployed or only do odd jobs – went from 619, 000 in 2010 to 979,000 in 2011. The percentage of people unable to provide in 2011, for a number of basic needs (four out of a list of nine) came to 28.4 per cent (24.1 per cent in 2010). Among these basic needs, there are mentioned: the obligatory fixed expenses (rent, mortgages, etc.); adequate food; a telephone (including mobile); adequate heating...

Women (especially single-parent families) are the hardest hit: the rate for this "category" was 43.2 per cent in 2011 (33.4 per cent in 2010).

According to a recent trade union study, 50 per cent of new entrants to the "labour market" earn 300 euros per month. The press has just published the new wage contracts of Greek seafarers (who have qualifications and responsibilities on the ships): they go down from 2,500 euros a month (with bonuses for overtime) to 850 euros, with no payment for overtime. The journalist, with bitter irony, said: "Greek seafarers have become Filipino seafarers." He must be overestimating the wages of the Filipinos.

The number of homeless in Athens is estimated by NGOs involved "on the ground" at 20,000; with all the hardships specific to what is today called "this population".

The government's "law and order" offensive

In this context, the government of Antonis Samaras (New Democracy) - supported by the PASOK of Evangelos Venizelos and DIMAR (Democratic Left) of Fotis Kouvelis – has launched for several weeks now a very violent daily campaign against SYRIZA. It is aiming, with a certain success for the moment, to set the political agenda and to put SYRIZA in a strictly reactive position.

From a certain angle, this offensive of the governmental Right and its state apparatus, with its relays in the media, is following in the tracks of the large-scale police operations (multiple arrests, detention camps, etc.) against migrants [2]. This is sometimes overlooked by a part of the European left, which focuses its "reflections" strictly on Golden Dawn, whose breakthrough should admittedly not be underestimated. These political-police operations are placed under the banner of Xenios Zeus, from the name of the king of the ancient gods Zeus, protector of guests!

On January 9, 2013, the police attacked two historic squats in Athens, the best known of which (also to those who stormed it!) was Villa Amalia. The second is located at the crossroads of Patisision and Skaramanga streets: Villa Skaramanga. Finally, the "forces of order" continued the operation on Tuesday, January 15, at 1 p.m., dislodging the occupants of another historic squat (Villa Leila Karagiani), in the District of Kypseli. The deployment of police was spectacular: the entire neighbourhood was surrounded by police, helicopters were used, etc. Eight women and six men were arrested. The demonstration on Sunday, 13 January in solidarity with the squatters, and against the methods of the police, was quite big. It was preceded by a demonstration, politically important, against the destructive mining project of the Canadian mining company El Dorado in Skouries,

which is situated in the region of Halkidiki. The support of the left forces of Athens to these 2,000 demonstrators, who were distributing material that was well-produced and pedagogical, was barely visible. A missed opportunity.

The Interior Minister, Nikos Dendias – who directs the Xenios Zeus campaign – said: "We will not back down on the issue of squats." He said that 40 squats in Athens would be "cleansed". Following the rules of this kind of "cleansing of squats", the police – backed by the TV channels – produced photos of bottles of beer that "are used to make Molotov cocktails", and of batons "useful for attacking the police".

By a divine stroke of luck, on the night of Monday, January 14, at 2.30 a.m., shots were fired at the headquarters of New Democracy (ND) from a "Kalashnikov". And a warning of the possible explosion of a bomb was given, with evacuation of the building of the Supreme Court. Other "attacks" on premises of parties (PASOK, among others) have been mentioned.

Squatting the political space

The aims of these authoritarian government initiatives and "the effect of these events", rushed forward, may be declined thus:

1) To "provoke" (with the different meanings that this term covers) a reaction from what is called the anarchist milieu, which was the case. After the evacuation of Villa Amalia, the "occupiers" reoccupied the premises, briefly, and then chose a short-lived "appropriation" of the headquarters of DIMAR. The political and media campaign was reinforced in order to increase the "legitimacy" of the (more than 140) arrests, of the subsequent convictions and of the "war on squatters".

2) To put the question of violence – "law and order" as the political editorialists put it – at the centre of the political debate. This goes together with a theme presented with this tone: "We are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, with the assistance of the EU; however the radical Left is trying to fan the

flames". The editorial in *Kathimerini*, dated January 14, said: "The turbulence (social and political) is still there, but the public now knows that the crisis has invaded many other countries and that there is no magic solution. People have also understood that the antidote to rising unemployment does not lie in a mixture of instability and endless demonstrations."

3) The debate should no longer be centred, above all, on the austerity plans and their effects or on the unprincipled nature and the corruption of the political class. For example: the "Lagarde list" (the names of the Greeks who had accounts at the subsidiary of HSBC in Geneva). The debate, with twists and turns, on this theme has revealed the behaviour and the social network peculiar to the PASOK-ND system. The repercussions of this current scandal are far from being exhausted. It is therefore necessary to attempt to hide it and to shift the attention of the "citizens" elsewhere.

Isn't the real question on the agenda not in the conditions of social and political stability that will enable "us" to emerge from this crisis at the end of 2013 or the beginning of 2014, as the ECB (Draghi on January 10) has indicated the possibility?

4) Therefore SYRIZA "must" clearly take a position before the population: is this coalition of the radical Left in favour of violence or not, in favour of order or not? Must it not stop fanning the flames of the terrifying social violence that results from the dictates of the Troika and its government allies, who are the voice of the rich?

It is therefore unacceptable that one of the SYRIZA members of parliament says, frankly, that anarchists, in their own way, are for direct democracy, a value he shares.

All the media and government officials question Alexis Tsipras. He must be "absolutely clear" about violence and not just declare that the government "is creating an artificial polarization" and "violence or threats to human life are not in harmony with the values of the Left". This was all the more so as he was preparing his visit, on Monday, January 14,

to the German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble. Moreover, Schäuble simply reaffirmed his credo. Predictably. That will not contribute much to the governmental stature of Tsipras, who will also travel to the United States.

The attacks against SYRIZA combine the denunciation of its "intolerance", the cover it gives to "confrontations" with an assertion that is repeated ad nauseam: "You are unable to clearly present the objectives and modalities of running things if you were in government." This is a reference to conflicting pressures on the question of the left government and its definition, in terms of alliances and initiatives, within the ranks of SYRIZA.

Trying to dictate the political agenda

5) The theme of violence is all the more incisive in the media because explosive devices, very amateur, did some minor damage, on Friday, January 11, in front of the entrances to the buildings of five journalists: Antonis Skyllakos, leader of the Athens News Agency, the presenter Giorgios Oikonomenas of the influential Mega TV, one of the channels that unleashes attacks against SYRIZA, Antonis Liaros, formerly an influential figure in the Mega group, Petros Karsiotis of Alpha TV and Christos Konstas, formerly with Alpha TV and now head of the economic newspaper *Ependitis*.

On Sunday, January 13, in the daily *Kathimerini*, the spokesperson of the Government, Simos Kedikoglou, renewed the attacks against SYRIZA, following a Molotov cocktail being thrown at the entrance to the home of his brother Giorgos. The formulas were carefully chosen: "The differences between inflamed declarations and inflamed attacks are very small. There must be a clear denunciation of violence and verbal abuse."

The Prime Minister, Antonis Samaras repeated the same theme in a long interview published on Sunday, January 13, in the important daily *To Vima*, which is today the journalistic channel of the government. The "events" of Monday morning, 14

January, mentioned above, were the first point on all the radio and TV programmes.

6) Press articles began spreading an "analysis of the historical roots of the current violence in Greece". To sum up, it was said to be the result of society becoming used to the violence of the "left" and "terrorist" groups (such as the November 17 Revolutionary Organization, the date referring to the massacre committed by the army against the students in 1973).

This violence, according to these professionals of propaganda built up from a slanted chronology and from reality turned upside down, is said to have created a favourable terrain for actions by the neo-Nazis of Golden Dawn. "Extremes feed on each other", we must fight them with determination. Let's remain silent about the links between Golden Dawn and some sectors of the state apparatus, let's focus on the real danger: the squatters and those who do not denounce them and do not approve of the police operations.

7) So the government has been able to dictate, for the time being, part of the political agenda. Following on from that, it is increasingly bypassing parliamentary procedures on austerity measures (among other things, on taxes). It is in fact governing by decree, under the direction of the Eurogroup which is scheduled to meet on January 21. Because, as the spokesman for the government said: "We cannot terrorize democracy!" So, on Monday, January 14, 21 laws were to be adopted without debate.

The most elementary features of parliamentary democracy are being effaced, as was highlighted by Panagiotis Lafazanis, one of the sharpest parliamentarians of SYRIZA. He declared on 11 January, facing the Minister of Finance who controls the levers of the austerity plans: "You are introducing a new form of government. Ministers impose fiats which abolish the rights of Parliament and laws will in no way be discussed. You are responsible for turning parliamentary democracy into a parliamentary junta." In other words: the present majority of

the 164 MPs of the coalition government (who were 179 following the June elections) vote for decree-laws, unanimously and without discussion.

8) To this must be added various measures, widely publicized, against tax evasion, including some arrests, revealed at just the right moment, of some fraudsters. This deployment, which is carried out with the help of "European specialists" reflects a marked solidarity: the French will take responsibility for inspecting the richest individuals; the Spanish, as specialists in the matter, will investigate suspicious real estate transactions; the Swedes will develop a system of electronic control of the highest incomes; the Belgians and Dutch will create a telephone switchboard to call taxpayers who are slow to pay their taxes! The government's justification is that since it is difficult to reduce wages any further, the emphasis should be on taxes! Of which the repeated increases are raining down thick and fast on wage-earners and their income, including their fictitious wealth, for example, the fact of buying a car on credit. In addition to the VAT paid, the repayment of interest on the loan, the annual taxes to pay on the car, it becomes the sign of a fortune that must be subject to tax.

This rain of taxes mimics that of the carcinogenic particles caused by the use of firewood (from all sources) which is partially replacing fuel oil due to its unaffordable price [3]. But electricity rates will strongly increase in 2013 and 2014. And state institutions have accumulated a debt of 170 million euros to the public electricity corporation, which is on the list of companies to be privatized.

Behind these provisions against the fraudsters we can see the outline of a political campaign: admittedly the "political class" and a part of the civil service were not very concerned about the "public good". But now a new generation is beginning to occupy important positions and is directing, in the image of the "European technicians", the state machine, whose "technical decisions" do not brook discussion, because they come from detailed financial necessities and from "universal measures, applied without exception".

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Following on from there, it is obvious that there is being prepared, given the crisis of PASOK and New Democracy, the establishment of a modern political party, doted with authority and a European profile, capable of "modernizing" Greece.

SYRIZA and taking back the political initiative

In the coming phase, SYRIZA must be able to regain the initiative by imposing, in the public space, the social and political themes that preoccupy the vast majority of the population, and to do so in concordance with the multiple and permanent social struggles, work stoppages, strikes, workplace occupations, and the various forms of active resistance by sectors of the population. This resistance expresses the rejection of government decisions whenever they come down. And there are many more still waiting in the wings.

This rejection expresses not only the deterioration of working conditions, the liquidation of collective agreements, the decline in wages, but all the facets of conditions of life that have been disrupted by three austerity plans (memoranda). The movement *Den plirono* – "I do not pay" – concretizes in its own way the principle: "we will not pay for their crisis". However, these struggles have not resulted, as a rule, in gains. That must be taken into account.

In this connection, it seems exaggerated to use, without precision, the formula of "general strike". The reference to the "19 general strikes" in Greece is, in part, misleading. For the most part, it was a question of "strike days" (24 hours, much more rarely 48 hours); some of them were massive. Admittedly, more than once, they were baptized "general strikes". From there the meaning of the term "general strike" tends to lose its connotation of large-scale and relatively centralized (more or less directly) confrontations with the political regime in power.

This is not to underestimate the significant rise of social conflict. But the not very precise use of the term "general strike" can lead some people – most often outside Greece – to characterize the situation

as pre-revolutionary, if not more than that (and, therefore, to denounce the "traitors", who are always lying in waiting). However, to speak precisely, the dimension of the social crisis, the numerous struggles, often scattered as they unfold in the course of a day, and the rejection of austerity have not, for the time being, led to a fusion between a political radicalization – expressed in the rapid and massive electoral support for SYRIZA – and a broad social mobilization acquiring a degree of autonomy and independence, *de facto*, in relation to the trade union apparatuses.

On the other hand, this has led to clashes within the unions between the fractions (PASKE) linked to PASOK and those (DAKE) linked to New Democracy. A crisis of considerable proportions has opened up between these trade union fractions, their representatives (some of them have had to resign) and the parties of the government coalition.

This opens up a field of action for SYRIZA, whose influence on this level is not commensurate with its electoral audience (the one recorded in June). Some questions flow from this: what should the priority be: the development of a rank-and-file class-based trade unionism – where unity of action with members of the KKE and Antarsya is needed – or winning over cadres coming from PASOK, in order to change the relationship of forces at the top? Which, of course, is not always contradictory. However, where the emphasis is placed counts for a lot in the dynamics that can be unleashed and in the ability to link up with a sector of the unemployed, the student youth and other social movements.

Another important question is also posed: the building of a social front capable of winning over a sector of small peasants thrown into poverty and small entrepreneurs (in the most basic sense of the term) strangled by the crisis. The GSVEE (Confederation of industrialists and traders of Greece) supported a one-day strike backed by the GSEE (private sector trade union confederation). These small "entrepreneurs" are immediately hit by the austerity measures, as well as by tax and banking policies.

These two social layers are mainly captured by the Right and by nationalist forces. Without a more pronounced political affirmation of the "radical Left", of proposals and initiatives that mark the rhythm of the political agenda and affirm the proposals of SYRIZA, the junction between different social movements and a more consistent and renewed class-based trade unionism, there is a risk of a political slide towards proposals for "productive reconstruction of the country, necessitating a government of "social unity" becoming strong, or stronger.

Although it is clear that there is no cost-free alternative – given the depth of the crisis, the specific features of Greek capitalism, the European and international economic and political context – to the policies of the Troika, one decisive question is crystal-clear: what classes will pay the real cost? The social majority, which is already paying a price similar to what was the norm in the 1930s, knows this from its living experience. A fraction of the so-called middle classes is contemplating it, even though it can still escape from it, partially.

The priority is therefore to offer convincing answers to the most socially active sections of workers and the unemployed, as well as pensioners and invalids. Because they are all affected by real "confiscatory taxes", in every imaginable form.

It is from this angle that there can and must be presented a set of proposals dealing with the refusal of the memoranda, the refusal to pay the debt, the establishment of a really dominant public banking system, with an investment policy and with the programmatic core of a government of the Left in a "non-revolutionary situation", to use a non-traditional formula.

The recent declaration by the secretary of SYRIZA, a member of Synaspismos, Dimitris Vitsas, whereby, if SYRIZA was in government, all the privatized firms would be renationalized – including the termination of the lion-sized contract with Chinese giant COSCO, which has acquired a decisive share of Piraeus (a key sector of the port centre and the land

adjoining it) - expresses not only the effects of popular discontent, but the complex relationships between different positions within this coalition, as well as the attachment of an indisputable sector of the membership to the programme put forward during the elections.

The violent reactions of the media machinery and of members of the government that this statement aroused demonstrate the determination of the ruling class, its government and their European allies.

Therefore the central points of an alternative policy must key into the resistance movements and the various struggles, particularly as a certain desynchronization may exist between these struggles — whose size and dynamics are changing after three years of a terrible crisis - and forms of political radicalization, linked to rejection of the government and marked by bi-polarizing dynamics.

In addition, a Samaras government could, in the near future, play the card of an affirmation of national sovereignty, in alliance with Israel (and Cyprus), over a wide Mediterranean zone that is said to have significant reserves of oil and gas; these resources are presented as making possible "the development of Greece". Such an adventurist initiative - with the support of Israel which has asserted its autonomy with regard to the United States - would open up a political conflict with Turkey. This project is at present more difficult to implement given the situation in Syria. But, were it to materialize, nationalist tendencies would flare up in Greece. On January 6, 2012, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoglu, already warned the Greek Government against "prospecting for oil" in these disputed regions. This is another challenge for the forces that make up SYRIZA, specifically for the internationalist current.

In this context – of a precarious and dangerous political and social equilibrium - the latest poll (11 January) for Skai TV and *Kathimerini* comes at the appropriate moment. New Democracy won the support of 29 per cent of those polled (+ 3 per cent),

SYRIZA: 28.5 per cent (-2 per cent). Golden Dawn (Chrysi Avgi): 10 per cent; PASOK: 8 per cent; Independent Greeks (very much on the right): 8 per cent; Democratic Left (DIMAR): 7 per cent; KKE (Communist Party): 5.5 per cent.

One result surprised several analysts: the 8 per cent of PASOK, which is in complete collapse.

The drop in the number of people who think, compared to December 2012, that SYRIZA can win the next election is 16 per cent. The rejection of the government remains very strong, even though it has slightly receded. This survey reinforced the political campaign we discussed above. Even though a majority think that the crisis will last another five years, it indicates the decline of the widespread idea of a "probable bankruptcy of Greece" with its «terrible consequences for everyone», if compliance with the austerity plans is not reaffirmed, and if they are not implemented, a theme put forward continuously by Samaras and by Finance Minister Yannis Stournaras.

Antonis Samaras is considered to be more capable of leading the government than Alexis Tsipras, who arrived in third position. In second position comes someone who is absent: "those polled" assert that nobody is able to govern properly. This expresses a significant element of the present political situation. The use of polls is a political weapon, and it is wielded enthusiastically. The pro-government press and the electronic media, which are hegemonic, have not hesitated to do so.

A configuration marked by the (pre) congress

Within SYRIZA, the pre-congress in late November-early December 2012 modified the configuration of relations between political currents. The votes won by the agreement reached during the meeting between the Left Current (represented by P. Lafazanis) and the "left pole" (DEA and the majority of Kokkino, and also APO), 25.71 per cent of the 2987 delegates who voted (a number of the 3308 delegates - one for every ten members - had had to leave the congress, since the vote took place

very late on Sunday night) caused astonishment in the "presidential group" of Tsipras.

Tsipras, feeling the climate, made a long late intervention - not provided for on the agenda and not really accepted by a certain number of delegates - in the middle of the debate on the question of the future organizational structure of SYRIZA. He was clearly opposed to the presentation of two lists for the election of the leading bodies, in the name of the "new democracy to be exercised individually by each member". In fact, this "presidential centre", made up essentially by a generation in their thirties and forties, seeks to play a Bonapartist role. But it is trying to do it in a very unstable internal situation and in a context where the Samaras government has taken, for the time being, the initiative, even though its parliamentary base remains weak and may break faced with the emergence of events that are specific to the multi-faceted crisis in Greece.

The position of the "presidential group" - with its partially informal characteristics - nevertheless acts today to block the most right-wing dynamic of an influential sector of Synaspismos. This is often not taken into account by those who denounce

SYRIZA. The "presidential group", in this Bonapartist function that is difficult to control, sometimes plays, faced with the left of SYRIZA the card of its co-optation, and especially that of its neutralization.

This is all the more so as the link between the "Left Current" and the "left pole" has continued and been consolidated following the conference. The formation of an executive secretariat of SYRIZA, which was established on Thursday, January 10 and should meet on a weekly basis, leaves less room for manoeuvre for the strongly mediatized Tsipras leadership. It would have had more opportunities to empower itself in relation to a "central committee" that meets only once a month, while Greek socio-political temporality is more compressed than that.

An interview was given by a member of the "presidential network", Yannis Bournous, responsible for "external relations" to the Australian magazine *Links* on December 14, 2012 and republished in IV here. It gives an idea of the "presidential" discourse at the end of 2012, before the relaunch of the government initiative of the past few weeks.

January 15, 2013

VENEZUELA

Declaration by Marea Socialista to the Bolivarian civilian and military people

We want to remember our Chavez together with the Bolivarian people, civilian and military. The Chavez of the struggle for independence from the Empire. The Chavez obeying the people. The irreverent Chavez who was part of a rebellious people. The critical and the self-critical. The Chavez able to invoke the dream of Latin American unity as it should be, socialist. Our Chavez is that of the "change of course".

And we want to remind you to hold on to what we shouldn't forget, what we have to defend and what to deepen. And the best tribute to him is to change everything that has to change.

National Independence

When neo-liberalism was imposed on our continent and in the country, from the uprisings of the Caracazo and 4 February there was born a union between the civilian and military people to search, find and fight in search of the second independence. But that popular union needed a name and a leadership, so the people became the Bolivarian people and gave birth to their leader, Chavez. And since then they have struggled to consolidate and deepen the first conquests of our definitive independence. Following that road is our first commitment.

Obeying the people

One of the things we learned over these long years of struggle of the Bolivarian process together with this people is that if Chavez was in command by obeying, we should not accept that a ruler disobeys the popular mandate. This is what the Comandante was thinking when on December 8 he asked that we support Nicolas Maduro as our candidate. Yes, he said, always accompanied by the people.

Irreverence and rebellion

Since the fight against the Empire and the oligarchy that never again will return to govern this land takes a road assured by irreverence and rebellion against the old capitalist powers, the construction of a united and independent Latin America cannot be achieved without irreverence, rebellion, criticism and self-criticism. This is another keynote of our Chavez.

With tears in our eyes and chests tight with emotion and pain, we accompany the man and we make our commitment to continue the work of building the independent homeland and a socialist Latin America.

Today we exercise our right to pain and sadness, we exercise our right to pay tribute. And also with the millions of compatriots who have taken to the streets of the country we are committed to fight for life.

Independence and socialist homeland

Long live Chavez, Carajo!

Caracas, March 6, 2013

Food:

Do we know what we eat?

ESTHER VIVAS ·

It was in Ireland and Great Britain where, in January, horse DNA was first identified in meat sold as beef. Companies like Tesco, Lidl and Aldi, and even Burger King were forced to remove these products from their establishments. Here in the Spanish state, the government denied the existence of any similar situation. Weeks later, the Consumers' Organization found horse meat in burgers from Eroski and AhorraMas

Food globalization and the off shoring of agriculture and food lead to these things. Sooner or later the consequences of such scandals come here also. The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and the Environment has had to acknowledge, finally, the existence of horse meat in products that were sold as veal. And multinationals such as Nestlé, among others, have withdrawn the affected food.

While the replacement of one meat by another is not detrimental to our health, that case has reignited fears on what we eat and who pulls the strings of the food system. Once more, it has demonstrated how the economic interests of a handful of companies in agro-industry are put above the food needs of the people. In this way, if producing horsemeat is cheaper, horsemeat is what will be on the plate.

In addition, discovering where the fraud started becomes mission impossible in a food chain that has foods travel an average of five thousand kilometers, according to a report from Friends of the Earth, before arriving on our plate. A burger can be made by meat from ten thousand cows and go through five different countries before reaching the supermarket. Where did the horse meat come from? Ireland initially accused the Spanish state, then Poland. When the case erupted in France, the culprit was a

factory in Luxembourg which, in turn, pointed out that the meat came from Romania, who at the same time, said the goods came to them from the Netherlands and Cyprus. There is no way to know the answer.

History repeats itself. And whenever a new scandal appears we see the same cross-accusations, social alarm, impossibility of knowing its origin and tons of food in the dumper. It happened with e. coli and cucumbers and much earlier with chickens with dioxin, BSE, swine flu and many more. And it will happen again. It's the other side of a food system that in reality does not work and is unable to feed us in a sound and healthy way, be transparent and put an end to hunger in the world.

Such food scandals are the result of a dislocated, extended, oil dependent model, without farmers, intensive, addicted to pesticides, which basically seeks to do business with something as essential as food. Even swine flu and bird flu originated in intensive large scale breeding farms, where animals are crowded, abusively and cruelly treated, highly dosed with antibiotics are raised and treated as merchandise.

Today the food chain, which has at one end the farmer/producer and the other the consumer, has been extended to such an extent that none of them can impinge on it. Our food is in the hands of companies that monopolize every one of the stages of production, processing and distribution of food, from the seeds to the supermarket, and impose their rules of the game. And if our right to feed ourselves is in the hands of companies like Cargill, Dupont, Syngenta, Monsanto, Kraft, Nestlé, Procter & Gamble, Mercadona, Alcampo, El Corte Inglés, Carrefour and so on it is clear that this right, as evidenced by reality, is not guaranteed.

We only have one alternative: to re-appropriate agriculture and food policies. To end the dictatorship of the markets in food. To demand that which is denied to as individuals and as a people: the right

to decide, sovereignty, in this case over food. And to once again become owners of our agriculture and our food

USA

Reproductive justice needed

DIANNE FEELEY ·

On August 26, 1970, when U.S. women marched "out of the kitchens and into the streets" to commemorate the 50th anniversary of women's suffrage, the three main demands were equal pay for equal work, free abortion on demand and 24-hour quality child care.

If none of these demands have been met, women have nonetheless continued to struggle for our rights. The passage of a number of laws and the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion has altered the ground. This is not only true of the women's movement, but of the civil rights movement too.

Reflecting on the legal status of abortion on the 40th anniversary of the *Roe v. Wade* decision, we see that legalization removes only one barrier women face in expanding our reproductive rights. And in fact most activists in 1973 understood two things:

- *Roe v. Wade* was a flawed decision from a woman's point of view, because it did not sweep away all legislation restricting women's access, but in fact provided a framework for constructing new restrictions.

The decision divided women's pregnancies into three phases. In the early phase, "The attending physician, in consultation with his patient, is free to determine, without regulation by the State, that, in his medical judgment, the patient's pregnancy should be terminated." State interest grew as the pregnancy moved into its second and third phases. In the decision all physicians are men and it is they who are at the center of the decision-making process!

- The right wing would not roll over and play dead.

In the early years the activist right wing took down the license plates of cars in clinic parking lots, located the names and phone numbers of the registrant, and called to harass them.

They set up pickets at clinics and produced wanted posters identifying health care providers as "murderers," and the fanatics stirred up among them did murder several physicians and health care workers.

They also set up phony clinics near the to clinics and advertised free pregnancy tests as a way of luring in unsuspecting women. Although they wanted to find a way to outlaw all abortions, they were most successful at pressuring politicians at both the federal and state level to pass laws restricting access. Eventually they adopted a death-by-a-thousand-cuts strategy. Most importantly, they draped themselves in a "pro-life" mantle.

Barriers to Access

Abortion services have never been available in most counties. Today 88% of counties, where 35% of U.S. women live, lack clinics. Since the Food and Drug Administration approved the use of mifepristone and misoprostol for nonsurgical abortions in 2000, women in rural areas have had the potential for greater access to abortion in their early stages of pregnancy (within the first nine weeks).

Through a telemedicine procedure, a woman goes to a clinic where a nurse takes her medical history and gives her a physical exam. The doctor is sent the results over the computer. She and the nurse then meet with the doctor by videoconference. After a consultation, the doctor provides her with two medications. While the doctor and nurse watch, she takes the first dose of mifepristone, which blocks a hormone required to maintain the pregnancy. Two days later she takes misoprostol,

which makes the uterus contract and expell the fetal tissue.

More than 1.4 million women have used this procedure. According to a study released by the American Journal of Public Health, it is as safe as surgical abortion.

However Arizona, Kansas, Michigan, Nebraska, North Dakota and Tennessee have banned its use and states such as Wisconsin impose severe restrictions that limit its use. Last year 48 representatives introduced into Congress a bill to ban it at the federal level.

With the exception of the West Coast and upper East Coast, almost every state has enacted laws curtailing abortions. Last year 19 states enacted 43 laws, with six states responsible for 24. None improved access to abortion or comprehensive sex education. Two years ago a total of 93 laws passed state legislatures. But for every bill passed, many more are introduced. For example, in Michigan over the last two years 41 anti-abortion measures were introduced, of which only three became law.

In addition to banning telemedicine for abortion, Michigan also passed a provision that no woman be "coerced" into having an abortion (but not into continuing a pregnancy, or setting the same standard for a man seeking a vasectomy). Additionally it demanded that clinics performing at least 120 abortions a year have the same architectural standards as an ambulatory surgical facility. When signing the bill, Governor Rick Snyder remarked that this would probably affect only 10-20 clinics (out of 32).

Over the decades state restrictions include parental consent (38 states), mandatory counseling (35 states) — with at least 18 providing misleading information, 27 demanding that the woman learn about fetal development and 10 requiring in-person counseling that mean two trips to the clinic (with waiting periods ranging from 24 to 72 hours) — restrictions on clinics and their personnel, mandatory ultrasounds even when not medically warranted, and banning abortion procedures beyond 20 weeks.

In 2011 legislatures in Indiana, Kansas, North Carolina, New Hampshire, Tennessee, Texas and Wisconsin cut off funding to any family planning clinic that is not operated by their health department, thus eliminating Planned Parenthood. Last year Arizona and North Carolina did as well.

Yet by the age of 45, half of all U.S. women have an unintended pregnancy and one out of three will have an abortion. Eighty-eight percent will obtain the procedure within the first 12 weeks; 7 in 10 would have preferred to have an even earlier procedure. Reasons for later abortions boil down to three: lack of money or access, unwillingness to face the fact of the pregnancy in the early weeks, or initially welcoming the pregnancy only to discover a serious problem that causes the woman to seek an abortion.

Given the lack of comprehensive sex education (over half the states mandate abstinence as sex "education") and the reality that contraception is not freely available, women whose wages are below the poverty line are five times more likely to have an unintended pregnancy, five times more likely to have an abortion and a birth rate six times higher than a woman with a higher income.

Undercutting Abortion Rights

Clearly the barriers that have been built disproportionately affect poor women, particularly women of color. Just four years after Roe Congress passed the Hyde Amendment, restricting Medicaid-paid abortions except in cases of rape, incest or life-threatening conditions. An initial court decision held that the amendment was unconstitutional — but the government appealed and the decision was eventually reversed. The women's movement was never able to overturn that restriction.

In 1992 the U.S. Supreme Court gave a green light to restrictive state legislation in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. That decision undercut *Roe v. Wade* by replacing the "fundamental" right to abortion with an "undue burden" standard, and dropped the trimester framework. Thus it upheld

Pennsylvania's right to demand parental notification, a 24-hour waiting period and a ban on abortion after 24 weeks (except in the case of a woman's life-threatening condition). It did, however, void a spousal consent provision.

For its part, the federal government has since outlawed late-term abortions. Some Presidential administrations have placed additional restrictions on women in the military having access to abortion. This is particularly ironic given the high percentage of rape within the military.

The majority of Americans support the legalization of abortion, but only under certain conditions — in essence, a woman must be seen as a victim in order to obtain an abortion. Since the majority of pregnancies are not the result of rape, incest or life-threatening conditions, this allows the right wing room to play on that ambivalence. The arguments they use focus on asserting "the rights of the unborn" (fetus).

Pitting women against fetuses, they compare themselves to the abolitionists' struggle to end slavery. Thus health care providers are as evil as the slaveholders, and any woman seeking an abortion is essentially immoral and selfish.

In a society that speaks of motherhood as sacred but actually provides little infrastructure to aid mothers, this right-wing offensive has made many women ashamed of their desire to terminate their pregnancy. They are told this is a mistake they will regret.

As we remember from reading Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, judging women is an old American tradition. While women's legal rights have been extended, this judging of females continues to affect the self-image of girls from a very young age.

Government policies that judge the circumstances of women's lives, categorizing some as "deserving" of aid and others as "undeserving," is reflected not only in welfare regulations but in all the restrictions on sex education, contraception, abortion and ac-

cess to quality day care. This assumption that politicians know best is a continuation of treating women as the property of men, kept, for their own good, from adulthood and decision making.

Women with money may be able to go around the barriers, which explains why they have fewer unintended pregnancies, lower abortion and maternal death rates. As Occupy Wall Street pointed out, the gap between the 1% and the 99% is widening. It will widen further as governments at all levels cut back services women particularly need, from health clinics to day care.

It will also widen with the restructuring of public schools as charters move in and as education for the majority will be driven by test scores. Cutting off access to comprehensive sex education, contraception and abortion is just one more way inequality will be reinforced.

This year and next will see challenges to the provision of full contraceptive coverage under the Affordable Care Act. The provision covers all contraceptive methods and sterilization procedures approved by the Food and Drug Administration, including "morning-after pills" and intrauterine devices that the right wing classify as abortifacents.

Forty lawsuits have demanded the voiding of this requirement; last year Alabama, South Carolina and Wisconsin banned contraceptive coverage in their state health exchanges.

Several state legislatures have also moved to eliminate abortion coverage in standardized group health insurance plans, stating that if a woman desires such coverage, she must arrange an additional rider and pay for it. Since most plans now cover the procedure, such a move would encourage the insurance industry to drop the provision from private-sector health plans.

In "A Flood of Suits Fights Coverage of Birth Control," Ethan Bronner writes that half a dozen appeals might be ready for inclusion in the U.S. Supreme Court's docket for fall 2013. One fear is that the Obama administration might settle these

cases by offering an attractive compromise. (New York Times, 1/27/13)

Resisting the Attacks

A range of organizations — from mainstream health care providers such as Planned Parenthood (which provides 90% of all abortions as well as other health services for women) to staff-driven organizations such as National Abortion Rights Action League and the membership-based National Organization for Women — have worked to maintain and expand women's reproductive rights. Over the years these forces have testified against restrictive laws, developed educationals, organized vigils and called massive national demonstrations.

Yet often they were willing to live with restrictions if they felt there was a way around them. I remember one staffer telling me we "could live" with parental consent legislation as long as it had a judicial bypass provision. Yet even when the system "worked," it created a more chilling political environment.

For its part, the Coalition of Labor Union Women has played a positive role in educating union members about reproductive rights. But while many unions have decent positions on paper, there is little education of the membership. Often the leadership assumes the members are right wingers and remains quiet about the official position.

Meanwhile grassroots organizations, particularly those led by women of color, have developed thoughtful campaigns around women's health needs and opposed restrictive legislation.

Particularly impressive is the work of Sistersong, who developed a response to the right-wing's billboard campaign to denounce Black women's abortions as genocide. They launched the "Trust Black Women" partnership with a statement that explains:

"There are those who believe they should control Black women's reproduction like during slavery. They believe in population control and use false

compassion for children to disguise a racist and sexist agenda. Our opponents are manipulative, zealous, and immoral. They lie using religion as a cover. They try to use combination of guilt and force to undermine our human rights. They manipulate our history, our concerns about medical mistreatment, and our real collective pain about genocide and slavery to spin stories about Black women being the stupid pawns of doctors. They claim that Black women can't be trusted. They accuse us of practicing genocide on our people when we stand up for ourselves....

"We don't need fanatics to tell us what to do. Black women make decisions every day about whether to parent or not, not just whether to give birth. Those who think they should dictate our choices won't be there when the child is born, to help us fight for better education, increase child care, keep our kids out of jail, send our children to college, or get affordable health care. Black women fight for ourselves and we fight to uplift our people. Our opponents either stand in the way or fail to help....

"Trust Black Women seeks to increase respect, maintain dignity, and support Black women and girls with implementing reproductive health decisions that are personal, appropriate, accessible, and affordable. All women should be able to maintain their integrity when accessing reproductive health services. Black women should have self-determination to exercise basic human rights when implementing their decisions, and not be subjugated to the political winds, media campaigns and/or environment prevalent in government or society that hinders a woman's ability to control her body and destiny. Trust Black Women will challenge those who seek to undermine our autonomy, respect, integrity, and dignity as Black women...." (See http://sistersong.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=41&Itemid=

From the beginning of the campaign to end restrictive abortion laws in the 1960s, the most powerful tool the women's movement developed has been the speakout. Women spoke about why they sought an abortion at a time when it was illegal, and the

price they, their sisters and friends paid. After the Roe v. Wade decision, speakouts included health care providers outlining the attacks they faced.

The movement's strength has always been in showing the reality of women's lives and how we struggle to make the best decisions we can, given our circumstances. At the same time, speakouts show the distance we have to go to gain full equality.

With Planned Parenthood, a major women's health provider, on the right-wing's radar, it recently developed a "no one can walk in her shoes" campaign. Some have called this a step backward from its long-held pro-choice stance. I believe this criticism comes from those who see pro-choice as a principle that needs no specifics.

However I've found the variety of women's experiences effectively refutes judgmental attitudes and reactionary laws. In fact, when the women's movement of the pre-Roe era talked about a woman's right to choose, we meant the right to come out of the shadows and enlarge the possibilities around

when, if and under what circumstances to have children. To do that requires systems of social support. We certainly didn't limit ourselves to abortion rights. Few of those needs have been addressed. Meanwhile, the State constructs barriers that restrict our legal rights.

Those who seek to attack us pretend to support women but treat us as perpetual minors, incapable of decision making. Like small children, we must be led to the truth. Abortion providers are portrayed as evil doers that prey on us; in reality they provide services we need at personal risk.

Women certainly are capable of making the decisions that affect our lives. To do that we need reproductive justice in its fullest, most revolutionary meaning.

See five charts from the Guttmacher Institute at www.guttmacher.org

From ATC <http://www.solidarity-us.org/node/3814>

JAPAN

Two years after Fukushima

PIERRE ROUSSET ·

The earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011 have had important social and economic implications above all in the north east which was directly hit. A population which was massively damaged has found itself in a situation of impotence and dependency. The traditional family, social and institutional networks have been devastated. The psychological shock has been profound, fed by the physical disappearance of community spaces (villages, neighbourhoods and so on), the lack of reliable information, solitude, the feeling of no longer having a future. Faced with the incredible administrative impotence shown by the state in these times of emergency, regional activist organisations (trade unions, associations and so on) have done remarkable work to bring aid and offer frameworks of collective activity to refugees. They have benefited in this respect from national and international aid networks, but their resources have remained inadequate in relation to the breadth of the disaster. As for the Japanese workers' movement, it is too weakened (and bureaucratised) to bring to the attention of the country as a whole the social issues revealed or provoked by the disaster.

Thus — and given also the extreme gravity of the accident in the Fukushima power station — it is the nuclear question which has dominated the political scene in the post March 11 period. The pro-nuclear consensus which had prevailed in Japan has been broken. The avowals of those involved in this economic sector and the publication of documents

have shown how this consensus had been built on lies, corruption, and private-public connivance; on the negation of the risks linked to radioactivity and the possibility of major accidents. This policy of lies was perpetuated during and after the disaster — to the point that mothers in the contaminated zones no longer knew what precautions should be taken to protect their children (more sensitive than adults to radiation of relatively weak dosage). The anti-nuclear movement — yesterday predominantly local (a citizens' collective against each power station) — has taken on a national dimension, sometimes mobilising tens of thousands of persons, something never before seen in the archipelago. For various reasons, the power stations were deactivated, one after the other, to the extent that by May 2012 not a single one was still in service. In July, Naoto Kan, Prime Minister at the time of the disaster, declared himself in favour of a non-nuclear Japan.

In 2012, a number of polls showed a very large majority in favour of abandoning nuclear power. However, in early February 2013, polls showed 56% in favour of the policy of reopening of the power stations advocated by the new government of Shinzo Abe. How can this turnaround be explained?

Regional instability and nuclear lobby counter-offensive

After the Fukushima disaster, the nuclear lobby hunkered down. The development of the situation in eastern Asia gave it the opportunity to retake the offensive. Although often misfiring, the North Korean missiles increased the fear of a military threat. Above all, a conflict of sovereignty with China has emerged. Tokyo administers the Senkaku (in Japanese) or Diaku (in Chinese) islands. Beijing has always contested their annexa-

tion by Japan, but for decades the two governments had avoided making this question a "hot point" in their relations.

The territorial hot points are located more to the West, China forcibly demanding with military deployments the Paracel and Spratley islands against Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines, but remaining very discreet on the tracing of its maritime frontiers in relation to Japan.

In September 2012, Tokyo opened the Pandora's box wide. The government effectively "nationalised" the Senkaku islands which were under private ownership. Beijing reacted by sending ships and planes to the sensitive area, and then stating that it wanted to map the micro-archipelago. The tension has just mounted further with the Japanese government accusing a Chinese warship of having "targeted" one of its destroyers with an attack radar. All this does not presage war, but an "active" territorial conflict which is likely to endure.

If what was yesterday diplomatically contained has now become explosive, it is obviously because each state covets the underwater wealth of the South China Sea. It is also because each has an interest in encouraging great power nationalism. For internal reasons (diverting attention from the social crisis), but also because the relationship of forces is in full evolution here. China is affirming itself as a military power and does not wish to be contained by the "island front line" running from Senkaku/Diaku to the Spratley and Paracels. The USA is strengthening the presence of the Seventh Fleet. However, Tokyo is no longer assured that the protection of Washington will remain unfailing.

For the first time, authorised voices are heard in Japan to say more or less explicitly, that the archipelago should equip itself with nuclear weapons. A fundamental taboo is being lifted in a country which in 1945, lived through the crimes against humanity of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The suppression of article 9 of Japan's pacifist Constitution is increasingly evoked (it affirms the renunciation of war). Concrete measures are taken or announced to

increase the military strength of the "Self-Defence Forces": an increase in the military budget, redeployment of F-15s, launching of a high precision optical satellite and so on.

Energy security is going through troubled times, argues the nuclear lobby, which advocates nuclear power so as not to depend on supplies by sea. The lobby wants the bomb also, the "civil" nuclear power supplying the necessary fissile materials necessary to the military. This alarmist campaign has made an impact on the Japanese people.

Confronted with this new situation, the Japanese citizen left has launched an appeal that each country in the region affirms resistance to the rise of xenophobic militarist nationalisms. It denounces the invocation of a mythical history to grab islands which have never been inhabited. It aspires to a shared management of the seas in the interest of the peoples and respect for ecological requirements.

Two opposed political blocs are taking shape, and this is something new. On the one hand the nuclear lobby, the militarist currents and most of the nationalist right. On the other, the civilian anti-nuclear movement, the last survivors of Hiroshima/Nagasaki our those who represent them (the mayors), the pacifists who defend the Constitution, those opposed to US bases in Okinawa, personalities like the Nobel prize winner for literature Kenzaburo Oe and so on. However, the anti-nuclear movement in Japan faces a difficult political situation for which it was not prepared.

In the absence of a left political alternative, the rejection of nuclear power after Fukushima was first incarnated on the political level by the parties of the centre-right, although they became rapidly discredited because of their incompetence. New populist radical right formations have emerged in the region of Osaka, then Tokyo. For now, the dominant post-war party, the Liberal Democratic Party, has regained power under Shinzo Abe. It has benefited from the abstention of disillusioned sectors of

the population and an unmerited reputation for good management. The bad news – like the signature of the Trans-Pacific Free Trade Treaty whose social effects will be devastating – was put off until after the electoral period.

Internalisation of the anti-nuclear movement

There is no return to normality in the Fukushima power station. The nuclear crisis is going to last. The civic movement continues its everyday struggles in the archipelago: pickets in front of the head office of Tepco (the operator of Fukushima), filing of complaints by victims, resistance against the re-

opening of each power station. Last November Japan hosted a second international conference for a nuclear free world. Closer links have been made between the struggles waged in various countries for a nuclear free world, as well as struggles in various countries of the region, like South Korea or India. For the first time, the Asia-Europe Popular Forum has published a declaration in favour of ending nuclear power. March 2013 will be marked by numerous mobilisations for the second anniversary of the disaster.

The shockwaves from Fukushima continue to spread.

PORTUGAL

Mass demonstration against austerity

LUIS BRANCO ·

Few people would think that the huge demonstrations on 15 September, called by the citizens' group "Screw the Troika" [1], could be surpassed in number. One million people then filled the streets and led to the government's withdrawal of the Sole Social Tax amendment, that would increase the workers' contributions to Social Security while decreasing the bosses' contributions. This time, the government acted differently and decided to postpone the announcement of the welfare cuts — the initial intention is to cut more 4 thousand million euros — to next week, thinking it would keep many people out of the protest.

But their plans failed completely: on 2 March more people came onto the streets and made the biggest mass demonstrations ever in the country. For most of them, it was the first time they actually came into the streets to demonstrate and protest, mostly asking for the government to resign.

The demonstrations ended with the people singing "Grandola Vila Morena", the Portuguese Revolution anthem that has resurged in the last weeks with groups of people singing it to interrupt public speeches of members of government all over the country. Even the prime-minister got "grandolated" (a new expression for future Portuguese language dictionaries) during his speech in the Parliament last month. [2]

Unlike the September demonstration, now there was an organized sectorial presence, inspired by the Spanish "waves": the "health wave" gathered nurses and doctors, the "education wave" with teachers and students and the "retired wave" with retired workers and pensioners, one of the social groups most affected by the tax increase on their pensions.

This huge protest took place at the middle of the 7th evaluation of the troika memorandum, with the IMF, ECB and EU staff in Lisbon preparing the most savage cuts in Education, Health and on the welfare state as a whole. The unemployment rate remains out of control (almost half of all young people have no jobs) and the emigration numbers can only be compared with the late 1960s, when people fled the war, misery and dictatorship.

The indignation of the Portuguese people is an example to all European countries that are suffering from the consequences of the troika's brutal neoliberal programme and the new dictatorship of the debt. Of course the protests will go on after the announcement of the new cuts, but the power of this mobilization also brings the urge for an international agenda of protests against the common enemies that are destroying the peripheral economies of the eurozone.

To see photos of the 2 March demonstration in Lisbon.

GREECE

The historic responsibility of the left in Greece

JODY BETZIEN ·

Q: In mid-October, Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras gave a radio interview and at the time he said that "the three party consortium that is collapsing, will collapse and then the country's future will be managed by healthy forces". How much closer is the coalition of collapsing?

A: Well, first of all, we are experiencing a long period in Greece in which you can never make safe predictions with specific timelines. By making this statement the leader of Syriza expressed the reflections that we get from society. That even the people who chose in June to support the pro-memorandum, the pro-bailout forces, are now clearly realising, in a step by step process, that the pre-electoral promises of New Democracy and the other two parties in the government, these promises are collapsing.

The coalition government voted in favour of the so called Third Memorandum of Understanding for Greece. They imposed a new set of super austerity measures, which has brought the minimum wage in the private sector to below 500 euros per month. They're destroying any capability of the existing welfare state and social services system in Greece to cover the basic needs of the citizens.

That's why we saw the emerging social mobilisations start heating up after September with the first general strikes. There is a strong willingness by an enlarging part of society to overthrow this super austerity policy.

That's why Syriza officially declared that we are fighting for the resignation of this government. We are doing so on two levels. The first is the parliamentary level, we are now the party of the major opposition and this means that on the one hand we are doing everything possible to block the reac-

tionary super austerity measures and at the same time promote alternatives.

That's why for example Syriza has already proposed a new set of laws concerning the over indebted households and how to relieve the over indebted households from the big burden of the loans they have towards private banks. And we are doing the same for the over-indebted small and medium businesses, which are the backbone of the Greek economy traditionally. They have been collapsing since the first austerity program two years ago.

But on the other hand, we are also trying to raise the temperature on the social level, in the field of social struggles. From the first moment Syriza emerged as a possible candidate for government, we clearly stated that even if we win the elections and we manage to establish what we call a government of the left, an anti-Memorandum government, such a government even with a high vote, will not be able to win deeper changes in the Greek economy without strong popular support.

This means we are not seeking to reproduce the clientalist state of the political system that we have seen for the past 35 years since the fall of the dictatorship, but for a new relationship with society. This is a big question mark for us.

Q: Who are the healthy forces referred to?

A: I believe that from the two consecutive elections in May and June, all the political forces received a new political message.

The super-austerity programs that PASOK and New Democracy imposed through the three last cabinets deteriorated the social conditions for many social categories, social classes. And this led to a historical rupture of the bond between the two parties of the late bi-partisanship, New Democracy

and PASOK; with the lower and middle classes of the Greek society that constructed what we call the swing vote.

The social forces that helped these two parties to acquire absolute majorities for the past 30 years, only exchanging places between government and major opposition.

So we are talking about a completely different political scenery at the moment.

The Greek social democratic model is collapsing. In the case of PASOK, they are now down to 5 or 6% in the opinion polls. And New Democracy, despite the fact that they won the elections, they won the elections with the lowest election result in history. This means the liberation of the social forces.

So, what we mean with our project for an alternative government, is a new connection with these liberated, emancipated social forces. Regardless of how they voted in the past.

Q: On many occasions, Syriza representatives have argued that leaving the eurozone will destroy the Greek economy. How do you respond to criticism from some of the left who argue that exiting the Euro is a more radical position to take?

A: The basic slogan of Syriza is "no more sacrifices for the Euro". What has been clearly demonstrated with the latest developments on the European level, is that there has never been a threat of a Greek exit — what they call a "GR exit".

This has been used as an argument for blackmailing the Greek electorate on the one hand, and on the other hand as an argument in order to convince the tax-payers of the other European countries that the contributions through the so-called support mechanism, which are actually contributions to rescue the thieves of the private banks, are used in order not to dismantle the eurozone.

At the same time, they told the Greek people through the mainstream media that the GR exit wouldn't be a problem for Germany or the rest of

the eurozone, but would just cause destruction for the Greek society and economy. This has been a huge smear campaign and our response was that a left government would do anything possible in order to protect social interests.

When you are trying to answer to a wrong question, however right the answer you will find will seem to be, it will still answer to the wrong question. So there is no question of dismantling the eurozone, and there has never been such a question. There might have been some neoliberal fundamentalist Christian democrats from Bavaria or from Finland or the Netherlands who have been supporting this idea, but this has been marginal from the beginning and there has been no such real threat.

But the essence of the question and the so-called left criticism on our stance against a GR exit or the dissolution of the eurozone. The so-called left criticism, which supports the return to [former Greek currency] the Drachma is a fully Keynesian approach.

I will explain briefly why. The theory behind a so-called left position for exiting the euro is that, we will exit the euro, return to the national currency and then we can make some consecutive devaluation of the national currency. First point, this would lead to an even bigger destruction of salaries and pensions.

Then [the theory goes], we can be more competitive in the exports and then the big exporters who will profit from the exports, magically they will redistribute this wealth.

This is 100% pure Keynesianism, it has nothing to do with a radical stance concerning the question of the existence and the function of the eurozone and the economies, and actually it answers to the wrong question. It plays the game of the opponent by putting the currency as the major question.

What we want to change is not the currency, it is the social relations, and the balance of power that this currency represents.

That is why we are calling not only for a national struggle. We know that the national level is fundamental for the class struggle. But on the other hand, we recognise that even if we win in Greece and we establish a left government, if we don't see even gradual changes in the balance of power and the relations of forces, at least on the European level, then the left Greek government will remain as a "Village Gaulois" [ie: isolated].

It will be a historical rupture, because suddenly there will be a government to pose resistance to the neoliberal authoritarian project. But on the other hand, we have been calling for the formation of the European front of resistance. That's why for us the mobilisations across Europe on November 14 were very crucial. In my opinion, that was a historical breakthrough for the social movements in Europe.

I believe that the movement of the squares [occupy movement] created fertile ground for the development of a new kind of internationalism in social struggles. Even reformist trade unions are now mobilising in this direction. This, for us, is very crucial because without coordinated and massive European resistance you can achieve some initial things but you cannot proceed with deeper changes.

Q: Syriza has also been criticised from the left for calling to renegotiate Greece's debt rather than refusing to pay it. Can you explain the Syriza position?

The question of the debt, we believe, is in principle a political question and not a technical one. The debt has been used as the excuse for all the austerity programs. Greece had debt problems together with a lot of other European states for many years. Even Germany has a public debt that exceeds the criteria of the stability pact.

So we believe that with a political problem you have to give a political answer. What we have said from the start of the crisis is that this is not just a Greek issue. This is a European structural crisis of the way that the EU and the eurozone was constructed.

So we have been insisting that there cannot be a national solution to a European problem. That is why, what we have proposed, together with the other forces of the European Left, is a European agreement on the public debt crisis that would include all the over indebted European states. It would follow the model that was agreed for Germany in 1953 after the World War II.

This includes two things; one is an abolition of a big part of the debt. We have been proposing an audit to see what kind of debt we have. What part of it comes from corruption or speculative interest rates in the past or things like that.

But at the same time, you need to protect some smaller investors, like households who have spent their lifetime savings to buy state bonds or social security funds who own state bonds. These were not protected in the so-called haircut of the Greek debt last year.

The first bond holders to be destroyed were small household bond holders, Greek social security funds. Greek Universities which almost went bankrupt because of the "haircut". That is why we say that our program and our strategy is class orientated. You need to protect those who did not create the crisis and punish those who did.

At the same time, we are calling for an optimisation of the repayment condition of the remainder of the debt, again along the lines of the agreement for Germany in 1953. This means the precondition of growth. The years that our country appears with a positive growth rate we can repay. Those when we are in deep recession, like now the sixth consecutive year of recession, we cannot repay.

You don't have to be an economist to understand that. If you have recession and at the same time you have to repay interest and the capital on the loans and simultaneously find money for public investment to boost job creation; this is impossible. So we need to make a choice. If you want Europe to be saved as a whole, you need to make choices. Our choice is to defend and promote those policies that could lead Europe out of recession; job creation,

public investments, social control of strategic companies (banking sector, energy, transport etc) and at the same time secure basic social services etc.

But this is not enough, of course, because we acknowledge that the crisis is structural. We say that the European treaties that have been voted on have led the EU to the point that we are at now. You need radical change of the treaties and you need a fundamental change in the statutes of the European Central Bank, so that it becomes a last resort lender, which will offer direct loans to over indebted states, with a very low interest rate, as it does today with private banks.

The Party of the European Left made an official proposal for the creation of a European public bank for social and ecological development. This bank would directly fund with zero or very low interest rates only public investment directed to ecologically sustainable development and job creation projects.

Q: Tsipras was quoted as saying "Austerity has not failed because it was not implemented but precisely because austerity was enforced". What is Syriza's alternative to austerity?

A: You know it is the first time in our history where we are forced by society itself to have very concrete alternatives for the "next morning". This is a shift in the role of a left party in Greece.

This question is crucial. There is an urgency to find funds if we establish a left government. This means for example that one proposal would be to have an extra-ordinary tax, an immediate tax on big capital, big companies and the rich.

At the same time we need a very fast and efficient strategy for a change in the taxation system in Greece, a tax system which is actually against the Greek constitution. The constitution says that taxation in Greece should be progressive; each citizen must contribute according to his or her capabilities.

Despite this, in a period where Greece is in the sixth year of recession, the annual taxation of the

profits of big companies was cut by former PASOK PM George Papandreou. This has occurred at the same time as a cut in workers' wages and conditions.

I was reading an official analysis that said that in the last two years of recession the profitability of the 500 biggest Greek companies has increased by 19%. This demonstrates something that must change immediately.

So a basic target is to make the wealthy and not the poor pay, because lower and middle classes cannot contribute anything else. They have lost their houses, their jobs. In Athens you can find 25, 000 homeless people. The number of suicides because of personal devastation have been sky high. This demonstrated very clearly that we need to proceed with a radically different policy on how to acquire state revenues.

We need an agreement to tax the real estate fortune of the church, which is the biggest real estate owner in Greece. We need an agreement to tax the largest ship owners. They own the second largest commercial fleet in the world and they are officially tax evaders because of the 70-75 different tax exemptions that they enjoy because of the decisions of the previous governments.

If you do not proceed with class-orientated solutions you can never exit the tragic condition of the Greek economy today, because you cannot find any revenues.

Q: The fascist party Golden Dawn is currently polling around 13%. This has been compared to the rise of fascism in Germany in the 1930s. How does Syriza respond to this situation?

A: The rise of Golden Dawn is a complex phenomenon. It cannot be explained simply by stating that 500,000 Greek voters became fascists in one night.

Golden Dawn was projected as an anti-systemic radical solution. That is why, for example, many youngsters voted for them. The fertile ground for

the flourishing of neo-fascist ideas was created first by the PASOK government and use of racist and xenophobic rhetoric in the mainstream political discourse.

People got used to xenophobic concepts through a "socialist" government. It would be very easy, if you combined the general crisis of political representation, and the rejection of what people see as the whole political system, to turn to solutions like this.

Golden Dawn is a complex network, they are "national socialists" concerning some aspects of the economy. They call for the nationalisation of the banks. But at the same time it is very contradictory. In their official statements in parliament, they have asked the government not to implement new taxes on the ship owners because they claim they are also "patriots who can help our homeland".

We know they have been working and enlarging their influence through gyms, football club "ultras" [organise supporters], among security guards in nightclubs and army special forces squads. They are also involved in criminal activity in this sense, not only through their murderous attacks.

So it is a complex network that is not simple to face and crush. They are also extremely hostile towards workers' struggles. For example, last year we had a very big strike of the steel workers at Halyvourgia. Golden Dawn was against the strike but at some point they changed their position in Athens and took some food to the strikers but at the same time officially they were against the strike and in one factory they called on the strikers to go back to work.

Golden Dawn is a product of the capitalist crisis, but at the same time it presents itself as an anti-systemic force, although it is actually not.

What have we been doing? A complex problem requires a multi-dimensional strategy. It is not as simple as, for example, some anarchists might think to just create rival squads and have Nazi patrols and anti-Nazi patrols who crush each other every night.

What we have been trying to do is create broad anti-fascist committees in, for example, schools in collaboration with teachers unions or in neighbourhoods especially in Athens where the problem is bigger. And in neighbourhoods in collaboration with citizens of each neighbourhood who are artists, intellectuals we are trying to work through cultural events, trying to cultivate another kind of culture.

But you know another important thing is the networks of solidarity that we have been creating in neighbourhoods. These are not only crucial for the survival of the people, who are being assisted by these networks, but also for the introduction to a new kind of social organisation based on solidarity. Because Nazis are counting on fear, on the isolation of people, on the fear of criminality, on the fear coming from hunger and things like that.

What we are trying to promote is a collective way of facing social problems and this means that you are working together with your migrant neighbour. This is not philanthropy, this is not a vertical relationship, it is not a power game between the one who has and offers and the one who doesn't have anything depending on the other person above.

This is a horizontal kind of relationship. In our networks of solidarity, apart from the offers of free food and clothing, the relationship is based on the notion of exchange without the mediation of money.

Exchange of goods but also exchange of services. If your migrant neighbour has worked in the construction industry and is now unemployed, he can come and paint your house and at the same time you give him a tank of olive oil or offer free tutoring to his children.

These are also reflections that refer to more strategic questions. Because if you are talking about a vision of socialism with freedom and democracy, you need to promote the model of society that you want through opening small windows like that.

We do not wish to take the place of the state services. We clearly say this to the people that partici-

pate in the networks of solidarity, we are not replacing a public hospital by creating a local voluntary health care centre. We are helping each other to collectively survive, but at the same time we encourage people to collectively demand the satisfaction of their basic needs.

This is also a weapon against fascism, because it is a collective answer, an anti-racist, a cultural answer to the concept that Golden Dawn is using to reinforce itself.

Q: There have been accusations that the fascists have links to the police force, can you comment on that?

A: We have evidence, these are not just accusations. There have been repeated incidents, not only of tolerance of the riot police towards fascists in clashes with anti-fascists, but also in the demonstrations. There has been repeated evidence of police on motorbikes who have drawings on the back of their helmets with ancient Greek symbols used by the Nazis, or royalist symbols etc.

We have repeated incidents of racist violence within the police departments. There has been international exposure of these incidents through Amnesty International. In one case, when anti-fascist protestors clashed with Golden Dawn members, 15 of the anti-fascists were arrested and tortured. The Guardian published an article on this and the use of tasers and other forms of humiliation tactics.

The response by the Minister for Citizens' Protection, as it is called, was to publicly state he will sue The Guardian for misinformation.

Another incident was in two areas of Greece, Golden Dawn members of parliament took part in attacks on migrant sellers in flea markets and destroyed their stalls and kicked them out. There has been evidence that in one of the two attacks, in the town of Messologi, police officers dressed as civilians were present in the squad of Golden Dawn members.

There has been an order for inquiries, but we are used to the endings of these kind of inquiries.

Also, there was a survey after the elections that showed that in specific polling stations in Athens close to central police departments, there was an estimation that around 50% of the policemen serving in Athens voted in favour of Golden Dawn.

This is reinforced by the theory of the "two extremes" that is being dangerously used by all the parties of the government — unfortunately, even by the Democratic Left. It is this theoretical scheme of the two extremes, on the one hand Golden Dawn and on the other hand Syriza and everybody who demonstrates and resists.

The government not only uses this rhetoric, but has clearly taken a stance between the two extremes. The statements of the Minister for Citizens' Protection have been really provocative.

And the other danger is one that is often reproduced by left people. For example the general secretary of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), after the elections in June, stated in an interview that we should not be afraid of the Golden Dawn, because now that they are in parliament they will wear their suits and ties and they will become adapted to the system.

This is a tragic mistake. Because history has very bitterly proven that when institutions come in touch with fascism then institutions will adapt to fascism and not vice versa.

This argument we have been rejecting since the pre-electoral period. We said even if you don't agree with Syriza, even if you think we are completely against your interests, don't vote for Golden Dawn. This was clearly transmitted by our candidates and our leader. We were the only party that stressed this position.

Q: Based on a recent opinion poll, Syriza is in the leading party. When does Syriza anticipate new elections — will there be early elections?

A: We are returning to the first question in a way. We are not an oracle. Seriously, for us everything depends on the social availability and the organisation of the movements of resistance. If you have people actively present, pressuring the government, then we can have rapid political developments. In the absence of these mobilisation we will not have rapid developments and we will see these guys remain in power for longer.

I told you that officially we have said that our political aim right now is to force this government out, but this can come only through social pressure. Whenever it comes, we will be there to state that we are ready to take our historical responsibility.

Q: Around May next year, you will have the official founding congress of Syriza as a new unified, multi-tendency party. Is that Syriza preparing for elections?

A: Since the elections in June, the Syriza membership has been in a constant state of a pre-electoral period. To us, this means being part of the movement for resistance and not only organising electoral campaigns. It was the social pressures that kicked out two governments and imposed elections.

That is what we are trying to reinforce now. After thanking the 27% of the electorate for assigning such a huge responsibility to Syriza, the day after the elections in June, we clearly stated that in organisational terms Syriza was a party of 4%. We need to develop ourselves and evolve in such a way to be able to construct an open, inclusive, democratic, radical party of the left. Not only to embrace the 27% who already voted for us but also to enlarge this appeal.

This refers to the earlier mentioned new social alliances that are being supported in the last period. For us it is a very big bet, the question of whether or not we will be able to transform Syriza into a more coherent political subject.

We are experiencing a historical period where the model of parties of "ideological unity" have failed. This is even clearer after the last elections in

Greece, when the monolithic dogmatism and sectarianism of the Communist Party lead to its political and electoral marginalisation.

We believe in the political unity and the unity of social needs. That is what we are trying to build.

The first signs in this preparational period are good. Syriza almost tripled its membership since the elections, we are now exceeding 30,000 and moving towards 40,000 members. This is not very big, but it is very important. It is the biggest membership that a left party, to the left of social democracy, has had in Greece for the last 20 years.

The qualitative analysis of the new members who join Syriza clearly demonstrate that there is an enlarging social availability to get in touch with the ideas of the plural and radical left. This is the basic aim for the next period. We are addressing people of all political origins. We believe that this is a historical period where we can meet people coming from the whole political spectrum on the basis of the protection of basic social needs. Of course, not including the extreme right.

Step by step, it gives us the optimism and strength to continue this unifying, transitional process of transforming Syriza in the next period until the founding congress.

We have similar positive signs in the elections of different sectorial trade unions, the forces of the unity lists of the left that we are trying to create have been advancing. This is very important for us, because one big aim for us is to convince the people that the traditional trade union model of the last decade — that included corruption, bureaucracy and conservatism — must change.

The only way to change is to reinforce the forces that have an alternative plan for what trade unionism means nowadays. How, for example, can it be inclusive of the precarious workforce, which is today huge in Greece but is not included in the trade unions?

The signs are positive and we believe that in this whole transitional period until the re-founding con-

gress in late May or early June we will be able to
enlarge this influence.

From *Links*

INDIA

Greater than the Might of Armies

KUNAL CHATTOPADHYAY ·

General Strikes

The term general strike, if loosely used, can cause problems. Today, it is no longer possible to remain satisfied with what Luxemburg or Trotsky wrote after 1905, or with experiences of Europe in the first half of the twentieth century.

For anarcho-syndicalists, the general strike was to be the final cataclysmic battle, when capitalism and the state alike would be paralysed. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) picked up this idea. The general strike is the measure by which the capitalist system will be overthrown. As a result of this "general lockout of the employing class", control of industry will pass from the capitalists to the masses and capitalists will vanish from the face of the earth.

As one 1905 German syndicalist pamphlet argued, the general strike was the "new weapon of the struggling proletariat" for at least two historical reasons. For one, revolution on the barricades, as in 1848, was no longer feasible in modern cities with their wide streets, not to mention the advances in military technology already apparent by then. A national or even international universal work stoppage, however, would stretch the military too thin to break it, it was argued. For another, "modern industry, with its extremely specialized labour division and complications is but poorly adapted to oppose a general strike, even one initiated by a minority of the working class. However, Marxists in the Second International had a more nuanced position. They rejected the idea that a general strike by itself could topple the ruling class and its state. Nonetheless, Rosa Luxemburg, Leon Trotsky and others did write about the general strike, and after

the Russian Revolution, it was clearly viewed as an instrument of mass working class struggle.

In India, the idea of the general strike evolved in two ways. Under Gandhian leadership, the nationalist movement did not want specifically proletarian forms of struggle. But it did develop the hartal – a mass stoppage including shutting down of shops and marketplaces, transport strike, etc. The rise of the communist movement and mass trade unionism saw the growth of industrial strikes, from which mass strikes could also develop. In 1946, supporting the striking post and telegraph workers, the workers from all over India responded to the call of the All India Trades Union Congress (AITUC, then the sole all India TU) and went on strike. There had also been a mass strike over the attempted trial of Captain Rashid Ali, an Indian National Army (Azad Hind Fauz) officer earlier in the year, as well as strikes in Bombay and elsewhere supporting the revolt of the Royal Indian Navy sailors.

After independence, the aura of being the leaders of the nation meant the Congress could exercise hegemony for a considerable period, and attempts at general strikes, especially during ultra-left swings of the CPI or its heirs were not successful.

The situation also worsened due to the transformation of the trade union movement. In 1946, the AITUC had been the sole trade union federation at the all India level. Subsequently, every political party with some importance tried to develop a trade union wing. As a result, India now has a large number of all India trade union federations, often several of which try to work in the same work place.

Neo-liberalism and Struggles

United agitation by all the unions has been very difficult. However, the beginning of the neoliberal offensive brought about a change. Real wages began to fall in the organised sector. Job security worsened. Contractisation increased. As a result, strikes in various industrial and service sectors increased, as did bigger (general) strikes. Between 1991 and 28 February 2012, there were 15 general strikes in India. There was of course no continuous upsurge of the class struggle all the way through.

In 1991, it was mainly the left trade unions and left leaning mass organisations of various kinds that banded together in the National Campaign Committee. However, the predominantly Stalinist left wing politics in India, turning to social democracy, had no overall response. Rather, their class collaborationist politics of Popular Frontism, falsely paraded as "anti-fascist united front", hobbled the working class. In 1992, the communal-fascist RSS—VHP-BJP-BD combine (often called the Sangh Parivar), destroyed the Babri Masjid. This was followed by the decision to lower the anti-neoliberalism struggle's pitch, since fascism had to be combated. [1] As a result, the Left parties in parliament chose to tolerate the P.V. Narasimha Rao government as the lesser evil. Which was followed by a so-called United Front government with the CPI providing ministers and the CPI(M) and RSP providing outside support. None of this meant any halt to neoliberalism. P. Chidambaram, who had served as a minister in the Narasimha Rao government, became Finance Minister in the UF and presented what the industrialists called a dream budget. Then came the turn of the BJP and its partners in the NDA. They continued the same neoliberal trends, combining them with pogroms and communal politics. This provided the left with "reasons" to again support the Congress in forming UPA-I in 2004. [2] Though the left got its highest ever tally in parliament that year, instead of fighting tooth and nail for the policies whose supposed defence had garnered it the votes, it chose to soft pedal these issues. In West Bengal, where it ruled, the Chief

Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharjee indeed tried to follow a similar policy.

The non-left unions, notably the INTUC, close to the Congress, and the BMS, close to the BJP, have also been wary of supporting militant actions. Even though on paper the BJP has often opposed neo-liberalisation in the name of *swadeshi* (indigenous enterprise), this has been a rhetoric to gain support while in opposition. Generally the BMS has not joined in the major strikes, as in 2010.

The situation was however changing by 2012-13. In 1991-92, the left parties and following them the trade unions had been reeling from the shock of the collapse of the USSR and the East European bureaucratic workers' states. A new generation of working class has grown up since then—often unorganised, but also not burdened with the memories of defeats and false ideological blinkers.

The repeated strikes by workers in the first place presented a different picture of India to the world than the one better known. They showed that India was not only a new economic miracle, and not just full of peasants committing suicide, but also a country with the second biggest working class in the world, and right now, among the most militant.

The Old Unions and the New

Why did the Central Trade Unions take such a major action? In the first place, there has been a continuous pressure on the working class. There as accordingly also been a growing anger about losses, job cut in the manufacturing sector, the decline in employment, the growing casualisation of labour, the growing insecurity, etc. A large part of these workers also form the union membership and hence put pressure on the unions to act. The union leadership – however, bureaucratic they might be – cannot ignore these signals altogether. Indeed, the national leaderships of the major trade unions intend to limit the action to tokenism, but rank-and-file pressure is growing in favour of militant actions including strikes. This was the first reason to go in

for a two day general strike, following last year's one day general strike. [3]

Contrary to the ultra-left posturing that sees in trade union bureaucracies only betrayals, we argue that trade union bureaucracies, precisely because they derive their positions - including the occasional favours from the ruling class - because of the working class, has been deeply upset by the changed relationship since the onset of globalisation. At times, within their reformist framework, they have even challenged the left party leaderships. Thus, in 2010, Gurudas Dasgupta of the AITUC responded to Buddhadev Bhattacharjee's criticism of trade unions, who allegedly go on strike at the drop of a hat, by saying "Before Buddhadev was born, before I was born, the workers have protested through strikes". [4]

The ground realities show that in the last two decades, the membership of trade unions have remained stagnant, if not declining. Their activities have been more or less confined to the organised sector, more so to the public sector enterprises – from where over 70% of the membership is drawn. In the past, the state ownership on the one hand and trade unions' closeness to political parties made not only the unionisation work but also made easier securing non-productivity related financial benefits in the public sector establishments. With the onset of the liberalisation process that included disbanding of the public sector the trade-unions' capacity to influence political leadership in securing due demands weakened, causing the labour movement to move from one stage of marginalisation to the other.

Moreover, the very party-union relationship has meant a multiplicity of unions, including multiple unions in each workplace. These also involve over-centralised decision making, ad hoc management, obsolete strategies, external and over-aged leaders, personalized and power-oriented leadership, confrontationist attitudes, non-existent second tier leadership, and negligible gendering at both leadership structure and demands and programmes of action. All these have created distances between

trade-unions and the mass of workers. Even though workers adhere to formal membership, they do not have a sense of belongingness to unions any more as in the past. An ILO 2004 survey report found that in Gujarat, only 20% of respondents knew about trade unions and worse still, 33% of the respondents believed the best means of representing work-related interests were by direct representation to employers, as against 7.4% who preferred the union and 14.8% that preferred direct collective action.

Political parties in past relied on trade-unions to secure hegemony and also garner crucial votes during the elections. However, in this latest phase of capital accumulation, parties do not lay much of an emphasis on the unions which they have assumed to be 'tamed' in the absence of a militant workers movement. G. Sanjeeva Reddy, the president of INTUC, the trade union federation affiliated to the ruling Congress party has no voice within his party on economic and political issues, in spite of being a member of the highest body, i.e. the Congress Working Committee (CWC). In another situation, in 2006, during the four-day strike and struggle against airport privatisation by the airport workers workers, CITU and CPI(M) leader M.K. Pandhe endorsing the movement was strongly criticising the Central Government; while the CPI(M) leader and West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharjee tendered an apology to a meeting of Indian industrialists for the actions of his party-members in bring the Kolkata airport to a halt. This time also, Bhattacharjee opposed the general strike. And in West Bengal, the CPI(M) knuckled under to bourgeois pressure, so that there was a clear distancing from the CITU, in the name of observing Mother Language Day. [5]

Over the years, the left parties moved away from an independent class action towards building regional power bases and patronage networks by their position to distribute privileges and building a mighty set of beneficiaries right from the local capitalists to unemployed youth on the streets. For years they have limited themselves to working within the con-

finances of the capitalist system, and therefore had no choice but to continue with their attacks on the workers. In spite of the bureaucratisation, back in 50s and 60s a chunk of the leadership was with a trade-unionist background; in the current scenario the really influential leaders are seldom even from trade union background (regardless of whether they themselves are/were workers).

Since mid 1980s, organised labour has not been able to challenge the changing ideology of the ruling class. The multiplicity of unions led to a severe inter-union rivalry, which promoted a parochial and unprincipled view of membership among the union leaders. Since the unions' bargaining strength is positively related to their size, membership was a crucial element to be inflated. Eventually, some unions realized that only an independent, vigorous labour organization that enjoys the loyalty of the members has any chance of standing up to the challenges from management and the government, as well as the problem of multiple unionism. As it seemed that national unions or union federations were toeing the lines of specific parties, many of the "independent" unions that developed started abandoning politics in the name of safeguarding workers' interests. The ineffectiveness of politically affiliated unions as also of CTUOs affiliated to one or other political parties created conditions in which workers found their membership to unions of little practical use. In spite of these, another sort of unions emerged which were unaffiliated and also very militants, particularly, at plant levels, e.g. workers initiatives at Kanoria and Victoria Jute Mills (West Bengal); Kamani Tubes (Maharashtra); Madura Coats (Kerala) to the Maruti plant at Manesar. Sometimes independent unions have tried to stick to pure economic unionism. At other times, they have had to take up political issues in some form. The enterprise level independent unions are also functional at Siemens, Brooke Bond, Pfizer, and other multinational companies.

In the process a number of independent unions have been found by workers to be more acceptable.

There has also been the growth of a significant independent trade-union federation, the New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI), which currently has a membership of over 11 lakhs (1.1 million). Realising the disastrous effect of disunity within working class, a section of independent, but militant and socially conscious section of working class realised the necessity of building a nationwide federation, unbiased from political loyalty but focussed for workers causes took a pioneering role to form NTUI, not for a further division within the working people, but to uphold their unity. From the Intent Document of NTUI, "For a New Initiative" in 2001 till its founding conference in 2006 "Unity is the Perspective" has remained the central slogan of NTUI, that is judiciously followed in every action of the federation. NTUI has sought continuous dialogues with other Central Trade Union Federations like AITUC, HMS, CITU etc to ensure unity of working class within a single union in the workplace.

Under the circumstances, if the central trade unions of the old type simply ignored the workers' pressures, they stood to lose their support base.

Conditions of workers under neoliberalism

Writings, whether by bourgeois media commentators or by the so-called common person (who is capable of going online for hours) suggest that lazy workers are demanding hikes in spending on them at the cost of the hard working real people. Thus, one writer commenting on a post wrote: "This is what happens when citizens get addicted to free money. Trade unions saw central govt. distributing freebies through NREGA etc. and now they want a slice of the pie too. What no one cares to understand is the fact that money has to be earned, it cannot be printed. More you print, more its value gets eroded and we are back to square one." [6]

So workers basically want freebies, without working.

The Telegraph, a rabidly rightwing voice of the ruling class, a daily that in its quest for ever superior

models of neoliberalism is willing to support the fascist Narendra Modi's bid to become Prime Minister, had this to say, in part, in its editorial on 20 February:

"If the strike is aimed at forcing the government to change some of its policies, it may have already failed to do any such thing. It is unlikely that the government will roll back the reformist policies under pressure from the trade unions. There are compelling economic reasons as to why the reformist policies, which the trade unions oppose, are crucial to the country's economy. One of the issues on which the strike has been called relates to the alleged violations of labour laws. The fact of the matter is, however, very different. Outdated labour laws are a major reason for low productivity and low investment rates in India. If anything, the labour laws need to be amended in order to make them suitable for a modern economy. Rising prices are a concern, both for the government and the common people. But those who think that a strike can help bring prices down obviously have rather strange ideas of how an economy functions."

Television channels throughout 20th February showed one piece of footage – workers setting on fire a car and hurling bricks at one factory.

These are good points from which to enter the discussions. We learn that:

- Strikers are violent (rulers are evidently not)
- Labour laws are outdated and must be scrapped for the good of the economy, so that labour productivity is increased
- A strike cannot bring down prices
- Workers are lazy and want money without working

Between 2008 and 2011, the productivity of labour in India has gone up by 7.6 per cent. In the same period the real income of workers went down 1 per cent. The ILO's Global Wage Report 2012 shows the foregoing, and punctures the myth of "reforms" as aids to the poor. Between 1999 and 2007, the

previous period, the available data suggests another 1 per cent decline in real income while labour productivity went up by 5 per cent. In other words, in twelve years (1999-2011), labour productivity increased by 12.6 per cent, while real income went down 2 per cent. The reason for presenting the data in two fragments is, it shows that the world economic crisis has not meant any change in this matter. Both before and after, workers are constantly asked to tighten the belt, while productivity has not gone down, but steeply up.

From data presented by two scholars [7] we find that the introduction of economic liberalism has resulted in the rise in the top 50 business houses' share in market capitalization from 32 percent in 1997 to nearly 40 percent in 2001.

In the last ten years, the share of profits in the value added has more than doubled as compared to the share of wages. This is happening in both the manufacturing and services sector where companies are using the loopholes as well as lack of implementation of labour laws to suppress wages. Companies and even the government are increasingly using contract workers to bring down wage costs and improving productivity.

The Contract Labour Regulation and Abolition Act of 1970 is therefore one that workers turn to and bosses try to flout, and are seeking to abolish as outdated. A study by Meenakshi Rajeev [8] showed that among the contract workers she studied, the majority earned Rs 2000 per month.

Formally, contract workers are supposed to get Provident Fund. It is a burden for them, since a bit of their meagre salary is docked, and then, as they often change contractors, they find it difficult to retrieve the previous amount.

In addition, there are a number of unregistered contract agencies that deduct provident fund contributions from the workers but never deposit the same in the provident fund office and after a few years change the location and start the same business with a different name. There are obvious advantages of being un-registered as it enables an

agency to evade taxes, in addition to avoid paying PF, ESI benefits etc. to a worker and thereby increase ones profit margin.

In the industrial sector, the Public Sector has over 50 per cent contract workers, and the private sector over 80 per cent. One survey by a government organization shows over 36 million contract workers *under licensed contractors*. The labour ministry estimates that they make up nearly 28 per cent of India's 459-million-strong workforce (this includes all categories of contract workers, and the figure in this reckoning goes up to 128 million contract workers).

The Economic Survey by the Government of India states that between 1991 and 2006, there were 870,000 jobs shed from the public sector. At the same time there has been an increase in the numbers of persons employed as 'contractors' or 'casuals', or where the precise relationship between the worker and the employer is legally uncertain, within the formal sector. Each of these developments inevitably reduces the proportion of the workforce covered by India's labour laws. Furthermore many workers engaged within the formal sector may still fall beyond the law's protection. In 2005 the total workforce of India was 457 million persons, almost 395 million of whom were engaged in the informal sector. Of those in the formal sector only about 53% were actually covered by the labour laws, the remaining 47% constituting what amounts to 'informal' employment in the otherwise 'formal' sector. Various figures are advanced, but it is estimated that well over 90% of the employed workforce falls outside the law's protection.

According to World Bank's *World Development Report 2013: Jobs*, part-time work is on the rise in India. Significantly, the number of temporary workers in the country grew more than 10 per cent in 2009 and 18 per cent in 2010. More unusual is the increase in its number of informal workers in the organised sector. The report also said that the share of informal workers in organised firms is up from 32 per cent in 2000 to 68 per cent in 2010. Various studies looking at key industries such as

cement, iron, steel, cotton textile and jute, have found a high rate of contract labour ranging from 60-70%, and in some sectors, including construction industry it is as high as 80-90%.

Working class under neoliberalism may not have constantly risen up to challenge the rulers. But their sense of alienation has constantly increased. The "global factory" has meant that jobs are being restructured. Learning skills are at times irrelevant. As for women, their condition is often worse.

As far back as 1995, the Human Development Report had shown that 70 per cent of the people living below the very low definition of poverty were women. Men and women experience exploitation not identically, but in different ways, related to how patriarchy is related to capitalism. On the one hand there is a demand to draw women into wage labour directly under the domination of capital. At the same time there is a requirement to maintain the family as a unit for reproduction of labour power and to reinforce women's role in domestic labour within it. These contradictory tendencies are embodied in the organisation of labour processes such as creation of flexible shifts, part-time work, home working and so on. This does not mean that the two aspects of women's lives — as domestic workers and as wage-workers — are harmoniously related. While within the family men control the resources and are the main decision makers, outside, in the work-force hierarchy women's status is never equal to that of men. The majority of them are confined to low-paid, low-skilled and irregular labour processes. Globalisation has intensified this, and with it their alienation, in the case of a significant part of the female labour force. Gender hierarchies are reproduced in workplaces with male owners, managers, and supervisors, and women assembly workers. Women complain of having restrictions regarding going to the toilet. There are many repeated cases of sexual harassment inside and outside the premises. Poor working conditions and long hours of work lead to occupational diseases which only means loss of job for these women. It is also this poverty and multiple pressures that lead to the ease

with which violence is done to women. To cite only one recent example, three sisters, young girls aged 5, 0 and 11, were lured with offers of food, because since their father's death they had lived in extreme poverty, and raped and murdered, in Murmadi in Maharashtra. Women who work in numerous industrial sectors are constantly at risk, given the growing violence against women, and which shows that lack of security is pushing them into ever greater economic difficulties or risks.

Price rise and low wages have been major issues behind working class unrest in recent years.

Taking the Consumer Price Index for 2001 as 100, the average price, according to government sources, of selected articles for industrial workers, has risen rapidly. Data for one city, Kolkata, shows that price of rice has gone up from 13.67 per kg (2006) to 22.21 (2010). Taking the same years, we find price rise for wheat going up from 10.65 to 16.78 per kg,

Pulses (of different kinds) from between 33 to 45 rupees to between 70 and 110 per kg; cooking oil from 46-47 to 60-67 (again, different kinds), fresh fish from 91 to 157, onion from 9.58 to 28.6, soft coke from Rs 1544 per 40 kgs to 204, milk from 16.5 to 24 per litre, and so on down the line. [9]

We have used the Kolkata data, but data for all cities would show a rise. In the decade 2002-2012 prices have grown a staggering 284 per cent. Housing, health, education have become considerably more expensive. And food access is certainly the most important political issue for the toiling masses. Nutrition indicators, already among the worst in the world, have stagnated and per capita calorie consumption has actually declined. Pervasive hunger has worsened. In the past year, inflation has moved across food items, and the average inflation has been high.

The other side of prices is wages. The minimum daily wage for unskilled work in Delhi is Rs. 203 and for skilled work, it is Rs. 248, in Maharashtra the minimum wages range from Rs. 116.54 -Rs. 310.62 (in film industry), ranges from Rs. 80 -

207.42 in Tamil Nadu and Rs. 87.50 - 163.30 in West Bengal. However if one calculates the minimum wage as per the norms set by the 15th ILC and subsequent Supreme Court judgements at current average prices (on which the CPI-IW is calculated by the Labour Bureau) of the 4 metros, the daily minimum wage would be Rs. 346.42.

Minimum wages in states especially for agriculture are so low that even if workers find employment everyday in a year and are paid the minimum wage, they will not be able to fulfill the basic needs of their family specified as per the 15th Indian Labour Congress (ILC) norms and the subsequent Supreme Court judgments (Unichoy vs State of Kerala in 1961 and Reptakos Brett Vs Workmen case in 1991) that is the basis for determining the minimum wage. The Supreme Court also has on various occasions amplified the need for payment of minimum wages by stating that the minimum wage sets the lowest limit below which the wages cannot be allowed to sink in all humanity; that it has to be paid irrespective of the kind of enterprise, the extent of profits and financial condition of the enterprise; or the availability of workmen at lower wages; that non-payment of minimum wages amounts to 'forced labour' under Article 23, and that employers have no right to conduct their enterprise if they cannot pay their employees a minimum subsistence wage.

A troubling aspect about the fixation of minimum wages by the Advisory Boards is that many wages are not linked to the payment of dearness allowance so that the real wages of workers keep eroding due to inflation. Another inadequacy is that though the Minimum Wages Act requires wages to be revised every five years, this rarely happens. According to the Minimum Wages Act if wages are not revised, the existing wages should continue. This has led to greater lethargy and less justice to workers.

Statutory minimum wage can prove to be a suitable instrument for combating wage discrimination against women and workers belonging to backward castes, migrant labour, who are usually over-repre-

sented at the bottom-end of the wage scale. Ultimately, implementing statutory minimum wages also contributes to the reduction of poverty. The minimum wage is supposed to set the wage floor, instead it now sets the wage ceiling in most informal sectors of employment. The minimum wage has also become a poverty wage instead of an anti-poverty wage.

The Demands of the Strike

These conditions determined some of the crucial demands of the strike. These were

- Living wage indexed to inflation for all
- Universal food security
- NREGA wage not to be less than minimum wage
- Raise the minimum wages to Rs. 10,000 per month
- Universal and comprehensive publicly financed healthcare system
- Equal wages for equal work for contract workers and women workers
- No to sexual harassment at workplace and mandatory sexual harassment prevention committees
- Defence and regeneration of the public sector

Most of the demands do not require further explanation. Except to point out that in India, according to the International Food Policy Research Institute's 2011 Global Hunger Index, about 60 million children in India are underweight and malnourished, while 21 percent of the population as a whole general is malnourished. [10] A study indicates that in 2000 about 70 per cent of non-pregnant and 75 per cent of pregnant women in the age group 15-49 were malnourished. [11]

The NREGA has been much trumpeted by the government as the way out of poverty and attacked by rightwing writers. In fact, it is a pathetic half measure, though even so, in a country with massive unemployment, of some use. According to the

scheme, one person per family will be given employment for 100 days per year. In reality, this does not happen. But to the extent people are employed under NREGA, in the countryside, there is a bargaining counter against low wages. If only, however, NREGA is paid at the rate of the government stipulated minimum wages.

One major demand of the struggle was the restoration of democratic rights for workers. Because there are periodically organised elections to parliament, state assemblies, and municipal and rural self-government bodies, it is argued that there is ample democracy in India. Certainly, for the bulk of the working class, democracy does not extend to their everyday existence. Demands included compulsory registration of trade unions in 45 days, and immediate ratification of the ILO conventions 87 and 98. ILO Convention 87 is a charter giving workers the right to form trade unions of their own choice, and without state interference. Convention 98 tries to add teeth to the right to form unions by laying down what the law cannot do. Collective bargaining and the right to exist as human beings are thus supported by these ILO policy guidelines.

At the central level, an evident lack of gender sensitivity resulted in many women-specific demands were not highlighted. Even so simple a demand as the creation of crèches and separate toilets for women in every workplace, while very important for the women, do not find adequate space in the demands actually highlighted. But some demands have been raised. The central demands list includes, as we have seen, the demand for equal pay for equal work, as well as the demand for an end to sexual harassment at workplace. This has of course been a major problem for working women. Ever since the Bhanwari Devi case and the subsequent Vishakha judgement, sexual harassment, assault, all have come under some scrutiny, yet it is a reality that most institutions do not even now have Committees to look after issues like these, as laid down by the Vishakha judgment. [12] If women are to work as equals, sexual violence on them has to stop, and the fact that trade unions raised this de-

mand shows their awareness, along with the callousness of owners and management even now.

Women in the trade union movement have been putting forward other demands. The demand for social security has to include maternity benefits in practice for all women, an important but difficult task, given the high proportion of unorganized and contracrual women employees.

"Strike doesn't solve problems"

This is a favourite comment of bourgeois politicians and media persons. With record economic growth of the last two decades the income inequality has doubled, ranking the country as last amongst the so-called "emerging" economies. The price hikes, restructuring of labour, privatisations and deregulation of the economy, wage freezes and other "neoliberal" policies made the lives of even those in work overwrought. At the same time, the large swathes of suburban and rural populations continued to slide into the abyss of harrowing poverty and deprivation.

Corruption scandals involving the reactionary politicians and the hue and cry over petty non-issues went on unabated. The movement around a populist demagogue, Anna Hazare, was mainly sponsored by sections of corporate capital to attack their financial and political adversaries, but above all to divert and vent steam from the seething revolt in society beneath this smog of the burgeoning chaos.

The fact is that the greed infested Indian media has been playing a pernicious role in its crusade to observe a criminal silence over the real issues afflicting the teeming millions, while constantly whipping up religious and nationalist chauvinism. However, in the wake of the general strike call issued by eleven major trade union federations, the media machines came into full sway and a torrent of negative propaganda was unleashed against the strike. The editorial of *The Telegraph*, quoted earlier, summed up their public campaign. The strike can-

not succeed because the government will not accept your demands.

The fact is that although the strike might not have brought India to a total standstill, it is still one of the most significant movements of the Indian proletariat on real issues, cutting across the prejudices and divisions imposed upon the masses to detract, distort and dent their class unity. And the strike, as with 2012, was called by all eleven national federations of TUs along with a vast array of unions from specific sectors. Almost one hundred million workers joined the strike. It called for a halt to price rise, employment, minimum wages to all workers, same wage for same and similar jobs, universal social security & the creation of National Social Security Fund, end to disinvestment, along with the issues of mass scale contractisation of work, rampant violation of labour laws and onslaught on trade union rights. Such was the pressure of the workers from below that most trade union leaders and federations had to heed the strike call to sustain a semblance of credibility amongst the workers who are seething with revulsion against their reformist and compromising policies. Even the trade union federation affiliated to the ruling Congress party, INTUC had to join the strike. Its president G. Sanjeeva Reddy, had this to say: "Our most important demand is the abolition of contract labour and a check on the uncontrolled increase in prices." Even the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) affiliated unions participated.

And if we now look at the reports that have come in, as well as deconstruct the message of the mainstream media, we actually get a picture of a tremendous working class anger and upheaval.

We deliberately leave out, initially, the detailed reports from various trade unions. Instead, we are looking at data provided by 'serious' bourgeois journals like *Business Standard*, where the capitalists talk to themselves on economic issues.

Reporting from Odisha, *Business Standard* announced that on 20 February, the first day of the strike [13]:

– The normal life in the state was disrupted as the vehicular traffic in most part of the state remained off roads. The bandh impacted rail services. Due to rail roko, as many as nine express trains were short terminated, one train was cancelled and two trains were rescheduled by the East Coast Railway (ECOR) authorities.

– The effect of the bandh was more prominent in industrial towns like Rourkela, Paradip, Sundergarh, Keojar, Talcher and Angul.

– The Angul-Dhenkanal industrial hub witnessed a mixed impact of the bandh. Units of GMR Energy and Bhushan Steel were paralysed since no worker turned up for work.

– Industries in Angul including coal mines, however, reported normal operations. National Thermal Power Corporation's (NTPC) power station and National Aluminium Company's (Nalco) smelter complex functioned normally though the aluminium major recorded less attendance.

– Officials of Mahanadi Coalfields Ltd (MCL) said all the regular workers in both Talcher and Ib valley field turned up for work while most of the contractual workers stayed away from their duties.

According to another news item on the second day of the strike:

– Banking services came to a standstill and 14 million cheques worth about Rs.80,000 crore [800 billion rupees] were not processed in the last two days as clearing houses were closed. [14]

– Business Line reported that the strike has resulted in a revenue loss of Rs 100 crore to major ports in the country. [15]

– Another report stated that transport had been affected across the country. Most reports stated that West Bengal, where the CPI(M)-led Left Front had been voted out in favour of the Trinamul Congress (TMC) led by Mamata Banerjee, saw a failure of the strike. This calls for a bit of discussion.

In the first place, most newspapers insist on using the word bandh in preference to general strike,

with good reason. Several Indian courts have ruled that while strikes are permitted, bandhs are not. In some cases there have even been suggestions that in case of economic damages caused by bandhs the parties who call the bandhs should be made to pay compensation. Not for nothing are the media so keen to use the word bandh.

Secondly, in West Bengal, during its 34 year rule, the CPI(M) often enforced bandhs by using government machinery and its party cadres, and the success of bandhs was measured more often, not by how far industry was shut down, but whether employees in the government offices had turned up. While they too are part of the labouring force, white collar government employees are better off than many of the other workers. They do get pension, they get (albeit less than adequate) dearness allowance (the latest in West Bengal was paid a month back), and they are also more directly threatened under a very rightwing government. This is why, the government employee response to the strike this time was lukewarm.

But transport in Kolkata and in other parts of West Bengal was thin, and there was normally ample space in the buses, something unusual in the crowded metropolis, since many people did take part in the strike. Jute mills, teagardens, the Asansol-Durgapur industrial belt, and other places showed considerable participation in the strike.

In the transport sector, out of about 42,000 private buses and minibuses, less than 2000 were plying. It was the forced running of public sector buses that made up some of the deficit in Kolkata. Out of the 120 tea gardens in North Bengal, very few saw anything like regular work on 20 February. Banking service was completely shut down. In the Barrackpur industrial area there was considerable response to the strike, as also in the Taratala area (these are the areas to the North and South of Kolkata).

Two Reports and a Major Breakthrough

One report made television headlines throughout 20th February, while the other was tucked away in newspapers the next day. The latter was the news that in the town of Ambala, a scab driver ran over an AITUC leader who died. The news on display was that workers in Noida had set a car on fire and had attacked factory offices. It was necessary to highlight this news for two reasons. The first was to bolster the slander that it is the strikers not the government and the bosses who use violence. Just like last year, when after the violence in Manesar, it was reported simply that workers had killed a manager, without reporting the sustained violence on the workers, including the fact that factory gates had been closed, or the casteist abuse that had been unleashed, which was what had triggered off the conflict. [16]

The second important reason is that Gurgaon, Manesar, Noida, are areas where the trade unions have traditionally been weak. Trying to organize unions has met with solid owner-government resistance, including massive violence, sackings, etc. These are also areas where cotractisation is high.

At Maruti Suzuki, a leading car manufacturer in India, a study by Prasenjit Bose and Sourindra Ghosh had shown, between 2007 and 2011 while MSIL workers' yearly earnings increased by 5.5 percent, the consumer price index (for the Faridabad centre, Haryana), went up by over 50 per cent. They calculated that MSIL profits after taxes have increased by 2200 percent since 2001. [17]

They also wrote the following:

"A comparison of the wages received by the workers of the MSIL's Gurgaon plant in 2007 and what they earn currently (wage structures at the Gurgaon and Manesar plants are similar) reveals the movement of wages over time. If a senior permanent worker at the Gurgaon plant had not taken any leave in a year, he would have earned a maximum of around Rs.2.80 lakh in 2007. Today his maximum yearly earnings would be around Rs.3 lakh, i.e., an increase of around 5.5 per cent only. The

consumer price index (for the Faridabad centre, Haryana), however, has gone up by over 50 per cent between 2007 and 2011. Therefore there has been a squeeze on the real wages of the permanent workers. In fact, the real wages of all categories of workers in MSIL have been squeezed during this period.

By contrast, the annual remuneration of MSIL's CEO has increased from Rs.47.3 lakh in 2007-08 to Rs.2.45 crore in 2010-11, an increase of 419 per cent. The annual remuneration of the Chairman of MSIL has also increased by 91.4 per cent during this period (figures are from MSIL's Annual Reports). This clearly shows the deeply skewed manner in which the benefits of rising sales and profits of MSIL have been shared between the management and the workers over the years." [18]

And this is enough to explain why, ignoring threats, workers in these areas joined in massive numbers. As a result of the unexpected support (unexpected, at least, from the side of the bosses) the strike resulted in inflicting a bigger damage on the ruling class than it had estimated. The clearest statement comes from the ASSOCHAM or The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry. In its press release, it stated, inter alia, that "Against its initial estimates of Rs 15,000-20,000 crore, the GDP may be eroded by about Rs 26,000 crore, it is apprehended based on the damaging effect of the Bandh on the industrial activity and the services sector like banking, finance". [19]

The ruling class had attempted to seal off those areas. Over three hundred FIRs had been filed and over a hundred arrested before anything had happened. Massive policing and terrorizing had taken place. It was this violence, this total lack of democratic rights, that had spilled over into violence in a few cases. And the ruling class was waiting for that. The swiftness with which its minions acted, and the rapidity with which demands were made to restore "investor confidence", showed what was at stake.

Overall the strike was massive in not just banking, which is so visible that the ruling class could not lie

about it, but also in mining, post and telegraph, communications, defence, ports, and other forms of transport.

Beyond the Strike

For the past decade and a little more, India has been held up by the economic pundits in the West, as an example of how neo-liberalism allowed a country to modernise. There has been the growth of a considerable middle class, with a rising purchasing power that translates into changing consumption patterns for the benefit of major producers. Wikipedia reported that the Indian automobile industry was the sixth largest in the world. It had an annual production of more than 3.9 million units in 2011. [20] In the same year, the number of mobile phone handsets sold touched 213 million units. [21] Sale of PCs touched 11.15 million units. [22]

What has not been reported so widely is the extremely skewed nature of that growth. The working class in India does not share the growth. After over two decades of neoliberal policies, the propaganda that only when the economy grows will workers be able to take part in that growth has worn thin. At the heart of the fight between the unions and the government is the need to ensure decent pensions versus the pension bill, which wants to tie pensions (for which workers' wages are deducted) to market

driven financial instruments, to ensure greater profits for the private insurance and other finance companies. This puts workers' retirement benefits in great jeopardy.

The contradiction that exists now is between a tremendous pressure from below to fight, a pressure manifested in 100 million or more coming out though the formally organized are much smaller in number; and the inability of the traditional trade unions to wage sustained struggles. It is interesting, that while the ruling class has been trying to regain the offensive, the attitude of the trade unions linked both to the bourgeois parties and the reformist parties was dubious. While they dubbed it "general strike", there was no attempt to draw in a vital sector – the railway workers. There was not even any attempt to get them to go on a token strike for a couple of hours, which would have shut down trains. It is for initiatives like the NTUI to push forward and build greater links. It is also necessary for the dissident currents in the left parties, and the "far left", to make trade union work a central part of their work. The coming together of all such forces would be able to create a pole to the left. Meanwhile, the working class struggles, despite the heroic proportions, are unable to go to the next stage. The over 450 million working class in India is still only very partially aware of its potential.

TURKEY

Continuity and Change in Turkish Politics

MARAL JEFROUDI ·

The very same day, Mazlum Aksu, a 20-year-old soldier, was declared to have committed suicide with a G3 rifle. A bullet entered his left temporal bone. He was Kurdish and the district director of the leftist EMEP party. Before his supposed suicide, he mentioned to his family and friends the repression in the military he was under due to his ethnic and political identity. The right to conscientious objection is not recognized in Turkey and military service is still obligatory. It was recently reported by State officials that 949 soldiers committed suicide in the last ten years, a number which exceeds that of soldiers that were killed in battle operations. Mazlum's friends and family are not buying the suicide claim.

Last year on the 24th of April, the day of commemoration for the Armenian Genocide, Sevag Balikci, a 25 year-old Armenian from Istanbul was killed by another soldier in his unit. Allegedly it was an accident. The perpetrator was known to be a Turkish nationalist and the trial is still continuing without him being arrested. Sevag's family and friends are also not buying the official explanation for their loved one's death.

These events act as reminders of the axis of continuity that persists in the Turkish political system. It has been ten years that the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has been governing Turkey and the change they brought to Turkish politics has attracted the attention of many commentators in Turkey and abroad. The fact that some generals are taken to court and a number of them arrested builds the image of a Turkey that is much more democratic than it was ten years ago. But the

referendum by AKP in 2010 that was propagandized as to end the regime founded by the military coup of 1980 brought clear attacks on labor rights and paved the way to the authoritarian rule of the governing party. Just like the arrest of some generals does not bring an end to the repressive and discriminatory structure of the military, speaking of the Kurdish issue and taking timid steps only to stop and turn back after a while does not bring forth constructive change with regards to the Kurdish question either.

Starting on the anniversary of the 12th of September 1980 coup, a hunger strike of Kurdish political prisoners that had lasted for 68 days with the participation of more than 700 hundred people came to an end with a message from imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan. During this hunger strike, the government chose to ignore the reality of the hunger strike as well as its demands. However, the primary demand, which was the end to Abdullah Ocalan's isolation that lasted for one and a half years due to an alleged problem in the coast-guard that enabled the transportation to the island where Ocalan resides, was de facto met. Ocalan's brother was able to visit him and bring his message that ended the hunger strike. This started a new process of dialogue with Ocalan. On the 23rd of February, the second delegation from the Kurdish civil-rights-oriented Democratic Society Party (BDP) visited Ocalan. State Intelligence Service members were also present in the meeting. Despite the official non-recognition of the hunger strike and even severe pressure on the groups that had organized solidarity actions with the hunger strikers, this new process owes its existence to the Kurdish political movement. This movement has persevered despite what are possibly the harshest conditions since the foundation of the Turkish republic and through the post 1980 military coup regime.

This process of dialogue with the leader of the Kurdish political movement runs parallel to the government's plans for the new constitution. The draft of the new constitution that is planned to be presented to parliament in March involves a new definition of citizenship, which does not define Turkish citizenship in ethnic terms (i.e., the Turkish Citizens are Turks) but in civic terms (i.e., anyone tied to the Turkish State with the bond of citizenship is a citizen of Turkey). This is a standpoint that brings the governing party AKP and the BDP to common ground and makes them face the opposition of particularly the Nationalist Action Party (MHP). However, the new draft does not involve the Kurdish side's demands of decentralization and a focus on increasing the importance of local governing bodies. Instead, the governing party wants to introduce a presidential system, which would strengthen the post of present Prime Minister Erdogan, and enable him to rule for at least another term. The BDP leadership and the governing AKP made declarations that hint to the possibility of working together to subject the draft to a referendum. However, the terms are not yet clear and the practice of the government does not point to an initiative that has peace as its ultimate goal.

While rhetorically the government and BDP are giving signals that they are not opposite poles in the process of negotiation for the new constitution and Abdullah Ocalan is semi officially consulted for his views on the "road map" to peace, the Black-Sea tour of BDP deputies, involving three deputies' visits to three Black Sea region cities, was violently sabotaged by local fascist groups. The police neither took any pre-emptive measures, nor stopped the violent groups from attacking the speakers. After assaults in the cities of Sinop and Samsun, the group chose not to go to Trabzon considering the inactivity of the police. It was in November that Kurdish people in Diyarbakir were pepper-sprayed

as they were organizing solidarity sit-ins with the Kurdish prisoners on hunger strike. Since 2009 there have been more than 2000 people in courts due to their "links" with KCK, which is supposedly the urban branch of the PKK. According to these claims, all Kurdish civil rights oriented NGOs, journalists, academicians and artists are suspects of being a part of this "urban branch".

It is not only Kurdish activists that are faced with arrests and trials. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) recently reported that Turkey jailed the most journalists in 2012 — ahead of Iran and China. From the Confederation of Trade Unions of Public Employees (KESK) alone 115 jailed trade unionists are jailed. Plays that criticize the repressive political environment and books such as John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and Jose Mauro de Vasconcelos's *My Sweet Orange Tree* are considered to be "at odds with Turkish values".

It is not possible to say that nothing has changed since the 1980 coup or that in the ten years rule of the Justice and Development Party, no long lasted taboos in the Turkish political scene were broken.

However, giving all the credit to the ruling party and not to the grassroots political movements that persistently fight for freedom of speech and freedom of unionization at all levels; to the anti-militarist movements struggling for the recognition of the right to conscientious objection and to the contemporary Kurdish political struggle that has a life of more than 30 years and vast experience of local governance does not do justice to reality. Such a top-down picture of Turkish politics is exactly what the ruling party has: to negotiate with the elites and suppress the grassroots movements. However, the "road-map" to peace has to be developed from below, by means of the very same urban movements that are under persecution these days in both the east and the west parts of Turkey.

MALI

A neo-colonial intervention under French leadership

JEAN NANGA ·

The intervention took place while the "international community" — in the event the UN Security Council which adopted resolution 2085 on December 20, 2012, and the ECOWAS — were again discussing the terms of the deployment of a sub-regional armed force, the Mission internationale de soutien au Mali (MISMA — International Support Mission in Mali), under African leadership, but with the agreement of some Western states, to expel the "Islamic terrorists" from Malian territory. According to the representative in the Sahel of the Secretary General of the United Nations, former Italian council president Romano Prodi, the said force would only be ready from September 2013. Meanwhile Algeria and Burkina Faso, for certain geopolitical and historical reasons, negotiated, in the name of the said African "international community", a political solution with the Malian Tuareg organisations — the MNLA and Ansar Dine — and the Malian interim government. The Algerian and Burkinabe mediations were, it seemed, going well. A cessation of hostilities was obtained between Ansar Din and the MNLA (December 2012) and the Malian authorities. Then, the victorious jihadist attack in early January 2013 on the town of Konna, considered by the mediators as a betrayal of the word that had been given to them, was supposed to lead to the taking of the town of Sévaré (the operational headquarters of the Malian army, with an airport and a separate French military aid), which would have opened the road to the con-

quest of the capital Bamako, given the state of the Malian army. Mali would thus have been the first stage of the supposed establishment of a West African caliphate.

With the exceedingly bad reputation of the jihadists, founded on the horrors committed in the name of Sharia against the people — not always showing resignation in the face of their conquerors — accompanied by a great media coverage and the rapid defeat of the Malian army by the jihadist militias, the French military intervention had a sufficient base to appear legitimate, both for the Malian people — who acclaimed it — and for a part of African and international opinion.

In a metropolitan France characterised in recent years by an undeniable ambient Islamophobia, combined with the traditional support, through indifference, of public opinion for neo-colonial enterprises by the Republic, there was quasi unanimous approval of this military intervention. Some departed from the said consensus in raising the "debatable" character of the president having decided without prior consultation of the government or parliament when "the fundamental interests of France are not at stake, according to the head of state himself" (thus Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of the Parti de Gauche on January 11, 2013). But it is precisely in terms of the interests of France in Africa in the current phase of capitalist globalisation that the military intervention must be understood.

Rebellion of the Tuaregs

A new post colonial armed rebellion against the Bamako government by the Tuaregs, a Berber people also present in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali and Niger, began in northern Mali on January 17, 2012. It followed those of 1962-1964, 1990-1995

and 2006-2009. These rebellions result, in different countries, from frontiers inherited from French colonisation, whose respect has been a supposedly untouchable principle of the defunct Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and of the current African Union (AU). They are the product of the inegalitarian policies of national development which post-colonial African states have continued, a factor in ethnic/national identity-based tensions in less favoured areas, in addition to the non respect by governments of undertakings made in peace agreements, a factor of crystallisation of frustrations.

These ethnic frustrations are socially determined. Their crystallisation is explained both by the collapse of alternative political projects to neo-colonialism as well as by the social violence of neoliberal structural adjustment policies. Mali was bled white during the 1990s and 2000s by the repayment of a debt inherited from the autocratic regime. Such policies have increased the abandonment of the traditionally deprived areas and favoured individual strategies of survival and all forms of corruption. The elites being moreover devoted to the neoliberal principle of material self enrichment, by all means. Such is the general situation in north Mali, zones inhabited by Tuaregs in particular, although Arabs, Peuls, Songhaï and others are present.

The latest revolt by the MNLA is distinguished from its predecessors by:

- the importance of ex-soldiers and ex-mercenaries from the overthrown Libyan regime;
- the involvement of jihadists (AQMI and MUJAO)
- some of whom fought in the anti Gaddafi rebellion — which came to militarily dominate the MNLA, not only because of their ability to religiously convince the local youth, already Muslim, of a different Islam, but because of their financial capacities.

The taking of Western residents as hostages, the traffic in the Sahara of cocaine (unloaded along the coastline stretching from Ghana to Senegal, originating from the South American cartels, already di-

rect actors in economic growth and indirect actors in political change in this part of the continent, with the recent military coups in Guinea-Bissau, for example) and other traffics are significant sources of income. They allow the leaders of these Islamist militias to recruit youth. More than a year before the outbreak of the current rebellion MNLA spokesperson Hama Ag Sid'Ahmed had said: "the youth abandoned by their state and also often by their Tuareg political and military leaders do not know where to turn. Some are tempted by the facilities offered by the AQMI, the only northern enterprise which works and wins all the markets without making any investment".

Controlling northern Mali is then a very profitable business for these jihadists. Also, the smooth running of their business requires complicity in certain state apparatuses which they border or where they have created lawless border zones. This explains not only the connivance of certain notables in northern Mali with the narco-Salafists but also the ineffectiveness of the Malian army, numerous members of whose hierarchy are presumed linked to the coastal networks in Guinea of the South American narco-traffic and the narco-Salafists. Which also goes for the political and military leaders of the neighbouring state of Burkina Faso.

France's "cooperation" with Mali

One thing is certain: for France, this intervention will change the givens of military "cooperation" with Mali. Unlike most former French colonies it decided, in January 1961, under the presidency of the non-aligned and leftish Modibo Kéita, on the closure of the French military bases of Kati, Gao, Tessalit — the latter very important for France's war against the FLN in Algeria. This decision stemmed from the abrogation of military accords including a defence agreement signed in June 1960, one of the consequences of the dissolution in August 1960 of the Federation of Mali, involving Senegal and the former French Sudan. In the name of national sovereignty, the new Republic of Mali considered the maintenance of French bases on its

territory as incongruous, especially since France had supported Senegal in its secession.

The presidency of Moussa Traoré, a French trained officer, who had overthrown the first president, certainly re-established military "cooperation", but without however signing a defence agreement (a tool which allows France to intervene legally "in case of external aggression" against its African vassals). It was limited to a technical military cooperation agreement. Mali, even led by the autocratic general Traoré, was not comparable to the Ivory Coast, Djibouti, or Senegal (until 2010), or to Chad, where French soldiers form part of the national landscape.

The regimes installed by democratic elections since 1992, those of Alpha Oumar Konaré (1992-2002) and Amadou Toumani Touré (1991-1992 and then 2002-2012) conserved this situation, with however one change: the development of military cooperation with the USA. Since the end of the Cold War, under the presidency of George Bush senior, the US had decided on a greater presence in Africa. Thus military "cooperation" with Mali and other states began with the Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET) set up in 1993. By its geographic position, it became in the context of the "struggle against Islamist terrorism" one of the laboratories of US military policy in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the Sahel-Sahara zone where various military exercises related to the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) which subsequently became the African Contingency Operations Training Assistance (ACOTA) take place.

The Malian army has accordingly benefited from a specific attention from the US government departments involved in counter-terrorism. The said terrorism being incarnated by Algeria's Groupe salafiste pour la prédication et le combat (GSPC – Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat), which recently became AQMI, moving in virtually complete freedom and sovereignty in the border lands of Algeria, Mali and Niger – states in the forefront of the US campaign. It is this context that the CIA opened its most important office in the area here

some years ago. There has been the intensification of the training of Malian soldiers by the US army, and the regular supply of military equipment. Thus, on October 20, 2009, Mali received from the Obama administration more than 4 million dollars of military equipment, including thirty seven pick-up Land Cruisers, communication equipment and spare parts and under the CTTE (Counter Terrorism Train and Equip) programme. Following a US programme of military training of troops from three Malian bases, including the 33rd regiment of parachutists, by US special advisers.

With all the training and exercises organised since the 1990s as well as the equipment received and assistance in intelligence, it is surprising that the Malian army did not show the least resistance in early 2012 faced with the pro-independence MNLA – supposedly enjoying underhand support from France, indeed from Switzerland – and the different jihadist groups, which did not prove so combative with regard to the weak resistance met by the French army, supported by the Malian army. The latter had been trained throughout recent years to face this possibility: the coming together of the Tuareg armed movements and the jihadist militias. Confronted with it, it retreated. Which attests to the defeat of the US anti-terrorist campaign in this zone. Worse for the US image, heavily armed convoys left Libya for northern Mali, passing through south east Algeria and north west Nigeria, without being intercepted, in a zone monitored with the aid of the most modern technology, while there was a desertion to the MNLA, of the higher Tuareg Malian officers trained by the US army. Meanwhile, the putschists – who, by their paralysis of the army, after the overthrow of Amadou Toumani Touré, indirectly contributed to the partition of Mali by the MNLA and jihadists – had at their head captain Amadou Sanogo, trained by the US army as a parachutist, intelligent officer and teacher of English to the military. The current head of AFRICOM, General Carter Ham said: "I was sorely disappointed that a military with whom we had a training relationship participated in the mili-

tary overthrow of an elected government," [1]. However the same article cites a Malian officer who speaks of the defection, with arms and troops, of the heads of three of the four units of the Malian army then fighting in the north of the country: "The aid of the Americans turned out not to be useful," said another ranking Malian officer, now engaged in combat. "They made the wrong choice," he said of relying on commanders from a group that had been conducting a 50-year rebellion against the Malian state". [2].

A French general noted: "The Americans have been involved in Africa for five years with AFRICOM. They trained the Malian army for 600 million dollars. All this to end up in a putsch carried out by a captain... Everybody is then happy to turn towards France which has its savoir-faire, regional and cultural knowledge, and links. We are there a little by delegation of the western world for fifty years." [3]

While the US ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, opposed French activism for a rapid intervention and General Ham declared the impossibility of an intervention in Mali, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, pressed the Algerian president to involve himself in the preparation of the intervention rather than to negotiate with the MNLA and Ansar Dine. The current US declarations of approval of the French intervention and offer of logistical support brings to mind the supposed new option, applied in Libya, according to which the United States will not take the leadership of military operations that they deem relevant to European interests before their own, while the Europeans will remain dependent on the US to supplement their efforts where necessary. But unlike the intervention in Libya, the disagreements between France and the US have been publicly exposed as an inter-imperialist duel from which France has emerged victorious, affirming thus its imperialist leadership in the sub-region, at least in its former colonial area. It is not obvious that Mali can remain a very good customer of US counter-terrorist military exercises.

France: return on military investment

As the real fighting was initially carried out exclusively by the French, it was the French army (personnel and equipment) which will emerge prestigious — including for the soldiers of other countries in MISMA, whose Nigerian commander in chief is a Francophone — in the event of the final victory of the neo-colonial coalition. The non opposition of Captain Sanogo to the French intervention should be noted. Yet his conflict with ECOWAS (hostile to his coup, which could inspire soldiers in neighbouring states) had centred on the demand for a Malian command for the African sub regional force. The appeal of Dioncounda Traoré to the French army cannot have been taken without the approval of the junta, Sanogo presenting himself as the military advisor of the interim president.

France will find the opportunity to take root militarily in Mali after fifty years of comparatively timid military relations. France is already responsible for the training of the Malian army and that of neighbouring Niger, also at risk from jihadism, and whose president supported the French position on the Security Council, will not remain apart from the process. It cannot be ruled out that the French army wants to re-establish itself, with some supplementary forces from ECOWAS, in Tessalit, under the pretext of securing the frontier with Algeria.

The principle of foreign operations, which are expensive, is the economic return on military investment. Above all in this period of economic crisis. During the debate on the Mali intervention in the French parliament on January 16, 2013, some right wing opposition deputies, including UMP leader Jean-François Copé, insisted on the need to increase the defence budget for 2013, despite austerity. Good news for the French military industrial complex whose surveillance equipment (Atlantique-2, Pléiades and so on), was already active in the Malian skies before January 11. The operation promotes the Tiger combat helicopter as well as Mirages. Foreign operations are more convincing commercially than the Salon du Bourget. This aspect has often been avoided, including by critics of the French intervention.

French leadership of a European army?

Also the French intervention involves the redefinition of the *Politique de sécurité et de défense commune européenne* (PSDC – European Common Defence and Security Policy), a subject where the presidency of François Hollande contrasts with the enthusiastic Atlanticism of his predecessor. As a return to the Gaullist heritage of French leadership of a European army, the Serval operation can then be considered as an anticipation of the European Operation Sahel 2013 which envisaged training and aiding African forces to regain the north of Mali. This European operation could be led with other African states directly threatened and with regional organisations. It is undoubtedly in relation to this operation that the French defence minister said that "these soldiers [French, European] will not participate in combat operations. But the EU considers that it is necessary to help Mali eradicate the jihadist menace. The European initiative is independent of the resolution adopted by the UN Security Council to allow ECOWAS to intervene militarily alongside the Malian army" [4].

It seems inevitable that part of the EU's aid to Mali will concern the "modernisation" of the security forces, which will include the provision of appropriate equipment, i.e. that which proved its worth in the war against the jihadists. Each European army participating in this expedition will wish to have its economic return on military investment. There is perhaps more chance for the Europeans here than in Iraq or Afghanistan — where attacks undermined participation in the coalition of international forces supporting the US army. The US and the UK will also play their part along with France. The principle of a return on military investment has been applied in Libya and the same can be expected in Mali.

French interests

While Mali is known for being among the lowest ranking nations globally as far as HDI is concerned, it is much less known as one of the main producers

of African cotton, or the third biggest gold producer of the continent, with the perspective in recent years of supplanting Ghana or South Africa, the two biggest. This gold is exploited by, among others, AngloGold-Ashanti, Gencor, Société financière internationale. Bouygues, and SOMADDEX (Société malienne d'exploitation) a subcontractor of AngloGold. These transnationals have been confronted by the struggle of miners and neighbouring communities, victims of the collateral social and ecological effects of mining. This does not particularly concern the Malian leaders who share out the dividends — the state being the main minority shareholder in the mining enterprises — and the profits, part of which are diverted not only for consumerism but also for the primitive accumulation of capital in a society with very old traditions of corruption. The poverty of most Malians is not the consequence of an unfavourable natural environment, despite the aridity of a part of the territory which does not however prevent the domination of farming activity. Malian poverty is a consequence of economic choices inherited from French colonisation, reproduced by the neo-colonial elites with the complicity of the old colonial metropolis for nearly five decades (exception made of the Modibo Kéita years of an attempted emergence from neo-colonial dependency) and the organisers of the neoliberal world order.

While 51% of Mali's population lives on less than 800 FCFA per day, its economic potential is of interest to French and international capital. Which gives the lie to François Hollande's claim, made in Abu Dhabi: "There is no French interest, apart from our nationals in Mali..... We defend only one cause: the integrity of Mali..." [5] There certainly are French interests in Mali, represented for example by the Club des investisseurs français au Mali (CIFAM), made up of around sixty enterprises, including Air France, Air Liquide, AGS, Gras Savoye, BNP Paribas, CANALSAT horizons, Sanofi Aventis, SDV, Allianz, Total, CFAO, Castel, Bouygues. Some, like Bouygues or Orange, have benefited from the

privatisation of Malian public companies and liberalisation.

Chinese competition

However, companies confronted with Chinese competition fear having to quit Mali. "In the area of investment, China intervenes in various areas in Mali... in particular in textiles, agro-industry, the pharmaceutical industry, public works" [6]. Direct Chinese investment in Mali was 30.95 million US dollars in 2009 against 23.4 million in 2007. The last figures available for 2011 indicate an increase to 160.06 million dollars. Also, "China is forcefully inserted in nearly all sectors of the Malian market. Malian imports from China concern even the most ordinary equipment and consumer goods" [7]. Which has an impact on France's trade balance with Mali, currently positive for France at nearly 270 million euros.

Meanwhile the US ambassador in Mali has expressed concern about the Chinese monopoly in Mali, while the deputy secretary of state for African affairs, Johnnie Carson, has said that the whole Sahel region was vital to US interests. For French finance minister Pierre Moscovici: "It is obvious that China is increasingly present in Africa. French enterprises which have the resources should go on the offensive." [8]. Mali is presented as one of the areas where the Chinese are most active. And the French minister's call is not motivated by empathy with Africa but because "the new phenomenon that is African growth has the potential to stimulate growth in France."

Certainly there are other French interests in West Africa, like the exploitation of uranium in neighbouring Niger, whose protection could justify an intervention from imperialist point of view, given its vital importance for France. The establishment of an Islamic state in Mali, considered as the embryo of a future caliphate embracing the whole of West Africa would certainly have modified the situation. For example the neo-colonial contract of exploitation linking Areva and the Niger state. The jihadists in power could have revised the contracts, demand-

ed higher returns, or availed in certain economic sectors of capital from Qatar or other Gulf oil states at the expense of French or Western competitors. But they would not have done so as the Gulf monarchies can make their Wahabbism coexist with very fruitful economic partnerships with the main Western transnationals as well as significant military assistance from the imperialist powers. In the light also of the coming to power of Ennahda in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, we can say that there is no anti-capitalist perspective in the current Islamist dynamic.

But France is not blind to the potential of Mali in terms of the exploitation of other minerals, including uranium. There is also the exploitation of fuels: — gas, a deposit of which, containing produce of a very rare quality, has been discovered not far from the garrison town of Kati and elsewhere; — oil, whose importance for France was underlined by, for example the events in Mauritania from 2005-2009.

In a speech to the Senegalese parliament in Dakar on October 12, 2012, Hollande stated: "today on trade, the climate, on economic questions, you are our main partner and France will be your first ally. The task of a country like mine is to accompany you in the domains of the future, not simply natural resources but also agro-alimentary, telecommunications, services". He also warned Africa against possible "predators" among the new big investors in Africa.

A future oil and gas state

Like many other African countries in recent years, Mali has entered the club of oil and gas states. Thanks to the exploration carried out first by the Chinese enterprise SINOPEC, before the Algerian SONATRACH, in northern Mali, although this is endlessly being postponed. The last postponement was caused by the war of independence launched by the MNLA in January 2012. Foreign enterprises like SONATRACH, the Italian ENI, Australia's BARAKA and China's National Petroleum Corporation), as well as TOTAL ARE involved. But

the latter does not enjoy the traditional French oil leadership in Francophone Africa. To such a point that the sympathy of Sarkozy's France with respect to the MNLA has been interpreted as motivated by the potential oil wealth of north Mali, destined to be separated under the name of Azawad. Links have been established between the rebellion of the MNLA and the last Tuareg rebellion in Niger, led by the Mouvement des Nigériens pour la justice (MNJ) in 2007, at the time when China became involved in the exploitation of Niger's uranium (jealously protected by AREVA) and, since 2011, oil exploration, at the expense of EXXON. Elsewhere in Francophone Africa, in Congo-Brazzaville, in relation to oil, and the Central African Republic in relation to uranium, coups, indeed wars have taken place following attempts to question the French monopoly in the name of liberalisation.

In Mali, the exploitation of a part of what was presented as the most important African on-shore deposit began with TOTAL being in a marginal situation. This led to the movement for secession or a broad autonomy for north Mali enjoying help from Sarkozy (sympathy for the Tuareg cause should not make us blind to the fact that northern Mali is an area shared with other peoples. An independence in the limits of Azawad traced by the MNLA would have to be ratified by a popular referendum to be legitimate or democratic). A French military intervention under François Hollande can correct this. The economic return on military investment can only improve.

China is increasingly present as much in the old oil bastions of the Western majors as in the new ones. The production of certain majors including Total is falling. Thus the, battle for control of what remains has already begun. The "fight against terrorism", although the jihadists and their horrors are no fiction, is a good alibi to justify imperialist appetites.

What is happening in Mali, like what has happened in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Sudan, relates to the recomposition of the imperialist order imposed by neoliberalism. France, which initially supported the MNLA diplomatically, seems inspired by the Sudanese situation (a partition blessed by the United States, thirsty for oil, on the basis of legitimate popular demands), is now transformed (turning a deaf ear to the public offer of the MNLA to support the struggle against the jihadists) as restorer of Mali's territorial integrity, dragging behind it the so called "international community" in general and in particular the African satraps. The monsters produced in Afghanistan during the Cold War by their system — which includes the Gulf oil monarchs, financiers of these "jihadists" — serve in recent years as permanent alibi to legitimate their own imperialist horrors. Emergent capitalist powers like China and India, who have their own "Islamist" problems at home, have for the moment in Africa other assets which are also one of the factors in the aggression of the traditional imperialisms.

The action of the "international community" under French imperialist leadership can only consolidate the links of dependency in their neoliberal version. It will reinforce the ideological domination of imperialism considered as a saviour and bearer of democracy rather than a predator. The Malian left in particular, and the African and global anti-capitalist left must grasp the current complexity of the dynamic of capitalist domination. Support must be given to the Malian people and particularly those in the north, who are the victims of a war between forces which are fundamentally hostile to their emancipation with respect to neo-colonialism. Support must also be given to all those struggling everywhere in Africa — particularly those in Egypt and Tunisia — and the rest of the world against capitalism, which everywhere no longer offers an alternative.

Recomposition of the imperialist order

LATIN AMERICA

Would Marx be an extractivist?

EDUARDO GUDYNAS ·

This extractive mode of being is expressed both in conservative and progressive governments. But as the latter hope for another type of development this emphasis has become a political knot of enormous complexity.

Extractivism is appealing to new political justifications. One of the most striking is to invoke the old thinkers of socialism, arguing that they would not oppose extractivism in the 21st century, and would indeed promote it.

Surely the most notable example has been the Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa, who to defend extractivism launched two challenging questions: "where does the Communist Manifesto say no to mining? What socialist theory said no to mining?" (interview in May 2012).

Correa redoubled his bet, since in addition to quoting Marx and Engels, he told his own assembly that it cannot go unnoticed that "traditionally the socialist countries were miners". The message that is displayed is that the theoretical basis of socialism is functional extractivism, and that in practice, the countries of actually existing socialism implemented it successfully. If his position is correct, today, and in Latin America, Marx and Engels would be encouraging mining, oil holdings or monoculture plantations for export.

Dreaming of an extractivist Marx

Let's start by weighing the validity of Correa's question. One can't expect that the Communist Manifesto, written in the mid-19th century, would contain the answers to all the problems of the 21st century.

As noted by two of the most renowned Marxists of the twentieth century, Leo Huberman and Paul

Sweezy, both Marx and Engels considered that the principles of the manifesto were still correct, but that the text had aged. "In particular, they acknowledged implicitly that the means by which capitalism would be extended and introduce new countries and regions into the mainstream of modern history, would necessarily lead to the emergence of problems and forms of development that are not considered by the Manifesto", they say [1]. Without a doubt this is the situation of the Latin American nations, where it would be necessary to contextualize both the questions and the answers.

It is then necessary to verify if the socialist countries were really miners. That is not entirely true, and in those sites where mining increased in importance, we now know that the environmental, social and economic balance sheet was very negative. One of the most striking examples occurred in the mining and steel areas of Poland under the Soviet shadow. Today equally terrible situations with regard to mining exist in China.

We cannot forget that many of those enterprises, given their high social and environmental cost, only become viable when there are no adequate environmental controls or civic demands are muted by authoritarian means. It cannot go unnoticed that extractivism, Soviet-style, was unable to generate the economic and productive leap that was predicted by those same plans.

Currently, progressivism defends extractivism, aiming to take advantage of its economic income to finance various social plans and changes in the productive base to create another economy.

The problem is that, in this way, a dependency develops between extractivism and social plans. Without taxes on exports of raw materials possibilities would be reduced to fund, for example, month-

ly monetary aid to the poorest. This means the state itself becomes extractive, becoming a partner in various projects, courting investors of all kinds, and providing various facilities. Without doubt there are changes under progressivism, but the problem is that the social and environmental impacts are repeated and reinforce the role of national economies as subordinate suppliers of raw materials.

The claim that emergence from dependency is possible through more extractivism has no chance of being realized. It creates a situation where the promised transition becomes impossible, through the consequences of extractivism at various levels, through economic policies (such as the displacement of local industry or the overvaluation of national currencies, and a tendency to combat civic resistance). The use of instruments of economic redistribution has limited scope, as demonstrated by the repetition of social mobilizations. But it is also expensive, and ends up with governments needing still more new extractivist projects.

It is precisely all these perverse relationships which should be analysed by looking to Marx. Correa's message, although challenging, is in fact not applying those principles of Marx that still remain for the 21st century.

Listening to the warning of Marx

Marx did not reject mining. Most of the social movements do not reject it, and if their claims are heard carefully it will be found that they are focused on a particular type of enterprise: large scale, with huge volumes removed, intensive and open-pit. In other words, don't confuse mining with extractivism.

Marx did not reject mining, but was very clear where there

should be changes. From that perspective there are answers to Correa's question: Marx distinguished "vulgar socialism" from a substantive socialism, and that differentiation should be considered attentively today.

In his "Critique of the Gotha Programme" Marx recalls that the distribution of the means of consumption is, actually, a consequence of the mode of production. Intervening in consumption does not transform modes of production, but it is at this last level where the real changes must occur. Marx adds: "vulgar socialism (...) has learned from the bourgeois economists to consider and treat distribution as something independent of the mode of production, and, therefore, to consider socialism as a doctrine that revolves mainly around distribution" [2].

Here is the answer to Correa's question:

Marx, in Latin America today, would not be an extractivist, because that would mean abandoning the goal of transforming the modes of production, becoming a bourgeois economist. On the contrary, he would be promoting alternatives to production, and that means, in our present context, moving toward post-extractivism.

For sure the vision of Marx is not enough to organize the end of extractivism, since he was a man immersed in the ideas of the progress of modernity, but it identifies the sense that there must be alternatives. Indeed, it becomes clear that instrumental adjustments or redistributive improvements may represent progress, but it is still imperative to transcend the dependence on extractivism as a key element of the current mode of production. This issue is so clear that Marx himself concludes "once the true relation of things is clarified, why go backwards"? So, why continue to insist with extractivism?

FEATURES

In-depth analysis from International Viewpoint's Features section



A critique of the ecosocialist manifesto of the Parti de Gauche

DANIEL TANURO · 24 March 2013

The Ecosocialist Manifesto of the Left Party (PG) is an important document. For the first time in France, a political force with parliamentary representation adopts the concept of ecosocialism to try and combine social and ecological demands, in a perspective of a break with capitalism. The condemnation of productivism is unambiguous. The fact that the document rejects as socially unjust and environmentally criminal the social democratic strategy of relaunching the system (Thesis 6: "We therefore expect neither the resumption of growth nor the beneficial effects of austerity: we believe in neither the one or the other") demonstrates an awareness of the seriousness of the situation and the urgency of the measures that must be taken to confront it. That is to say that the manifesto contributes to a fundamental political debate: what alternative to co-management of capitalism by the Greens and social-liberalism? What programme, what vision of society, what strategy for an anti-productivist socialism?

This debate has only just begun. The Left, in order to deepen it, would benefit from further immersing itself in environmental problems, the scale of which it scarcely grasps. In this respect, the progress made by the Left Party since its founders left the Socialist Party is remarkable. However, in my opinion the point has not yet been reached where the activists could take cognizance of the immensity of the challenges. The road that remains to be travelled can be measured, among other things, by the fact that the PG Ecosocialist Manifesto considers

technology as socially neutral (Thesis 13: "The problem is not the technique itself but rather the lack of choice and of citizens' control"... as if the hypothesis of "socialist nuclear power" was possible!) and says nothing about biofuels, shale gas or carbon capture and sequestration. But our main criticism is that the PG does not come out for the abandonment of fossil fuels and does not confront frankly some major constraints of the transition towards a system entirely based on renewable energies. In fact, despite all the excellent things that it contains, the manifesto of the PG does not seem to grasp the formidable scale of the energy/climate challenge that must be taken up in the next forty years and which is in my opinion the main reason why ecosocialism is a burning necessity.

The basic elements of the problem

We cannot repeat often enough the basic elements of the problem: beyond an increase in temperature of 1.5 ° C compared to the pre-industrial era, the warming of the lower atmosphere will more than likely lead to irreversible ecological and social catastrophes. The disaster-making machine is already en route – we can see it in the multiplication of extreme weather events. But the worst – in particular a rise of from one to three metres in the level of the oceans, involving the displacement in the relatively short term of hundreds of millions of people - can still be avoided. However, to have a chance of the increase in temperature remaining below 2.4 ° C, the conditions that need to be met are draconian: it means that the developed countries almost entirely abandon fossil fuels by 2050 and that global greenhouse gas emissions decrease by 50 to 85 per cent by that date, to be reduced to zero before 2100 (by that point, in fact, they should even begin to be

negative, which means that the ecosystem of the Earth should absorb more carbon dioxide than it emits). Renewable energies can take over from there. Their technical potential is more than sufficient. But the transition is extremely complicated because it is a question, in a very short period of time, of replacing the existing energy system by another, completely different and much more expensive.

Change the energy system

The elements that have to be taken into consideration are the following:

- If we refuse nuclear technology – we have to refuse it, for many reasons that I will not go into here – and if we respect the principle of the common but differentiated responsibilities of countries = this must be respected, for obvious reasons of North/South justice = then it follows that the success of the transition to renewable energy makes it necessary to reduce final energy demand by around half in the European Union and by three quarters in the United States;
- A reduction of this magnitude is not possible through energy-saving measures alone. A reduction in material production and transport is also indispensable. It is therefore not enough to balance the removal of productions that are useless or harmful, on the one hand, and the increase in ecological products, on the other hand: the balance of the whole must be negative;
- The objectives in terms of emissions mean that approximately 80 per cent of the known reserves of coal, oil and natural gas must remain in the ground. But these reserves are the property of capitalist companies, or state capitalist companies; they appear as assets on their balance sheets. Their non-exploitation would amount to a destruction of capital. This would be unacceptable to shareholders, it goes without saying;
- With few exceptions, renewable energies are more expensive than fossil fuels and will remain so, roughly speaking, for the next two decades. In prac-

tice, the main effect of the increase in the price of oil is to make profitable the exploitation of tar sands, shale gas, heavy oils and deep offshore wells, all profitable businesses from the capitalist point of view but highly destructive from the environmental point of view, and whose energy efficiency (the ratio between the input and the output of energy) is often very low.

– Overall, the transition to renewable energy has not begun. The United Nations make the following observation: "The change in energy technology has slowed down considerably on the level of the global energy mix since the 1970s, and there is no evidence in support of the popular idea that this change in energy technology is accelerating. (...) Despite impressive growth rates of the dissemination of renewable energy technologies since 2000, it is clear that the current trajectory does not come anywhere near a realistic path towards a total decarbonization of the global energy system by 2050" (UN, *World Economic and Social Outlook 2011*, pp 49-50).

– One of the reasons for this situation - which contrasts with the image portrayed by the media - is that the fully rational use of renewable energy requires the construction of an alternative energy system, completely new, decentralized, efficient and equipped with storage facilities. In the framework of the present centralized and wasteful system, 1GW of wind power requires the backup of 0.9 GW of fossil energy: renewables only add to traditional energies. To avoid this combination means building an "intelligent" network in ten years. An undertaking that would be "gigantic, necessitating technological progress, international cooperation and unprecedented transfers" (ibid., p. 52).

The obstacle of Capital

The economic, and therefore political and social implications of changing the energy system are well summarized by the same United Nations report: "Overall, the cost of replacing the existing fossil and nuclear infrastructure is at least 15 to 20,000 billion dollars [between a quarter and a third of global

GDP – DT]. China alone increased its production of coal-fired electrical power by more than 300 GW between 2000 and 2008, an investment of more than \$300 billion, which will begin to be profitable from 2030-2040 and will operate perhaps until 2050-2060. In fact, most of the energy infrastructures have been deployed recently in emerging economies and are completely new, with lifetimes of at least 40 to 60 years. Clearly, it is unlikely that the world (sic) will decide overnight to wipe out 15 to 20,000 billion dollars of infrastructures and replace them with a renewable energy system which is more expensive"(UN, *World Economic and Social Outlook 2011*, p. 53).

If it was consulted and adequately informed of the issues, "the world" would undoubtedly decide to replace the fossil system with a renewable system. But the capitalist states will not take this decision, even though they are informed of the issues. Generally speaking, they are absolutely incapable of finding in forty years a humanly acceptable solution to the tangle of problems outlined above. The law of profit prevents it. No carbon tax, no emission rights market will bring a solution. To have a chance of being effective, the level of taxes or rights should increase to 600 or 700 dollars per ton of CO₂ in areas such as transport, which is obviously inconceivable. All the key sectors of the economy (automotive, aerospace, shipbuilding, chemical and petrochemical, power generation, steel, cement, food, etc.) would be heavily penalized. To believe that the bosses of the enterprises concerned will accept that we impinge on their profit margins, to believe that the rival states representing these bosses will agree to simultaneously impinge on the profit margins of all bosses in all countries, is to believe in Santa Claus. The failure for 20 years (twenty years!) of the international summits on the climate provides ample proof of it. And this will not change in the context of the competition wars that have been raging since 2008!

A triple catastrophe

No doubt is possible: in the framework of the system, we are heading quickly towards a triple disaster - ecological, social and technological. This last aspect emerges clearly from the scenarios developed by the International Energy Agency and adopted, with variations, by the OECD, the World Bank, the UNEP and other international institutions. In order to try and reconcile capitalist growth with climate targets, without changing the energy system, all of these organizations in fact put forward the same combinations of proposals (the same "energy mix"): triple the number of nuclear power stations; increase the use of coal, tar sands and shale gas; considerably increase the production of biofuels; in general increase the use of biomass, especially by having recourse to genetically modified plants - in particular trees... It should be noted that these scenarios, if they were implemented, would at best make it possible to limit the concentration in CO₂ equivalent to 550 parts per million (ppm), which corresponds to a temperature increase of between 2.8 and 3.2 °C... Unacceptable!

In all these cases, carbon capture and sequestration is presented as the Columbus's egg which will make it possible to continue the combustion of fossil fuels without the quantities of carbon dioxide produced being sent into the atmosphere. In reality, there is good reason to fear that the massive deployment over the long term of this technology is a new solution of the sorcerer's apprentice kind, a way of sweeping rubbish under the carpet. Generally speaking, ecosocialists should oppose it... except possibly in the clearly limited context of conversion plans for workers in certain polluting enterprises that are destined to close. We should note that it is precisely this technology that is involved in the ULCOS project in Florange. This case illustrates the difficulty of the concrete articulation of social and environmental questions in the ultra-defensive context of today...

Growth, non-growth, de-growth

From the ecological point of view, the main weakness of the manifesto of the PG is, in our view, that

it does not tackle head-on this formidable question of the energy transition and of capitalist policy on the issue. It is not enough to challenge "the re-launching of GDP growth" (Thesis 6), or to juxtapose "the necessary reduction of certain kinds of material consumption and the need to relaunch certain activities" (Thesis 10): it must go further and admit that, at least in developed capitalist countries, a net decrease in material production and transport is essential to make the transition successfully and avoid an irreversible transformation of the environment, with catastrophic social consequences.

What "green rule"?

It is true that the manifesto links the "relaunch of certain activities" with "taking systematic account of the carbon footprint that is generated". Incorporating a central theme of the presidential campaign of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the document proposes introducing the "green rule" as "central indicator for directing the economy". The explanation is as follows (Thesis 10): "In addition to the damage already done, and which we have to make up for as regards greenhouse gas emissions and loss of biodiversity, we adopt as a means of evaluation of public policies, the fixing at a later date every year the day of 'global overtaking'. This is the date when we have calculated on a global level the volume of renewable resources equal to what the planet is capable of regenerating and when we have produced waste that it is capable of digesting. Our goal is to push this date back to December 31, i.e. to neutralize our carbon footprint. This implies the drastic reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the cessation of nuclear power, which produces waste that nobody knows how to deal with".

The drastic reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the cessation of nuclear power were not mentioned in the first version of this text, submitted last December to the Conference on Ecosocialism. The inclusion of these amendments is very positive, but nevertheless unsatisfactory. Firstly, because the text does not go beyond the objective, not budgeted

for and rather vague, of "reducing our dependence on exhaustible resources" (Thesis 9). Secondly, because "the global ecological footprint" is a questionable indicator, with no real practical significance:

- Questionable, because by amalgamating the calculations of renewable and non-renewable resources in relation to the population, the footprint gives a biased image of being unsustainable. It dilutes the major responsibility of fossil fuels (about 80 per cent of the footprint results from the combustion of these fuels) and thus diverts attention from the coal, oil and gas lobbies. On the other hand, it draws attention to the question of population, which is the hobby horse of the neo-Malthusians;

- With no real practical significance, because the sustainability of the ecological footprint "on a world scale" only commits the government of a particular country if it is translated into national objectives that are specific, measurable, and verifiable in terms of the historical responsibility of the country considered in the context of the "global ecological crisis". However, this translation into national objectives is not so simple to achieve.

To deal with the emergency by adopting a "green rule" is certainly an idea to be retained, but the chosen indicator must be relevant, clear, measurable and verifiable. The ecological footprint strikes the imagination ("we would need three planets!") but also creates a lot of confusion. It would be better to adopt a law stipulating that, while abandoning nuclear power, and without resorting to "carbon credits", France will decrease every year its fossil emissions of CO₂ in a proportion such that the country reaches a minimum of 80 to 95 per cent by 2050, passing through an intermediate stage of 25 to 40 per cent by 2020 (compared to 1990)... and aiming at more than 100 per cent (i.e. negative emissions) between 2050 and 2100.

Internationalism: try a little harder!

The adoption of such a law is one of the means par excellence by which France - or any other devel-

oped capitalist country - can "fulfill its responsibility to humanity by effacing the ecological debt". But it is not the only way. In this regard, many important and accurate things are said in Thesis 17 about the international dimension of ecosocialism ("conduct an internationalist and universalist combat"). However, the text fails to deal with the main problem: how to reconcile climate stabilization with the right to development of the peoples of the South? The challenge, let us repeat, is quite simply gigantic. On the one hand, three billion human beings are suffering because their basic needs are not satisfied, or insufficiently so: it is necessary to produce more. On the other, the climate constraints that must be respected between now and 2050 prohibit massively relaunching material production on a global level, and even dictate that it should be reduced in developed countries.

What is the way out? No one can decently claim to have the definitive answer. It is, however, insufficient to write that you are "contributing to the discussions aimed at combining development policies and social progress and the preservation of the environment" and that you support the approach of the "Yasuni ITT initiative". The PG recognizes «the responsibility of what are called the countries of the North, and of the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, towards the peoples of the South». It should draw some programmatic conclusions from that: in addition to the unilateral adoption by France of a plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, other measures would be, for example, to cancel the debt, not to import biofuels, to recognize the right to food sovereignty, to denounce REDD +, to make free transfers of green technologies and to pay – in the form of aid, not loans! – for adaptation to climate change. These few measures seem to me to be essential elements of a consistent ecosocialist internationalism.

Transitional strategy

The scientific reports on "global change" bear witness: the energy/climate challenge is the major en-

vironmental and social problem major which mankind must face up to. It is starting from this central question that the ecosocialists must jointly develop a programme, a strategy, tactics and forms of struggle. This is not about taking ideological postures, outbidding the PG by purism or being more radical than it by virtue of sacred dogmas. It is about taking the measure of the extreme gravity of the objective situation and soberly drawing the political conclusions that flow from it. These conclusions can only be radically anti-capitalist and internationalist. It is the very foundations of the mode of production which are in question. The manifesto of the PG also says so, and it is in this framework that the debate can take place.

How should we act? The strategic difficulty resides in the yawning abyss between the urgent need for an (eco)socialist alternative and the current level of consciousness of the populations, in particular the exploited and oppressed. It is to bridge this gap, to build a bridge across this abyss, that it is important to respond to both social demands and environmental emergencies through a programme of demands that makes it possible to begin to break from the existing order. It seems obvious that this programme must set the perspective of the formation of a government capable of implementing it - at the national, European and global levels. But the formation of a government should not justify lowering the level of the programme to the point where it would no longer make such a break possible. It is doubtful whether there is agreement on this point when we remember that Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a few days before the Conference on Ecosocialism, declared that he was a candidate for the post of Prime Minister of a government of the Left with the Socialist Party and the Greens...

Expropriation of energy and finance

In its first version, the Manifesto of the PG demanded the nationalization of energy, but not of finance. This deficiency has been corrected. It is to be welcomed because the expropriation of the lobbies of these two closely interlinked sectors is really

a condition sine qua non for the break. It provides a framework within which can be articulated a series of ecosocialist demands, large and small, ranging from the creation of public municipal boards for the insulation and renovation of housing to free transport, including along the way encouraging proximity organic farming, the prohibition of planned obsolescence, free services (water, electricity, mobility, heating) up to a level corresponding to basic needs (with rapidly progressive pricing beyond that level), the retraining of employees of polluting enterprises, with maintenance of their seniority and benefits, the generalized reduction of working time to 30 hours a week without loss of pay, etc. Outside of this framework, the programme loses its coherence and breaks down into a series of scattered measures, some of which are digestible by the system, others not.

A government that would commit itself to implementing a programme for a break with the system worthy of the name would be immediately confronted with the response of the international bourgeoisie, especially through the European Union. It would have to protect its policies from it. Not in the name of the nation, but in the name of another Europe that has to be built, a Europe of which its policies would give a foretaste to other peoples. Although the manifesto has been improved on this point (Thesis 16: "Although the European level may be relevant for major environmental and social policies, their implementation would only be possible by the building of another Europe, under the democratic control of the peoples"), there should be an even more offensive approach, pointing to the need for a constituent assembly of the peoples of Europe. Because it is only on the level of the sub-continent that an ecosocialist programme worthy of the name can be deployed. Through the establishment of European public services of energy, water, transportation, housing. Through a reorientation of research and industry towards the needs of these services. Through joint management of natural resources.

Self-management or statism?

The manifesto of the PG is right to conclude (Thesis 18) that "given the magnitude of its objective, challenging the capitalist production model cannot result from a simple electoral alternation and from decisions from above". Indeed, such a challenge is only possible through an in-depth social mobilization. A mobilization of everyone, regardless of their philosophical and religious beliefs. This point probably merits discussion. For us, there is for example no reason that participation in the ecosocialist combat should be subject to the acceptance of secularism as understood by the PG. This condition goes against the necessary and urgent unity against imminent catastrophes. The management of the Earth's ecosystem "in a responsible fashion" is compatible with the humanist foundations of all religions, of all cosmologies. Provided that they are fighting for demands which emancipate men and women in practice - on Earth, not in heaven - it matters little whether those involved believe in God or not.

The key point is that this mobilization should be coupled with democratic self-organization. Imposing workers' control in the workplaces, electing strike committees, occupying workplaces when there is a strike, forming residents' committees that determine themselves the criteria and the priorities of municipalities, encouraging mass struggles against crazy technological projects (such as Notre Dame des Landes), encouraging everywhere direct links between producers and consumers to escape from the mediation of capital and of the market, supporting the autonomous struggles of women and of all the oppressed: this is the road we should take.

The manifesto of the PG takes important steps in this direction, referring to "the ongoing intervention of workers in the management of enterprises" and to "conferences of popular participation to re-define the criteria for social and environmental utility and the articulation between the different levels" of "ecological planning" (Thesis 13). But

these proposals would benefit from being made more precise because, generally speaking, the perspective of the manifesto is more statist and centralist than it is decentralized and based on self-management. It ignores the class nature of the state, adorns the Republic with virtues that it does not possess and presents, so to speak, a "top-down" conception of socialist emancipation (Thesis 4: "the emancipation of the human person requires the sharing of wealth, the democratization of power and global education").

The road ahead is long and difficult, full of pitfalls. It is the road of an anti-capitalist alternative. "For a

long time the world has had the dream of something that it only needed to become conscious of to actually possess", said Marx. This thing today is ecosocialism, the dream of a humanity which will collectively maintain the garden of the Earth with joy, prudence and responsibility. There is neither shortcut nor supreme saviour. The consciousness of the concrete possibility of this thing can only be forged in action based on solidarity, in the struggle without borders against this absurd system, which bears within it the ecological and social catastrophe as the storm-cloud bears the thunderstorm.