

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV466 November 2013

FRANCE

As National Front support grows, strategy struggle erupts in Left Front

GREECE

The rise of the neo-Nazi movement and its results

DOSSIER

Philippines Tunisia

Honduras

Philippines solidarity

Denmark

USA

Economy:

Greece

France

Middle East:

Canadian state

Indonesia

Luxembourg

Germany:

Egypt

internationalviewpoint.org

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.

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV466 November 2013

CONTENTS

Philippines — Report on solidarity campaign	P4
Tunisia — The Congress of the LGO and the tasks of revolutionaries in Tunisia	P7
Tunisia — The debate on being part of the Salvation Front at the Congress of the LGO	P10
Tunisia — "Socialism is our perspective, the revolutionary party is our means"	P12
Honduras — The importance of Xiomara Castro's November 24 presidential election campaign	P14
Philippines solidarity — A renewed and urgent appeal for solidarity and humanitarian support for the survivors of super typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) in Central Visayas and Mindanao, Philippines	P19
Denmark — Result of the municipal and regional election in Denmark 19th of November 2013	P21
USA — A Socialist in Seattle City Council	P23
Philippines — Haiyan/Yolanda: Inside each new-born violent storm is the DNA of the fossil fuel industry and capitalism	P25
Philippines solidarity — First steps in solidarity campaign with typhoon victims	P30
Philippines — After Haiyan: The ineptness of those who govern and the urgency of solidarity	P33
Economy: — Bankocracy: from the Venetian Republic to Mario Draghi and Goldman Sachs	P35
Greece — The rise of the neo-Nazi movement and its results	P37
France — As National Front support grows, strategy struggle erupts in Left Front	P46
Middle East: — No Easy Victories	P57
Economy: — Cancelling debt or taxing capital: why should we choose?	P61
Canadian state — New Brunswick, Canada: Elsipogtog First Nation Resists the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Southwestern Energy	P64
Indonesia — The power of the working class - national strike in Indonesia	P65
Luxembourg — Luxembourg elections open new political chapter	P68
Germany: — Merkel triumphs ... what now?	P73
Egypt — Questions to Hany Hanna on the situation in Egypt	P76
USA — Capitalism's government shutdown scam	P81

The Fourth International also publishes reviews in French, Spanish and German. You can visit them online at these locations:

Inprecor, French-language journal <http://www.inprecor.org/>

Punto de Vista Internacional, Spanish-language journal <http://puntodevistainternacional.org/>

Inprekorr, German-language monthly magazine <http://www.inprekorr.de/>

PHILIPPINES

Report on solidarity campaign

PIERRE ROUSSET ·

Since the first report on the beginning of our solidarity campaign, our appeal has been translated into German (as well as Dutch, Flemish, English and Spanish). In France, our initiative has received the support of the Solidaires trade union organisation. We are ready to fully involve in this activity the social movements, progressive reviews or other organizations which give it support.

Outside France, there have been donations from Germany, Holland, Spain, Switzerland, Quebec, Canada and the USA; and they are forthcoming from Hong Kong, Japan, and Australia. Before having received written notification of transfers from the bank, it is sometimes impossible for us to know their origin. We will in the future give more specific details on the international dimension of our campaign.

Our Philippine partners are making a considerable effort to raise funds in Mindanao themselves (see below). They are also in contact with European associations able to aid them, as in Belgium where Entraide et Fraternité has launched an appeal for this purpose. We hope that they will soon receive financial support from these movements. In the immediate however – to our knowledge at least – they depend at the international level on donations transferred by ESSF thanks the quick response of our solidarity network. Thanks to all donors.

The activities of our Philippine partners

As we have indicated in our previous articles, the organisations with whom we work are established in Mindanao, one of the two biggest islands of the archipelago, situated in the south of the Philippines. They have links with the zones most vi-

olently affected by the typhoon, located in the centre of the archipelago in a set of islands called the Visayas. A first team left last week to investigate the situation on the ground, evaluate needs and possibilities more precisely, and begin to provide aid and draw up an initial plan of action. At the same time, preparation, mobilisation, educational and organisational work has begun in Mindanao.

The "pilot" team which last week left Iligan (Mindanao) to go to the affected areas of the Visayas has gone to a rural area in Daanbantayan (in the north of the island of Cebu), to Palompon and Villaba, as well as Ormoc City where there is a significant Muslim community (on the island of Leyte). In all these places, the inhabitants have not yet received any aid from governmental agencies, private Philippine institutions or international bodies. This first team is currently preparing a report to evaluate in more depth the situation in the localities and specify the modalities of the necessary solidarity work. A second team has just left to help local coordination of operations and distribute aid in correct safety conditions.

Broadening of the mobilization in Mindanao

A big effort is being made in Mindanao to carry out activities of aid, rehabilitation and reconstruction in the Visayas. In the country as a whole, the population is in shock after having discovered the breadth of the devastation brought about by Haiyan/Yolanda. Typhoons are common climatic phenomena in Philippines. Generally disruptive, but relatively benign, they are sometimes murderous. This one has exceeded anything previously seen.

The inhabitants of the Mindanao coast have themselves faced devastating and murderous typhoons,

like Washi/Sendong in 2012. They are aware of what can mean "much worse than what they have themselves lived". In such conditions, solidarity has been readily forthcoming.

Initially, we worked with two associations: Tripod and RDRRAC. Now a new coalition has been established, comprising around fifty organisations: the Mindanao Humanitarian Action Network against Disasters (Mi-HANDs - its address will be: www.mihands.org). The campaign for the victims of Haiyan is called: "Mindanao Duyog sa Katawhang Biktima sa Yolanda" (Mindanao Solidarity for Typhoon Yolanda Survivors). A logo has been designed and an Internet site is under construction. The search for funds is linked to a campaign of explanation on the implications of the super typhoon. Small teams of volunteers go from school to school, shopping mall to shopping mall with a photo exhibition. Discussions begin, money is collected. The mayors (or their equivalent) are contacted so that they help the success of this initiative in their localities.

The next stage

Urgently, which means in a few days, Mi-HANDs has the objective of raising 1.8 million pesos (or more than 30,000 euros) in the form of advances and loans to send aid by boat to some 850 families who have lost everything: food (rice, canned goods, coffee, sugar, mongo, oil, dried fish, salt) and hygiene kits (bath soap, detergent soap, tooth brush, toothpaste, sanitary napkin, nail cutter, face towel)) as well as a team responsible for health questions (medicines and medical equipment and psycho-social therapy sessions).

Several dozen volunteers take care of logistics, with a division of labour between various teams: distribution of aid, documentation, psycho-social aid, health and so on. All this is only a beginning. The reconstitution of the social tissue will take time. In vast areas, economic activity is destroyed; the possibilities of finding a job are very low. There are hundreds of thousands of displaced persons. Many are those who are tempted to leave and join family

members in the capital, at the risk for the poorest of ending up in the shanty towns of unemployed and informal workers. New typhoons are currently hitting the Philippines, but they are of moderate strength. However, in the areas already devastated, they can still destroy the tents where the refugees are sheltering and revive the memory of a genuinely apocalyptic experience. People are experiencing insecurity. In coming to their side, the members of Mi-HANDs know that they make a long term commitment.

They thank all those abroad who have contributed to both political and financial solidarity. The money sent by ESSF has served to buy basic necessities and indispensable logical resources. For our part, we will continue our campaign, even when the TV no longer speaks of the victims of the super typhoon – and if possible involve other movements in solidarity, drawing in new layers.

To send donations

Cheques

Cheques in euros only and payable in France made out to ESSF should be sent to:

ESSF

2, rue Richard-Lenoir

93100 Montreuil

France

Bank:

Crédit lyonnais

Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)

10 boulevard Chanzy

93100 Montreuil

France

ESSF, account number 445757C

National bank references (RIB):

Bank: 30002

Code: 00525; 0000445757C

Key: 12

Account in the name of: ESSF

International bank references:

IBAN: FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT: CRLYFRPP

Account in the name of: ESSF

Paypal: you can also make donations via Paypal
(<https://www.paypal.com/fr/cgi-bin/webscr?>

cmd=_flow&SESSION=HYicOYx_ee-
jYpZ4KToLb3oCFQ__alLhQDaCsf2UhDzHg-
ORSJCLJk_DiCqy&dispatch=5885d80a13codb1f8e

We will keep you regularly informed via our site of
the situation and the use of the solidarity fund.

TUNISIA

The Congress of the LGO and the tasks of revolutionaries in Tunisia

DOMINIQUE LEROUGE ·

It is also directly involved in the development of political violence and terrorism: it did not hesitate to open fire on the population of Siliana (at the end of November 2012), it was involved in the repression of the demonstration on April 9, 2012 and the attack on the headquarters of the UGTT (on December 4, 2012) and then the murder of the leader of the Popular Front Chokri Belaïd (on February 6, 2013).

With the murder of a second leader of the Popular Front on July 25, the problem of "kicking out" those in power was posed on a mass scale as an immediate issue.

Nidaa Tounes, candidate to govern

Nidaa is a neo-liberal party formed in June 2012, around the figure of the former regime Beji Caid Essebsi ("BCE"), who was also Prime Minister from March 2011 to the end of that year [1]. Nidaa Tounes wants to get rid of Ennahdha, but without breaking, any more than Ennahdha, with the neo-liberal policies that have been in force since the days of Ben Ali. There can be found in Nidaa a section of the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie that is attached to secularism, former leaders of Ben Ali's party, as well as small currents from the centre-right or centre-left. Nidaa Tounes is in coalition with a party of the centre-right and three small parties with more or less distant origins on the left [2]

With 24.4 per cent of voting intentions, in late September Nidaa was six points ahead of Ennahdha.

Building a left alternative

The parties who come from the Marxist-Leninist (the Workers' Party, formerly called PCOT, the PPDU, the Revolutionary Watad) or Trotskyist (LGO) traditions, came together in October 2012 under the name of Popular Front with several Arab nationalist parties, the Green Party, the association RAID (ATTAC and the CADTM) and "independents", in other words, those not belonging to any party.

Rejecting both the religious (and neo-liberal) Ennahda government and the neo-liberal Nidaa Tounes, the Popular Front has become the third political force in the country. But it is still far from having as much influence as the two main forces: 7.5 per cent of voting intentions in late July (and only 4.6 per cent at the end of September)./

On the other hand the Front includes activists who have for a long time been playing an important role in trade unions and associations, as well as in mobilizations.

The debates within the Popular Front

Completely involved in the mobilizations that followed the assassination of Brahmi, the Popular Front demanded the resignation of the government and the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. It also called for mobilizations to kick out the representatives of the central government in the regions.

But the only party capable of forming a government in the present electoral framework remains Nidaa Tounes.

Faced with this situation, the Popular Front had put forward, since October 2012, the demand for a provisional government of "competent people", that is to say, a government whose members would have no responsibilities in the various parties and

who would undertake not to stand in the forthcoming elections.

But the disproportion in terms of forces between the coalition led by Nidaa and the Popular Front exerts a constant pressure on the Popular Front to ally with Nidaa in the name of the urgency of driving Ennahdha from power.

It was in this context that, by successive steps, a reconciliation took place between the Front and Nidaa. A turning point occurred in the aftermath of the assassination of Mohamed Brahmi, with the creation of the National Salvation Front, among whose components were the Popular Front and Nidaa Tounes, and also the General Union of Tunisian Students (UGET), the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD) and the Union of Unemployed Graduates (UDC).

Since then, both in Tunisia and in Tunisian emigrant circles abroad, members and sympathizers of the Popular Front have expressed concern, doubts or disagreements with the policy implemented by the Popular Front, which had largely based its identity on putting Ennahdha and Nidaa Tounes on the same level.

For some, the constitution of the Salvation Front represents Nidaa coming round to ideas that have been developed by the Popular Front for a long time. In their view, this would enable the Popular Front to increase its audience and develop mobilizations, particularly through "kicking out" government representatives in the regions.

For others, the formation of the Salvation Front has the opposite effect and would on the contrary enable Nidaa, in which leaders of Ben Ali's party have found a second home, to increase its audience and to make the Popular Front its satellite.

This debate was at the heart of the congress of the LGO from September 27-29.

Congress of the LGO

Formed just after 14 January 2011, the League of the Workers' Left (LGO) held its founding congress from 27 to 29 September. The LGO is a member of the "Popular Front for the achievement of the goals of the revolution", set up almost a year ago as a third pole in relation to Ennahdha and Nidaa Tounes.

In this Front, the LGO finds itself alongside numerically much more important organizations such as the Tunisian Workers' Party of (formerly called the PCOT) and the Unified Party of Democratic Patriots (Unified Wadat).

Despite its modest size, the LGO has activists who have played an important role, in clandestinity during the police dictatorship of Ben Ali and in the first almost three years of the revolution. Some of its members are very well known in the country, such as Ahlem Belhadj, president of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD), Fathi Chamkhi, spokesman for RAID (ATTAC /CADTM) and Nizar Amami, union leader of the postal workers of the UGTT confederation.

The opening session was addressed by most of the national leaders of the Tunisian Left and by the widow of Mohamed Brahmi, murdered on July 25, as well as representatives of the NPA, SolidaritéS (Switzerland) and the LCR (Belgium).

For its part, the UGTT was represented by a member of its national leadership and several middle-ranking leaders.

The conference itself took place over the following two days, with an average of forty voting delegates, in the presence of observers from the PST (Algeria), the NPA, SolidaritéS and the LCR.

There was discussion of a document on the political situation, an organizational document and a programmatic document. Moreover, already close to the Fourth International, the LGO also decided to ask to become a full member party. The core of the discussions revolved around the Salvation Front, which the LGO decided to leave by a majority of 81 per cent. At the same time, the Congress decided to

enhance the action of the LGO to build and radicalize the Popular Front as a class alternative to both the "modernist" liberals and the Islamist-liberals. An article on the debates over this question at the Congress is included in this dossier. A leadership was elected, including the different currents of opinion that were expressed during the debate on the Salvation Front.

Alain Krivine (NPA) and Jean Batou (SolidaritéS).

The central role of the UGTT

Founded in 1946, the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT), is the only trade union confederation with a real implantation. Matrix of the national movement during the colonial period, the UGTT has never limited itself to a role of protest: it considers that it has a right to examine the entire way in which Tunisian society functions.

The UGTT is not however a candidate for government and views itself as a counter-power. Its orientation, systematized in June 2012, is to foster the emergence of a consensus between all political and social forces, including Ennahdha. Consistent with this position, prior to the murder of Mohamed Brahmi, the UGTT did not call for either the resignation of the government or the dissolution of the National Constituent Assembly.

On 29 July, it crossed one of the red lines fixed by Ennahdha by calling for the government to resign and for the setting up of a "government of national salvation", composed of independent experts from different parties, a government that would absolutely have to fulfill a list of tasks within a fixed period of time.

But among the delegates who spoke at the National Administrative Commission of the UGTT on July 2, only about a third supported one of the key demands of the Salvation Front: the dissolution of the NCA. The result was to put the UGTT in a position that was halfway between the demands of the demonstrators and those of Ennahdha.

Also in this position were Ettakatol (a social-democratic party which participates in the Troika that makes up the present government), the UTICA (employers' organization), the LTDH (Tunisian League for Human Rights), the Bar, etc.

Noting this, the member organizations of the Salvation Front gradually aligned themselves with the position of the UGTT and its allies. For its part, Ennahdha finally signed, on October 5, the "road map" of the UGTT which included the resignation of the government before the end of the month. Speculation is rife as to whether this process will be carried to its conclusion, or whether there will be a new manoeuvre of the Islamist party.

TUNISIA

The debate on being part of the Salvation Front at the Congress of the LGO

DOMINIQUE LEROUGE ·

First Position: to remain in the Salvation Front (10.8 per cent)

"We must take into account the relationship of forces in Tunisia and internationally. We must put more emphasis on the danger posed by the Islamists, who practice terrorism and political assassination. If tomorrow Ennahdha wins the elections, it will mean the destruction of the revolutionary forces, which will be directly attacked."

"The LGO is not a political force which starts from a bookish position, but is oriented towards the masses. At present the enemy of the masses is Ennahdha, and we must position ourselves in relation to that."

"We therefore have to fight around democratic tasks, which we will later have to link with transitional demands. This is one reason why the conference of the Popular Front on June 1-2 was turned towards democratic demands."

"This June conference also wanted to influence the forces of the centre and right. Nidaa is basically an electoral party and does not have a coherent programme."

The Popular Front has not deviated to the right. On the contrary it had a clear programme and its tactics have been a success: firstly, the initiative of the Popular Front has dislocated the Union for Tunisia (UPT) formed around Nidaa Tounes, secondly the Salvation Front is dominated by the Popular Front.

The initiative of the UGTT was accepted because the dissolution of the National Constituent Assembly was not credible."

"The fact that the spokesperson of the Front has met with the U.S. ambassador is linked to the fact

that Ennahdha and Essebsi are plotting with foreign embassies. It is therefore necessary for the Popular Front also to have diplomatic relations."

"The forces of the LGO are limited and there is a risk of it finding itself isolated.

We must overcome the past opposition between Trotskyists and Maoists. Sectarianism is a destructive logic. We must on the contrary open up to the other parties of the Left.

If we decide to leave the Salvation Front, we must say what we will do then."

To sum up, "The tactic followed was correct. The LGO is a revolutionary organization, but this should not prevent it from taking tactical positions. Criticizing the Salvation Front is a leftist deviation which does not take into account the present balance of forces."

Second position: to leave the Salvation Front (81.1 per cent)

Some people believe that this position was wrong from the beginning:

"Participating in the Salvation Front is a real disaster."

"I do not understand how we can find ourselves side-by-side with former members of the RCD [1]. It is out of the question to find ourselves alongside Nidaa Tounes and Beji Caid Essebsi, who was the initiator of the counter-revolution."

"Our goal is to change the regime. The Salvation Front only wants to change the government, is that a goal for us?"

"We should be against any meeting and discussion with the present government."

Several delegates intervened to explain that this tactic was justified in the wake of the assassination

of Mohammed Brahmi.

"Participating in the Salvation Front was right, but only if the Popular Front had been the locomotive. This was not the case." "Because of our organizational weakness, the LGO was unable to influence the Popular Front so that it stayed on this road."

Another delegate said: "I agreed with the participation of the LGO in the Salvation Front, but my position has changed. We can make mistakes, it is time to take a fresh look at the situation."

Several delegates therefore proposed the following guidelines:

- Working with the liberal forces is not possible for the continuation of the revolution. It is therefore necessary to withdraw from the Salvation Front.
- We must have a position that is independent of Ennahdha and Nidaa Tounes.
- The working class does not need inter-class alliances. The LGO must maintain its class independence from the "modernist" bourgeoisie and continue the struggle.
- We need to focus on the radicalization of the social movement with the UGTT.
- We must radicalize the programme of the Popular Front by putting economic and social issues to the forefront. What is the present economic programme of the Popular Front? The Popular Front says periodically that it will hold a press conference on this subject, but it does not do it.

Some delegates felt that "the Popular Front had drifted to the right."

"The fact that the spokesperson of the Popular

Front has met the U.S. Ambassador poses us with a problem. Inside the Popular Front, the LGO should have expressed its disagreement with that."

"At the Bardo sit-in, we tail-ended the UPT and Nidaa Tunes, who had a lot of money. All this creates a lot of problems among the activists. Meanwhile, in the regions, there have been very important confrontations. Activists have been attacked, and we were being asked: where is the Front?"

The Popular Front is now absent from the media, whereas Nidaa is very much present."

"There is very great anger among grassroots activists of the Popular Front at what is happening. There is a gap between the leaders and the rank and file. There is a problem with respect to how decisions are made".

Third position: freeze participation in the Salvation Front (8.1 per cent)

"Participating in the Salvation Front was not a mistake; we were obliged to do it.

If there had been no Salvation Front, there would not have been thousands of people in the street.

A front is necessary to bring down Ennahdha: you cannot say no to an RCDer who is acting in the same direction as us.

Even if we find ourselves together with bourgeois elements, revolutionaries must take part in it in order to impose revolutionary tasks.

We must give a revolutionary, class, and feminist meaning to this front. Such a link is not automatic, but it must be a dialectic."

TUNISIA

"Socialism is our perspective, the revolutionary party is our means"

On this occasion, the party greeted and thanked all those friends and comrades who had contributed to the success of the opening ceremony, and especially our comrades of the Popular Front and the Fourth International.

The congress took place in a political situation characterized by the continuing revolutionary crisis that began in December 2010. Although the revolution succeeded in driving out Ben Ali, the head of the dictatorial regime, and the symbols of that regime, it has experienced ebbs and flows which have led to the forces of the counter-revolution regaining control over the state apparatus through the successive governments of Ghannouchi and Essebsi, and then the government of the Troika, headed by Ennahdha, as a result of the elections held on 23 October 2011. This government has worsened the economic, social and political crisis by adopting capitalist policies that are hostile to the demands of the masses struggling against poverty, marginalization and unemployment and aspiring to social justice and an equitable balance between the regions. The crisis reached its peak with the assassination of the martyrs Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi.

In these circumstances, the work of the conference took place in a democratic atmosphere and with a broad participation of all comrades in the debates around the present situation in Tunisia, the analysis of the evolution of the political situation since the beginning of the revolutionary uprising and the evaluation of the continuing revolutionary crisis, characterized on the one hand by the success of the forces of the counter-revolution in regaining control of the state apparatus, and on the other by the

continuation of the revolutionary momentum and popular protests.

The congress also discussed the position to take towards the political, social and civil forces in the social movement, as well as how to clarify and determine the urgent and immediate social and economic demands of the popular masses and the need to link them to strategic demands capable of preparing a break with the present capitalist system and its overthrow.

The congress also discussed plans to crystallize the party structures of the LGO to ensure democracy at rank-and-file level and the active participation of all comrades who are members of the party.

The congress discussed the position as regards the Salvation Front that was established after the assassination of comrade Mohamed Brahmi. For the LGO, it is by no means a strategic alliance but a coming together around well-defined tasks contained in the press release dated July 26, 2013, namely the overthrow of the institution resulting from the elections of 23 October which was politically involved in the targeting of the Popular Front for political assassinations and the non-respect of the demands of the revolution. Today we consider that the Salvation Front has abandoned these essential demands and failed in its tasks because of the manoeuvres of the liberal components of the Front and the lack of qualitative initiatives from the Popular Front to give a political lead to the movements of protest. Therefore, the LGO has decided to withdraw from the Salvation Front. But it will continue to engage in the social movement and maintain its activities in the Popular Front, with the perspective of building a workers' and people's pole, with the aim of supporting and radicalizing

the revolutionary process, for the achievement of the objectives of the revolution of 17 December.

The congress completed its work with the election of the leading bodies of the League of the Workers' Left.

HONDURAS

The importance of Xiomara Castro's November 24 presidential election campaign

ELENA ZELEDON ·

November 23, 2013 – *Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal* —

On November 24 the people of Honduras will elect Xiomara Castro Sarmiento de Zelaya as the first woman, and the first avowedly socialist, president of the republic. Her election, if not stolen by fraudulent methods, which is extremely likely given the terror her potential election is causing in the ranks of the ruling oligarchy, will represent the fruits of nearly 20 years of direct and organised mass struggle for social, labour and human rights.

It has been a struggle against various forms of government, from military dictatorships to liberal and more accommodative forms of capitalist rule. It has been a struggle which has produced what could arguably be the most class and social conscious mass movement in the world. It has been a struggle that has produced more than its fair share of martyrs, murdered at the hands of killers hired by the oligarchs, and more than its fair share of sorrow.

There was the massacre of peasants in the Aguan Valley region by the oligarch Miguel Facusse as they resisted his attempt to take their land and use it to increase the size of his African palm oil holdings. There was cold-blooded killing of more than 30 journalists who attempted to speak the truth, to tell the real story of the Honduran people. The selected assassinations of trade union leaders, social activists, LGBTI leaders; assassinations with one political aim: to frighten the mass movement, to serve as an example of the potential consequences of struggle.

On November 24, these sacrifices will be honoured by the Honduran people by their vote for Xiomara Castro's LIBRE party, by their refusal to be cowed

by the oligarchs and their imperialist overseers and by their determination to build a new Honduras.

The election campaign

LIBRE, an acronym for Liberty and Refoundation (and also for Liberals in Resistance) is the political arm of the Front for National Popular Resistance (FNRP). Founded a little more than two years ago, LIBRE is, like the FNRP itself, a coalition of five political tendencies, each regrouping smaller political and social organisations.

The candidates of LIBRE were chosen by internal elections at the local level, and thus represent the relation of forces between the various tendencies. Xiomara Castro is a member of the Popular Resistance Front tendency, the largest of the five groupings, which includes Marxist organisations like the Political Organisation of Troublemakers (OPLN).

While there are political organisations of the left situated outside LIBRE, but who are members of the FNRP, almost all have called for a vote, even if critical, for LIBRE. Its composition and support represent its class make-up: trade unions, peasant unions, human rights and social organisations, small shopkeepers and sections of the radicalised petit bourgeois of the cities and smaller towns. Its candidates represent its class composition as well as its feminist and gender diversity.

LIBRE has consistently led in the polling almost since its founding. The polling itself is suspect as it consistently under-represents the poorest and most rural areas where LIBRE has support unmatched by the bourgeois National and Liberal parties. The last polls reported a more than 10 per cent lead over the right-wing party of the oligarchy, the

National Party. The "left" wing of the bourgeois, the Liberal Party, has suffered a series of internal scandals and is being squeezed between LIBRE and the National Party.

The massive support for LIBRE is shown by the election campaign rallies themselves. They are like the music video of Natalie Cardone's version of "Hasta Siempre", the homage to Che Gueverra. By ones and twos, then by the tens and then by the thousands, the Honduran people fill town and city plazas. Dressed in their white shirts, their red shirts and red handkerchiefs, their white hats and shiny shoes, with music blaring from the giant speakers set beside the speakers' platform around which the crowds gather, the heat and the smell of the country, the surreal beauty which is Honduras forms the backdrop of the event. The masses have come to see the next president, their president, the woman who embodies their hopes and dreams for their country, for their society and for their families.

Her message is simple, straight forward and filled with hope:

Together WE will refound our country. Together WE will build the Honduras which includes all, not just a country for the rich. YOU the people are the ones who make history. YOU the people have struggled to bring us to this point. YOU are Honduras. YOU are our future.

Our program is the program of democracy and of socialism. Socialism is democracy and a new Honduras will be a socialist and democratic one. It will be your democracy. It will be your socialism.

This is Xiomara Castro's message. One might say, "... another Castro, another revolution."

Response of the oligarchs

This message is not going down well with the oligarchs, the 12 families, who own and control most of the productive land, the financial institutions, the infrastructure, the media outlets and the Congress.

They, because of their ties with North American imperialism, ties which bind in hundreds of ways large and small, not only the richest oligarchs but the primary institutions of the state, the police and the army, are extremely worried by these developments.

They first removed judges from the Supreme Court who might, I say might, show some judicial independence in interpreting the events to come, and replaced them with craven creatures without dignity, whose only loyalty is to the bank accounts of the oligarchs.

Next, they tried to change the election rules. Honduras has a first past the post presidential system, like the United States. The candidate with the most votes becomes president. The oligarchs, while shortsighted, are not stupid. They can read the polls like anyone else. They know Xiomara Castro will receive the most votes.

A proposal to change to a run-off system between the top two finishers was proposed to Congress. This was met with mass action and a call to mobilise by LIBRE. The message from LIBRE was clear. Any attempt to change the election rules within the nominated election period would be seen as a coup, and would be met with mass actions whose aim would be to bring down the government.

The Congress backed down. The fall-back position is the old electoral fraud game of stuffing the ballot boxes and using the repressive forces of the state to keep the political partisans away from the polling places. In the week leading up to the election, international observers have been detained by the new military police and have been refused entry to some of the polling stations.

LIBRE's response has been to call on its supporters to flood the polling stations and observe the voting and vote counting using what media they have to record the proceedings. Whether this is enough to reduce the fraud will remain to be seen.

However, the real response of the oligarchs and imperialists has been to create a new repressive arm of the state, the military police. Now numbering about 30,000 and established with funding aid from the US government, this force has ostensibly been established to protect citizens against the violence rampant throughout the country. Honduras is the murder capital of the world, with gang-on-gang violence surpassing that of Mexico on a per-capita basis.

With its appearance as a method of crowd and anti-riot control and training, the real purpose of the force is clear to most Hondurans. Partly the creation of the military police is in response to what appears to the oligarchs as a lessening of loyalty by the regular police to the ruling-class political projects. A sign of this is the candidature, for LIBRE, of a former regional police commander. The pressure of the mass movement has not been without its effects in the lower ranks of the army, though to what extent this has been generalised is not really known. Perhaps the inevitable coup attempt against a Castro administration will reveal it.

Geopolitics and the limits of the new government

Imperialism will not let Honduras escape its direct grasp. This has been the fate of Honduras since its founding after the break-up of the Republic of Central America in the 19th century. Coup regime has followed coup regime. A controlled democratic regime replaced by a naked repressive regime. Such has been the lot of the Honduran people.

The last coup, that which four years ago overthrew the mildly reformist regime of Manuel Zelaya, the husband of Xiomara Castro, was supported by the imperialist governments of Canada and the United States and was a depressingly anticipated event, symbolic of Honduran history.

Honduras is the forward base of US imperialism in Central America. Situated between Guatemala and Nicaragua, Honduras was the rear base for the Contras in their counter-revolutionary war against the Sandinista Front for National Liberation

(FSLN) in Nicaragua, and against the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) of El Salvador.

The United States has trained a great deal of the core army leadership at its notorious "School of the Americas"; maintains a battalion of "military advisors" at its former base in northern Honduras; has established seven "forward operating bases" — including three secret ones — throughout the countryside, with a concentration on the Caribbean coast; and its embassy gives direct orders to the Honduran government.

This knowledge of the subservient nature of the Honduran oligarchs is courtesy of Wikileaks cables released after the overthrow of Zelaya.

A Xiomara Castro government, particularly one with a partially hostile Congress, will face major political hurdles to implement the major plank of LIBRE's platform: the calling of a constituent assembly and the writing of a new constitution which will place political and legal powers in the hands of the Honduran people.

From the point of view of the most politically conscious sections of the mass movement, a constituent assembly and a new constitution means replacing the present institutions of the state with those of popular power, similar too but rather more advanced than the process which opened the way forward for the Venezuelan popular movement. It means a more direct form of democracy. It means wresting control of the future of the country from the hands of the oligarchs and imperialism. It means reversing the savagery of the decades of neoliberalism and placing the economy under worker and popular control. It means land to the tillers. It means free education to the youth. It means a legal and social framework ensuring the rights of gay, lesbian and transgendered people.

This is the social content that the politically conscious elements of the mass movement have poured into the cup of the call for a refounding of their country. But it is this social content that the imperialists and the oligarchs cannot allow. One

the one hand it means the reduction and destruction of the power and the wealth of the oligarchs. On the other, it means that a process of radicalisation of the mass movement, including its eventual arming, will be set afoot with consequences spilling far beyond Honduras's borders.

Nicaragua

First and foremost, its effect will be felt most acutely in Nicaragua. Despite the fact that most of the international left has written off the Sandinista government of Daniel Ortega, the facts on the ground are quite different to those perceived by the "jilted lovers".

Without developing a long analysis of the structural changes in Nicaragua over the past decade, suffice it to say that the Sandinistas have been able to increase their support throughout the country, and especially on the Mosquito Coast among Indigenous former opponents of the revolution.

The programs of health and education, touching especially the women in rural areas, has had an effect of increasing citizen self-confidence in the aims of the revolution. Similarly, among the burgeoning youth population (half of Nicaraguans are under 25), the Sandinistas are seen as the political organisation that best represents their aspirations. It is among these young people that revolutionary Marxist ideas are being spread, as a result of the combined processes underway in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Cuba. It was the Nicaraguan youth participation in last year's May Day celebration, swelling the expected attendance from 100,000 to 300,000 in Managua, and raising revolutionary slogans of solidarity, that signalled this growing politicisation.

A victory for LIBRE will provide an impulse to the cadres of the FMLN in El Salvador, who are facing difficult times due to the nature of the government. A president who is implementing a neoliberal agenda with the help and ideological cover of a leadership adrift, caught in the Stalinist morass of a history of two-stage revolutions and so-called "progres-

sive bourgeoisies", provides little in the way of promoting the revolutionary zeal and organisation needed to overturn Salvadorean social relations.

In Panama, the form of the LIBRE electoral front, one which while multi-class makes no concessions to a non-existent national progressive ruling class, can provide a model for the Unified Popular Movement (MPU) and others to find ways to represent the Panamanian people as they struggle to re-found their country.

Of course, a Xiomara Castro victory and government would bring Honduras back into the fold of ALBA, thereby strengthening Latin American unity in the face of imperialism, and provide an expanded network of solidarity among the peoples of the Southern Hemisphere.

The need for solidarity

The potential of a victory of the people of Honduras on November 24 is a large step forward in the struggle to liberate "Our America", as Jose Marti called it. It has the potential to set off a dynamic in which the attempts to overturn a democratically elected government will be met with mass resistance, not only in Honduras, but throughout Central and South America. The world caught a glimpse of that dynamic by the solidarity shown by the Brazilian, Venezuelan and other governments towards Manuel Zelaya inside the Brazilian embassy.

A few weeks ago, legislators from across Latin America met in Tegucigalpa to show their solidarity with Xiomara Castro. They came from parties that, in whatever way they were able, represented the peoples of Latin America — from Mexico to Argentina. They understood the stakes involved in this election. It was an historic display of solidarity for a potential presidential candidate. Their display of solidarity was a way of showing imperialism that an attempt to deny a victory of the people of Honduras will have consequences far beyond that which they can be prepared for.

If legislators can show this kind of solidarity, can the international left show less?

The Honduran election might not have the cachet of the storming of the Winter Palace. It might not have the political form of "classical Leninism" (whatever that might be these days). It might not have the impact of the fall of Havana or Saigon.

What it will have is the strength of a class-conscious mass movement finding its way to burst onto

the stage of history, to write a new and exciting chapter in the text of social revolution. In order for this history to be written with an outcome favourable to the workers of the world, the broadest possible solidarity movement must be organised to defeat the attempts of US imperialism to overturn the victory of the Honduran people.

In the words of the FNRP; "We will resist! And we will win!"

A renewed and urgent appeal for solidarity and humanitarian support for the survivors of super typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) in Central Visayas and Mindanao, Philippines

Threats of further deaths due illnesses brought about by the extra difficult situations in evacuation camps continue to haunt among survivors who are now temporarily sheltered in tents and in partially collapsed buildings. In fact, there are several reports of deaths already in evacuation camps due to deteriorating health condition, sickness and complications.

The Tri-People's Organization Against Disasters (TRIPOD) together with the Ranao Disaster Response Rehabilitation Action Center (RDRRAC) in Iligan City lead the coordination efforts of around 50 network organizations in Mindanao in a Joint Emergency Response Operation dubbed as "Mindanao Solidarity for Typhoon Yolanda Survivors". The campaign is initiated by a newly formed humanitarian network called the Mindanao Humanitarian Action Network against Disasters (Mi-HANDs).

On November 14-19, 2013, Mi-HANDs sent a team to the affected regions of Visayas to do Rapid Assessment on the needs and conditions of the survivors. They reached Daan Bantayan, Cebu, Palompon and Villaba in Leyte and Ormoc City. In these areas 95 to 100 % of the populations are affected but accurate data remain to be generated by local government units whose officials and workers also suffered severe devastations. Affected villages in these areas are among those that have not received yet any relief assistance from the government or any responding organizations; hence, these were identified by Mi-HANDs as priority areas for emergency relief assistance.

Series of logistical and materials preparations and emergency resource mobilizations are being done by all member organizations to prepare for our sustained Relief Delivery Operation (RDO) to begin on 26 November, 2013. There will be kind-hearted and skilled volunteers on this mission with 3 sub-committees to carry out Relief Delivery Operations, Psycho-social therapy and medical treatment. We are raising financial, materials and logistical support to provide food packs and hygiene kits to surviving families. Each household will receive a relief pack worth Php 1,500 each with food pack containing rice, dried fish, sardines, mongo beans, sugar instant coffee and cooking oil along with a pack of hygiene kit containing bath soap, detergent, toothpaste and toothbrush, face towel, nail cutter and sanitary napkin.

TRIPOD and RDRRAC together with network partners in Mindanao under the initiative of Mi-HANDs would like to APPEAL to you kind-hearted friends and organizations for any financial and materials support for our ongoing campaign to help the survivors of Typhoon Yolanda. Our intervention and assistance is foreseen as not only limited to doing emergency relief assistance but even to the recovery and rehabilitation phase as well as in future pro-active campaigns for disaster risk reduction, the rights-claiming of the survivors and for climate justice.

Please contact/channel your support to:

Mindanao Humanitarian Action Network against Disasters (Mi-HANDs)
www.mihands.org

c/o TRIPOD Foundation, Inc.

37 Tulingan Street, Usman Subdivision, Bagua 2

9600 Cotabato City Tel: +63 64 421 1369

Email: tripodcc@yahoo.com.ph; website:
www.tripodcc.org

c/o RDRRAC Inc.

Door 2, Maca-agir Apartment, 6th East,

Tubod, Iligan City, Tel: 063 223-3171

Email: rddrac_inc@yahoo.com

We will acknowledge your support accordingly and keep you posted on the progress of our actions at our website/s.

Thank you very much for your immediate attention.

Mindanao Humanitarian Alliance against Disasters (Mi-HANDs)

c/o RDRRAC Office Door 2, Maca-agir Apartment, Tubod, 9600 Iligan City

Tel: +63 64 223 3171, www.mihands.org/Facebook

How to donate from outside the Philippines

The association Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF or Europe in Solidarity Without Borders) is collecting funds for Mi-HANDs' campaign: "Mindanao Solidarity for Typhoon Yolanda Survivors".

Individuals and organizations willing to send donations to support Mi-HANDs initiative may use this

channel, if it's easier for them. We are regularly reporting on our website on the progress of the campaign and the use of the donations.

To send donations

Cheques

cheques to ESSF in euros only, payable in France, to be sent to:

ESSF

2, rue Richard-Lenoir

93100 Montreuil

France

Bank Account:

Crédit lyonnais

Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)

10 boulevard Chanzy

93100 Montreuil

France

ESSF, account number 445757C

International bank account details :

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP

Account holder : ESSF

Through PayPal

You can send money through Paypal: see the PayPal button on the upper left side of ESSF home page..

DENMARK

Result of the municipal and regional election in Denmark 19th of November 2013

Furthermore the results grants the RGA a seat in the National Organization of Municipalities which negotiate the economy of the municipalities with the government and has been tolerating one austerity budget after the other even though it previously had a majority consisting of the Social Democrats (SD) and the Socialist People's Party (SPP). This gives the RGA a change to break the austerity consensus.

The local election result is the best for the RGA since our founding in 1989. It was far better than our aim in the election campaign which was to have 100 city councilors and between 5-6 percent of the votes. Actually the result was the best result of the Danish leftwing to the left of the SPP since the post-war municipal election in 1946.

In Copenhagen the RGA became the second biggest party with 19,5 % of the votes. The SD became the biggest with 27,8 % of the votes. During the late night negotiations the RGA in Copenhagen got the important seat as mayor for the Construction and Technical Affairs Department which give us an opportunity to prioritize a green and job creating path for the development of the Danish capital.

In the second and third biggest cities of Denmark, Aarhus and Aalborg, the RGA became third biggest party after the SD and liberal party. But most significantly the result means that we are now represented in all corners of Denmark and part of the local politics in a majority of the Danish municipalities. This is an important step that can hopefully help us to consolidate our current success.

The general result was a defeat for the SD and SPP governmental parties. A defeat that clearly reflects

the lost confidence many voters have in the two parties since they entered government and continue the neoliberal economic policy of the former right wing government, that their voters opposed.

The SPP lost more than half of their local elected with only 5,6 % of the votes compared to 14,5 % in the 2009 election. The SD lost votes as well, but kept their position as the largest party in municipal politics. The third party in government, the social liberal party, gained votes from 3,7 % to 4,8 %. Unfortunately their newly elected have in several places aligned themselves with the right wing.

The leading right wing opposition party gained votes and became the party with most mayors, but the success wasn't as great as they had hoped as the party has been hit by scandals around its leader in recent months.

The conservative party got its worst election in history, but a better result than predicted by many due to its strong local position.

The extreme right wing party, the Danish People's Party (DPP), gained 10,1 % of the votes. These votes were especially taken from former SD voters disappointed by the austerity policy of the SD as well as former conservative voters. The party might gain a mayor in the Copenhagen suburban municipality of Hvidovre from the SD, but negotiations are not yet finalized. The DPP has already gained one of the 7 mayors in Copenhagen. This is the first time the DPP gains a mayor in Danish politics.

The extreme neoliberal party, Liberal Alliance, gained 2,9 % of the votes which was a clear success from last election where the party only gained one municipal seat.

Overall the result was historic for our party and gives us a strengthened position to defend the wel-

fare, health and social security of people as well as in promoting a green policy that creates jobs. Furthermore it's an opportunity to strengthen our position as one of the leading parties in the workers movement in Denmark. It is clear that the voters rewarded the RGA for fighting social cut downs and at the same time working pragmatic to get any possible improvement for ordinary people and environment.

—

Final national result for the municipal election:

Inside () shows development from last election.

Social Democrats: 29,5 % (-1,1)

Liberals: 26,6 % (1,8)

Danish People's Party: 10,1 % (2)

Conservatives: 8,6 % (-2,4)

The Red-Green Alliance: 6,9 % (4,6)

The Socialist People's Party: 5,6 % (8,9)

Others: 5 % (0,4)

Social Liberals: 4,8 % (1,1)

Liberal Alliance: 2,9 % (2,6)

USA

A Socialist in Seattle City Council

BARRY SHEPPARD ·

Sawant, who was born in India but moved to the United States and is now a U.S. citizen, ran as an activist. She first drew attention as part of the local Occupy protests that included taking over a downtown park and a junior college campus in 2011.

While Occupy as an organized movement has faded, many of those who were inspired by it have organized on other fronts. These include opposition to foreclosures, support to the strikes and demonstrations by fast food workers, and opposition to coal trains coming through the Seattle area for Asian export. Sawant has been in the midst of these actions as a vocal champion, and it was these activists who formed the backbone of her campaign.

A few days after her victory in the tight race was confirmed, the new city council member stood with Boeing workers rallying in struggle against the company. Boeing's International Association of Machinists workers had voted down a concession's contract by a large majority.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported: "The rain was cold, dripping down her blue poncho, but the newly elected city councilwoman's words sizzled. Surrounded by union workers gathered to support Boeing's machinists, Kshama Sawant denounced the two-party political system, corporate greed, military contracts and the leaders of the aerospace giant..."

"We don't need the executives!" cried Seattle's first elected Socialist in living memory, as the damp crowd cheered and rush-hour traffic hummed slowly by. "We need Boeing to be under democratic public ownership by workers – by the community!"

Sawant's campaign centered on a program of immediate demands relevant to the continuing recession

workers face in the situation of deepening inequality as the capitalists are reaping high profits, and the stock market has reached historic highs. There were three central demands: a raise of the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, controls to curb skyrocketing rents in Seattle, and a tax on millionaires to fund a public transit system and other city projects.

Such demands, and others which socialists can develop, point in the opposite direction of the austerity pathway the Democrats and Republicans are charting. These demands struck a chord, as did her denunciation of the Democrats and Republicans. The whole country has seen the two parties of capital fail to address the needs of the "99 percent" while the "1 percent" has been coddled during the Great Recession and its aftermath.

Sawant didn't hide or downplay the fact that she is a socialist. The fact that she won as an open socialist in a city-wide election is important. It reflects that there is a new openness to socialism, especially among young people. An article in *The New York Times* quoted Sawant, "I think we have shown the strongest skeptics that the socialist label is not a bad one for a grassroots campaign to succeed."

Even the man she defeated, 16-year Democratic Party incumbent Richard Conlin, said after the election, "I don't think socialism makes most people in Seattle afraid." Recent polls also show that some 60 percent in the 18-29 age group favor socialism over capitalism when presented with that alternative.

This should not be overstated. Sawant's victory and these polls do not mean that socialism is well understood, or that large numbers now consider themselves to be socialists. Socialist organizations have been losing members, and the socialist label is

anathema to many, especially in less progressive areas of the country. But it does show socialists can make inroads with concrete proposals, and there is an audience for socialist ideas.

Seattle is a solid Democratic Party city. This meant that Sawant did not face the obstacle of "lesser evilism," whereby people are cowed into voting Democratic lest a Republican would win. The race was between a Socialist and a Democrat. Seattle now has a two-party council, without a Republican in sight.

Sawant's campaign began modestly. She was able to utilize the fact that Seattle is a one-party town to point out that party must serve the interests of the capitalist who run the place. She said, "the Democratic Party machines...totally run these cities in the interests of the rich and powerful," declaring Conlin to be a "corporate-pandering politician." As the campaign wore on, this became increasingly obvious.

"Conlin garnered donations from every single corporate real estate interest, downtown law firm, commercial construction magnate, railroad honcho, and so on," one commentator noted. Sawant rejected such donations. But as her campaign gained steam, her activist base raised a considerable sum of \$125,000 (still less than Conlin spent). Conlin also had the support of the Seattle Times (the major newspaper), the Democratic Party district committees, several unions, the mainstream environmental organizations, and the other elected officials.

Sawant was initially educated in Mumbai, India, and then in the U.S. She teaches economics at Seattle Community College. The American Federation of Teachers local there endorsed her, as did a local of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). She was also endorsed by the Stranger, a community newspaper that appeals to the young, the radical, and LGBTQ people.

But as her momentum grew, there were some interesting defections. Some Democratic officials broke ranks to support Sawant, despite Conlin's cries of foul. Then the county central labor council voted 28 to 21 to endorse the socialist, not enough for the two-thirds needed for formal endorsement, but enough to make headlines. Then Conlin himself came over to support a \$15 minimum wage, as did the two Democrats vying for mayor.

Another factor in Sawant's support was that Conlin was head of the city council's land-use committee, and had a pro-developer record. One activist wrote in a letter to the editor, "When ordinary citizens attended land-use meetings in large numbers Conlin ignored our pleas" to stop the developers riding roughshod. "Council members said our ideas were 'non-starters,' so we turned to Sawant and discovered that she understood our concerns. She is passionate about empowering people, not corporations."

Her campaign attracted attention in India. The third largest newspaper in the world, The Times of India, said she "reels off the list of betrayals by both Republicans and Democrats: Guantanamo, drone attacks, Afghanistan, Wall Street pandering, Bradley Manning's incarceration..."

Kshama Sawant ran as the candidate of Socialist Alternative, an affiliate of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI) based in Britain. The CWI considers itself Trotskyist. Her campaign was endorsed by Solidarity and the International Socialist Organization. It is to be hoped that similar efforts can bring together revolutionary socialists of different backgrounds in the United States in common work and discussion.

This article was first published on the Solidarity website-><http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/4046>.

PHILIPPINES

Haiyan/Yolanda: Inside each new-born violent storm is the DNA of the fossil fuel industry and capitalism

ALEXANDRE A. COSTA ·

Haiyan may be just a taste of the storms of a close future

"As you warm the climate, you basically raise the speed limit on hurricanes"

— Kerry A. Emanuel, atmospheric scientist, MIT

Typhoons (in the Pacific), hurricanes (in the Atlantic) are essentially the same phenomenon: tropical cyclones. These meteorological systems form over warm oceanic waters, over which the air heats up and ascends, leaving a low pressure near the surface. Because of Earth's rotation, when low-pressure conditions appear, the air is not simply sucked in as by a vacuum cleaner. Instead, the winds are deflected and start to rotate clockwise (in the Southern Hemisphere) or counter clockwise (in the Northern Hemisphere). As the air gains speed, it enhances evaporation, bringing abundant water vapour into the atmosphere. The ascending motion transports the moisture to upper levels where it condensates, producing clouds. In this process, as water molecules that originally came from a warm ocean go from vapour to liquid phase, they liberate the large amount of energy they contained ("latent heat"). As a consequence, air warms up even further, tends to accelerate upwards. This process boosts the low-level pressure system, which makes the wind rotation stronger, again augmenting evaporation and so on. Typhoons and hurricanes are therefore born from what we climate scientists call a "positive feedback". If conditions are favourable, these monsters arise as sustained and powerful storms that have warm oceanic waters for their food.

Based on this, imagine what we might expect if ocean temperatures rise... And they have risen. A

lot. According to the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 5th Assessment Report (AR5), the sea surface has been warming up at an average rate of more than a tenth of a degree Celsius per decade since the 1970's. This is not surprising at all, as the oceans retain about 93% of the excess heat associated with Earth's energy imbalance caused by the cumulative effect of the human emission of greenhouse gases (especially CO₂). In fact, thermal energy is accumulating in the upper 700m of world's ocean at a rate of 137 TW (Tera-Watts). This is about 60 times larger than the entire electricity generated by our species worldwide! [2] This energy must be liberated somehow! And storms are nothing but a perfect means of the climate system to resolve this physical instability, moving a huge amount of this stored energy into the oceans (made bigger by global warming) and into to the atmosphere. Haiyan may be just a flavour of what is to come .

Additionally, it is known that warming causes ocean water to expand, elevating sea level. Along with the already discernible human effect on global mean ocean levels, which, with the concurrence of natural factors, has raised the water levels around the Phillipines at a rate of about 10 cm per decade in the recent years, as also shown by the IPCC's AR5. As the oceans continue to rise, the impacts of all storms in coastal areas tend to be amplified.

Can we say that global warming is causing these storms?

Sometimes people say: "there were always big storms". In fact, from 1961 to 1990 (the period the World Meteorological Organization usually takes as reference for "current" climate) there were 10 very strong Atlantic hurricanes (or "category 5") and

there are reports of deadly storms raging through the Phillipines since the 19th century (such as the Angela typhoon that killed about 1800 people in 1867).

However, at the moment, global sea surface temperatures are, on average, almost 0.4°C warmer than the 1961-1990 mean and probably more than 0.6°C warmer than they used to be 150 years ago. And each tenth of a degree matters when it comes to the amount of vapour that may get out from warm waters as it increases exponentially, according to simple Physics [3]. In addition, due to the same physical cause, the amount of water vapour in the atmosphere has increased by 3.5% in 40 years.

If global warming means heated waters and more atmospheric water vapour, the conclusion is that a warmer world, which is what we already have, now, is more prone to produce massive storms such as Haiyan! This is why many of us climate scientists do not accept the old jargon that simply suggests that "no individual storm is caused by global warming". This is a half-truth or worse than that. If global warming provides extra fuel for giant storms, all storms in the present already have the human fingerprint; every single storm has greater chance of being stronger than it would be over colder waters. As a whole, they cannot even be seen as "natural phenomena" anymore!

There are plenty of analogies for this type of "probabilistic causation". A classic one is placing a bet on a loaded casino dice, whose outcome may not be clear when rolling it once, but may show a spectacular effect after multiple repetitions, as the numbers in the dice have no longer the same chance of occurrence. Another one is to depict warmer atmosphere and oceans as athletes using steroids and/or stimulants. A soccer player under the effect of any of these substances will certainly have his/her overall performance altered. Although linking a particular kick or run to the presence of these substances in his/her bloodstream may be difficult, it is cynicism to use this to disregard the role they play in the big picture. This is exactly what climate change deniers do to help the cause of the fossil

fuel industry. In opposition to that, it is scientifically reasonable to consider that global warming is already fuelling stronger storms!

At 400 PPM of atmospheric CO₂, the fossil fuel industry must be liable for greater disasters

Current global warming is caused by the accumulation of greenhouse gases in Earth's atmosphere as successively shown by the IPCC reports and a huge number of scientific papers that show clear evidence of that. As we approach an annual mean value of 400 parts per million of CO₂, way above the "safe limit" suggested by the Climate Science [4], the human contribution for Earth's energy imbalance, mostly because of those gases, gives us an amount of energy equivalent to the explosion of 17 Hiroshima bombs per second. A significant part of this imbalance warms up the ocean, especially in its upper portion [5].

Due to fossil fuels being the major source of emissions of the most important greenhouse gas (CO₂) it is reasonable to say that the oil and coal companies do, in fact, hold responsibility for the intensification of tropical cyclones. The question we need to raise is, thus: Will we allow them to keep hiding behind the uncertainties in the climate science (because of the limitations that still persist in the observation network and in the computational modelling tools), when there is a clear physical mechanism that links global warming and warmer oceans to more extreme events and more vigorous hurricanes and typhoons? There is a great deal of evidence showing us that a warmer world will give birth to monstrous storms, that Haiyan can become the first of a series of devastating disasters; will we allow fossil fuel companies to walk out of the court with impunity?

The influence of the extra atmospheric CO₂ is ubiquitous. Therefore the influence of the fossil fuel corporations, which poured that gas into the atmosphere as waste, is inside everything that happens in Earth's atmosphere today and consequently in the other parts of the climate system [6]. In addition, the amount of CO₂ beyond the pre-industrial

levels in the atmosphere, even with not a single further anthropogenic emission, is already capable of warming up the world at least some extra tenths of a degree Celsius. It is also capable of maintaining a long-term trend of warming in the deep oceans that may last for many centuries or a few millennia, with much more sea level rise as a consequence. Those two factors (warmer waters that propel tropical cyclones with stronger winds and more precipitation and elevated sea levels that amplify the storm surge) already magnify the impacts of the disaster caused by the landfall of a hurricane of a typhoon especially over poorer, more vulnerable people.

The tendency, however, as emissions continue to increase year after year and more CO₂ accumulates, is to surpass other boundaries, way beyond 350 ppm. Besides providing a warming of more than 2°C relative to the pre-industrial times, going beyond 450 ppm is like walking on quicksand. Global warming may become self-sustained if some "positive feedbacks" are initiated at certain intensity. This includes the "water vapour feedback" (the warmer the atmosphere, the more water vapour it is able to retain, but as vapour is itself a greenhouse gas, its enhanced presence in the atmosphere favours further warming of the atmosphere itself and the surface below it); the "ice-albedo feedback" (the warmer the world, more ice loss occurs and, as sea ice is a brilliant surface that reflects a large proportion of sunlight, preventing it to penetrate the ocean and to be absorbed by it, its reduction leads to further warming and so on, i.e., warming produces melting, which favours warming); the "permafrost feedback" (frozen soil contains organic matter and, as it thaws because of global warming, this matter gets exposed to decomposition, liberating both methane and carbon dioxide into the atmosphere thus enhancing the greenhouse effect, providing extra warming, and producing further permafrost thawing), etc.; other feedbacks involve breaking the stability of land biomes such as tropical forests, the liberation of methane that is cur-

rently stored at the bottom of the oceans in the form of clathrates and more.

Maybe the high concentrations of methane found in the Arctic [7] and the disintegration of the North Pole sea ice (very well documented in the scientific literature including IPCC AR5) are not yet complete indicators of irreversible climate change. But these facts should at least be taken as severe alerts to the risk of triggering those feedbacks that may ultimately drive Earth's climate system into an unstable, out of control, spiral. Therefore, we can only agree with Mr. Yeb Saño, from the Filipino delegation at the 19th Conference of the Parties (COP19) in Warsaw, who describes the climate crisis as "madness".

From madness to total inferno?

"My philosophy is to make money. If I can drill and make money, then that's what I want to do."

— Rex Tillerson, Chairman, President and CEO, Exxon Mobil

According to very recent estimates there are about 7.3 to 11 trillion tons of carbon stored in fossil fuel reserves (including not only conventional oil, coal and gas, but also tar sands, shale gas and other unconventional sources), as stated by the GEA [8].

What would be a world with all fossil fuels burnt? According to a paper by Dr. James Hansen and collaborators, published at the "Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society" [9], it may become simply uninhabitable in many areas. Based on evidences from particularly warm past climates (as the Palaeocene–Eocene Thermal Maximum and the Mid-Eocene Climatic Optimum at about 56 and 42 million years ago, respectively) and modelling, they state "global warming of that magnitude would make most of the planet uninhabitable by humans. The human body generates about 100 W of metabolic heat that must be carried away to maintain a core body temperature near 37°C, which implies that sustained wet bulb temperatures above 35°C can result in lethal hyperthermia. Today, the summer temperature varies widely over the Earth's

surface, but wet bulb temperature is more narrowly confined by the effect of humidity, with the most common value of approximately 26–27°C and the highest approximately of 31°C. A warming of 10–12°C would put most of today's world population in regions with wet a bulb temperature above 35°C".

This extreme scenario is what we may achieve if we burn the more than 7 trillion tons of fossil carbon stored as coal, oil and gas. For those who may get sceptical on such scenario, our neighbouring planet, Venus, with average temperatures above 460°C, reminds us what a runaway greenhouse may produce an inferno where tin and lead are liquids, no water no chance of complex life (at least as we know it), and covered by a dense atmosphere mostly composed of CO₂, with thick sulphuric acid clouds.

But way before this extreme situation, we may face the issue that no adaptation is possible for many millions, perhaps billions of people in view of the expected changes in the occurrence of extreme events (not only tropical cyclones, but also floods, landslides, heat waves, forest fires, blizzards – yes, they do get more intense in a warmer world, with more atmospheric water vapour, even during the winter - droughts, etc.). For the most vulnerable populations, adapting is simply not possible for a warming much greater than the one we already have. The Philippines are a clear example that for the poorest, adaptation is already a difficult issue for the storms of the present. Each tenth of a degree Celsius matters, unless the world's ruling class aims for the multiplication of climate refugees and body bags!

People must take control of fossil fuels to keep them where they are

"We're more likely to see other companies as collaborators rather than adversaries... We aren't so much competing with each other as we are competing with the earth. And maybe that's a healthy way to look at it."

— George Kirkland, managing director of Chevron Nigeria

"'Realizability' or 'unrealizability' is in the given instance a question of the relationship of forces, which can be decided only by the struggle."

— Leon Trotsky, in "the Transitional Program"

Despite all of the evidence pointing to climate change as an extremely serious and urgent issue, it is not in the plan of the corporations to reduce their profits, allowing the dramatic cuts in CO₂ emissions that are necessary. Those companies own fossil fuel reserves capable, if burnt, of driving the climate system to a point of no-return. The report entitled "Unburnable Carbon 2013" [10] states that the carbon budget for a 2°C scenario would be around 565–886 billion tonnes (Gt) of CO₂ to 2050". This amount is what comes from mere 154–242 Gt of fossil carbon, which is much less than if it was estimated by the GEA in the world's fossil fuel reserves! Those companies are merged with the financial system as described in bright colours by the Transnational Institute [11], and only 200 of them own reserves that contain much more carbon than this very tight budget, as burning their certified reserves would correspond to emitting 746 GtCO₂, again according to the "Unburnable Carbon 2013". In fact, only one coal company (Severstal JSC) and 3 oil companies (Lukoil, Exxon and British Petroleum) control reserves that might produce almost 261 GtCO₂, beyond the upper limit of the 2°C carbon budget estimates [12]. Investors want this huge amount of fossil carbon to be extracted and burned, to turn into profits. But this is clashing the stability of Earth's climate and the global ecosystem. It destroys the material conditions necessary to guarantee the long-term survival of our species (and many others).

Therefore, as long as these fossil fuel reserves are kept as private property, the more undermined becomes the chances of maintaining physical, objective conditions for a human society with dignity, equality and justice. Further, they must become

collective, in order to be kept intact... keep the oil in the soil, and the coal in the hole.

Leon Trotsky, in his *Transitional Program* was always driven by a sense of urgency, because of the effects that the economic crisis right before the World War II was producing in the working class. He stated, "*The question is one of guarding the proletariat from decay, demoralization and ruin. The question is one of life or death of the only creative and progressive class, and by that token of the future of mankind. If capitalism is incapable of satisfying the demands inevitably arising from the calamities generated by itself, then let it perish.*"

Perhaps what we are facing regarding climate change is not only the urgency of guarding the poor, the workers, the youth, the women, the indigenous people, the peasants, i.e., the protagonists of change, from decay, ruin and even death, as Haiyan produced in a dramatic fashion. Perhaps we are talking about guarding the stability of the global biogeochemical cycles and of the very physical conditions that allow food and water to be produced. No Socialism is possible in an isolated country. Barbarism becomes much more probable than Socialism in a scorched Earth.

PHILIPPINES SOLIDARITY

First steps in solidarity campaign with typhoon victims

PIERRE ROUSSET ·

Sending of 4,000 euros

On November 13, we were able to give our bank the order to transfer 4,000 euros to the account of the RDRRAC, one of our partners in the Philippines (see below). We have set up a permanent Asia solidarity fund, which in particular gives us the means to rapidly send a small initial financial aid – an advance – while awaiting donations.

The fact that we expect the response to our appeal to be significant – by our standards at least - has also allowed us to immediately transfer 4,000 euros. In the first four days we have received more than 2,700 euros in the form of cheques and Paypal payments. We don't yet know the amount of sums received by bank transfers (the bank takes a certain time to inform us of them) nor obviously of cheques not yet arrived in the post.

The appeal has been reproduced on several sites and in several countries in French and English. It has been translated into Dutch and probably other languages; articles calling for solidarity have also been translated into Spanish. As before, our initiative has an international dimension. We will report further on the financial situation next week.

Our Philippine partners

The donations we received are sent to our Philippine partners, directly involved on the ground and with whom we have already collaborated in the past: the "Tri-People's Organization Against Disasters (TRIPOD) Foundation" and the "Ranaw Disaster Response & Rehabilitation

Assistance Center, (RDRRAC) Inc: – we worked with the latter in support of the victims of a previous deadly typhoon which had particularly affected the province of Iligan.

Faced with humanitarian disasters, our association seeks partners in popular effective activist movements working directly on the ground; giving priority to the most deprived and reducing to the minimum their own costs of functioning; working in the long term, linking emergency aid, rehabilitation and reconstruction ; promoting the self-organisation of the victims so they become actors in their own destiny and can fight the multiple discriminations related to official aid and reconstruction of the devastated areas.

We have regular links with such movements in several regions of the Philippines, but not where typhoon Haiyan has hit hardest, in the centre-east of the archipelago (notably the islands of Leyte and Samar). Tripod and RDRRAC are based in Mindanao, in the south of the Philippines. Before launching our appeal, we have thus verified that they would be able to intervene in the areas affected. This is all the more possible for them since there is a real proximity between a part of the population of Mindanao and those in the Visayas: family links, and sometimes common languages.

Also Tripod and RDRRAC have a varied experience of action during humanitarian disasters, operating in a region characterised by violent typhoons, floods and landslides (often caused by the destruction of the forests) or military conflicts – notably between government forces and Muslim movements: internal refugees and displaced persons form part of the political reality of Mindanao.

Working with popular layers, Tripod addresses both the descendants of Christian Philippine migrants and the mountain tribes and Moros (the "three peoples" of the island), combating social, religious and ethnic discrimination and drawing on inter-community solidarity.

Sending of a first team by Tripod

That doesn't mean the task will be easy. The devastation wrought by the typhoon is so vast and the human shock so deep that the social tissue often seems ripped up. The local authorities are immobilised or spectral. The popular organizations are temporarily paralyzed: their offices are destroyed, priority is given to the counting of the dead, and the search for survival of family members.

The incredible presidential neglect does not help things. One week after the disaster, the most elementary aid only begins to arrive with an eyedropper and not yet everywhere. Tons of emergency equipment and food aid piles up in the airports while the government, which is supposed to coordinate its distribution, settles accounts among rival clans and muzzles the press so that it cannot reveal the breadth of the drama. Time passes, the situation gets worse, the risks of epidemics and insecurity mount, endangering humanitarian interventions. Rapes seem to multiply, as a symptom of social breakdown.

Tripod has already sent a first team to renew links with one of its organizations: a network of youth originally from Mindanao, living in the affected region, who have already organized some small aid actions. Now they must establish contacts with local popular movements. This team should in particular quickly choose a place which is not too dangerous from where aid, rehabilitation, and social reorganisation actions can be initiated with local partners. A second Tripod team is currently on its way.

A long haul

We are only at the beginning of a long term intervention. It is not only about distributing essential

goods and alleviating suffering, but a collective work involving helping the population to overcome the social and psychological shock, to emerge from its situation of dependency, to act in a coordinated fashion rather than everybody for themselves.

Many international humanitarian organizations are specialized: emergency medicine, food aid, child care and so on. They can deploy considerable resources, save many lives, but they have no intention of remaining. On the other hand, the activist and popular networks operating at this level are faced with a whole spectrum of problems created by such disasters. Where habitations have been massively destroyed, regroupment centres should be conceived to ensure the reconstitution of social activity. They must respond to an overall question: allowing the affected communities to emerge from a situation of powerless victim – at the risk of friction with the established powers who do not look kindly on the said victims affirming their rights.

Organizations like Tripod and RDRRAC have very few resources whereas the needs are unlimited. So they must be helped now to aid the affected populations. But it is also necessary to accompany them in a more long term task.

To send donations

Cheques

Cheques in euros only and payable in France made out to ESSF should be sent to:

ESSF

2, rue Richard-Lenoir

93100 Montreuil

France

Bank:

Crédit lyonnais

Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)

10 boulevard Chanzy

93100 Montreuil

France

ESSF, account number 445757C

National bank references (RIB):

Bank: 30002

Code: 00525: 0000445757C

Key: 12

Account in the name of: ESSF

International bank references:

IBAN: FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT: CRLYFRPP

Account in the name of: ESSF

Paypal: you can also make donations via Paypal.

We will keep you regularly informed via our site ESSF of the situation and the use of the solidarity fund.

PHILIPPINES

After Haiyan: The ineptness of those who govern and the urgency of solidarity

PIERRE ROUSSET ·

It would be impossible to "prove" that this or that cyclone would have taken place without global warming. Perhaps, but that isn't the point [1]. Haiyan is the most powerful typhoon having touched land ever recorded in the world, The unlucky Philippine archipelago suffered at full force the violence of exceptional meteorological phenomena formed in the Pacific Ocean. The list of deadly typhoons gets ever longer: Frank (Fengshen, 2008), Ondoy (Ketsana, 2009), Sendong (Washi, 2011), Pablo (Bopha, 2012) and now Yolanda (Haiyan, 2013). The worst is perhaps yet to come: cyclones are getting more numerous, and their trajectories are changing.

The "message" of Haiyan is clear: this is what climate chaos means for the peoples of the world – in particular for the poorest sectors who often live in the riskiest areas, threatened with floods, mudslides, rising sea waters. In these times of emergency, corruption as well as the destruction of the public services in the name of neoliberal dogma and private interest have contributed to rendering the state impotent.

Negligence on the part of the international community of the wealthy, criminal negligence also on the part of the Philippine presidency. The disaster was foreseen, but nothing was done to evacuate the inhabitants of the most exposed areas. Solidly protected stocks of supplies and medical equipment were not constituted. Emergency centres were not set up in advance when the authorities knew the risks incurred and when communications were still easy. The Philippine elites seemed to completely ig-

nore disaster prevention policy - certainly the rich can withdraw from the threatened areas but the poor lacked any means to do so. As to the local authorities, they were left to themselves to face the situation with very little means.

Television coverage, together with the reports of journalists or "cyclone hunters" who were on the spot have allowed us to take the measure of the disaster. The coastal town of Tacloban (220,000 inhabitants) was literally razed and it is feared that there alone up to ten thousand could be dead. The hospitals are devastated, the staff no longer have medicines. The survivors roam the ruins to find water, food, clothing, something to build a shelter with, while President Benigno Aquino denounces "looting" and vows to "re-establish order": army tanks arrive more quickly than the undistributed food aid! Rather than point the finger to criminalise the victims, Aquino would be better to draw the consequences of his incapacity to protect the people and prevent disaster.

Tacloban is not the only area struck by disaster. Haiyan passed over numerous islands of the Visayas, in addition to Samar and Leyte which the media have mentioned: 41 provinces were more or less seriously affected by the typhoon. Communications are still very difficult. It is today impossible to estimate the number of victims and the scale of destruction. The United Nations have warned that so far as the final balance sheet is concerned, it is necessary to "expect the worst".

Impossible not to be angry in the face of such a disaster; however now is the time for solidarity. International aid is being set up; so much the better. As indispensable as that is, experience also

shows its limits, indeed its perverse effects as the dramatic situation in Haiti continues to remind us.

Aid should be conceived as restoring a real decision making power to the affected populations. The victims should not be treated as helpless persons awaiting charity! Self-organisation of the people should be facilitated so they can defend their interests at a time of great weakness and dependency, as well as great disarray. If not, the most deprived could become victims several times over: of the natural disaster, of unequalitarian distribution of aid, and then of an unequalitarian reconstruction to the benefit of the wealthy.

Emergency aid (water, food, medicines and so on), rehabilitation and reconstruction should also be linked – aid should not be reduced to a short operation, but should continue long term.

It is in this spirit, in this perspective, that the association "Europe solidaire sans frontières" has launched an appeal for financial solidarity, to help our Philippine partners to aid the victims notably where the bulk of international aid will not go.

To send donations

Cheques

Cheques in euros only and payable in France made out to ESSF should be sent to:

ESSF

2, rue Richard-Lenoir

93100 Montreuil

France

Bank

Crédit Lyonnais

Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)

10 boulevard Chanzy

93100 Montreuil

France

ESSF, account number 445757C

National bank references (RIB):

Bank: 30002

Code: 00525: 0000445757C

Key: 12

Account in the name of: ESSF

International bank references:

IBAN: FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12

BIC / SWIFT: CRLYFRPP

Account in the name of: ESSF

Paypal: you can also make donations via [Paypal-
https://www.paypal.com/uk/cgi-bin/webser?cmd=_flow&SESSION=JnPvhpDVo7dKx6vTD-m7hxvfqXr3zFRtL8R8rIuNgjkpai6xiL9mEqP-wUj4&dispatch=5885d80a13c0db1f8e263663d3-fae8def8934b92a630e40b7fef61ab7e9fe63].

We will keep you regularly informed via our site of the situation and the use of the solidarity fund.

ECONOMY:

Bankocracy: from the Venetian Republic to Mario Draghi and Goldman Sachs

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

Bankocracy: from the Venetian Republic to Mario Draghi and Goldman Sachs

by Eric Toussaint

Their Order was outlawed, the leaders executed and its assets seized. Its army (fifteen thousand men, including one thousand five hundred knights), its patrimony and its credits to rulers failed to protect it from the power of a State set on eliminating its main creditor.

During the same era (11th – 14th centuries) Venetian bankers were also financing the Crusades and lending money to the powerful of Europe, but they manoeuvred much more deftly than the Knights Templar. In Venice, they took control of the State by founding the Venetian Republic. They financed the transformation of the Venetian city-state into a veritable empire including Cyprus, Euboea (Negroponte) and Crete. They made use of a clever strategy to gain lasting wealth and guarantee reimbursement of their credits: they decided to drive the Venetian state into debt towards the banks they owned. They were the ones who set the terms of the loan contracts, as they were at once bank owners and rulers of the State.

While Philip the Fair had an interest in physically ridding himself of his creditors to be free from the debt burden, the Venetian State reimbursed the debt to bankers in cash. The latter came up with the idea of creating public debt titles that could circulate between banks. This was a step towards the establishment of financial markets [2] This type of loan is the precursor to the major form of State debt as we know it in the 21st century.

Today, seven centuries after Philip the Fair crushed the Knights Templar, the bankers of Europe, just

like their Venetian or Genovese forebears, clearly have nothing to fear from governments.

The national states and the contemporary European Union proto-state may be more complex and sophisticated than the Venetian – or Genovese – Republics in existence from the 13th to the 16th century, but they are just as nakedly organs for the exercise of ruling class power, the 1% holding sway over the 99%. Mario Draghi, the former managing director of Goldman Sachs in Europe, heads the European Central Bank. The private bankers have placed their representatives or allies in key posts in governments and administrations. European Commission members are very attentive to the defence of private finance interests, and the lobbying that banks exert with respect to European parliamentarians, regulators and magistrates is very effective indeed.

If a handful of major capitalist banks have occupied centre stage in recent years, this must not hide the role of major private firms in industry and commerce, who use and abuse their close links with governmental structures just as deftly as the bankers. The maze of crossed interests amongst states, governments, banks, industrial and commercial firms, and major private communications groups is also one of the characteristics of capitalism, in its current phase as in earlier ones.

Indeed, as soon as capitalism became the victorious mode of production and the dominant social formation, representatives of major private groups and their allies have exercised power.

Looking back in history, the New Deal launched by President Roosevelt in 1933 and the thirty years following the 2nd World War seemed a parenthesis when the ruling class had to make certain limited

but real concessions to the working class. Major capitalists had to play down their control over the state to some extent. With the neoliberal turn begun from the end of the 1970s, they threw discretion to the winds.

The 1980s put the spotlight on an utterly uninhibited ruling class, flaunting and cynically singing the praises of the profit motive and the all-out exploitation of peoples and of nature. The regrettably famous Margaret Thatcher saying, "There is No Alternative" still leaves its mark on the political, economic and social landscape, via violent attacks on rights and social victories. Mario Draghi, Angela Merkel, Silvio Berlusconi (a leading Italian capitalist) and José Manuel Barroso have become emblematic figures of the continuation of Thatcher's plan. The active complicity of socialist governments (from Schröder to Hollande, by way of Blair, Brown, Papandreou, Zapatero, Socrates, Letta, Di Rupo and several others) shows the extent to which they have become parties to the logic of the capitalist system, just like Barack Obama on the other side of the Atlantic. As US billionaire Warren Buffett stated: "It is a class war, and my class is winning".

The public debt system as it functions in capitalism is a permanent mechanism for the transfer of wealth produced by the people towards the capitalist class. The crisis beginning in 2007-2008 reinforced this mechanism because the losses and debts of major banks were transformed into public debts. On a very large scale, governments socialised bank losses so banks could continue to make profits, which they redistribute to their capitalist owners.

Government leaders are the direct allies of the big banks and use their powers and public funds to serve the latter. There is a constant revolving door between major banks and governments. The number of Ministers of Finance and the Economy, or

Prime Ministers, coming directly from major banks or going to them when they leave government has not stopped rising since 2008.

The banking profession is too essential to the economy to be left in private sector hands. Banks must be socialised (this implies expropriating them) and put under citizen control (of bank workers, clients, associations and representatives of local public stakeholders), as it must be subject to public service guidelines [3] and the income its activity generates must be used for the common good.

Public debt contracted to save banks is definitely illegitimate and must be renounced. A citizen audit must determine the other illegitimate and/or illegal debts and play a part in mobilisation so an anticapitalist alternative can take shape.

Bank socialisation and cancellation/repudiation of illegitimate debt must be part of a broader programme [4].

As was the case in the Venetian Republic, nowadays in the European Union and in the majority of the most industrialized countries on the planet, the State operates in osmosis with the major private bank and obediently repays the public debt. Non-repayment of illegitimate debt, socialization of banks and other vital measures will be the outcome of an upsurge of the people as protagonists of their own history. This entails establishing a government as faithful to the oppressed as the Merkel, Obama and Hollande governments are to major private businesses. Such a government of the people must make inroads into sacrosanct major private property to develop the common good while respecting nature's limits. This government must also make a radical break with the capitalist State and do away with all forms of oppression. An authentic revolution is necessary.

Translated by Marie Lagatta

GREECE

The rise of the neo-Nazi movement and its results

JAN MALEWSKI ·

Faced with this pressure, the neoliberal government even began to look into the many abuses of the neo-Nazi party, which up until then had enjoyed impunity. Investigations began into the links between the neo-Nazi gangs and the police, forcing the resignation of nine officers of the police and its "anti-riot" squads. On September 28, the Samaras- Venizelos government (New Democracy-PASOK) finally decided to take action: six neo-Nazi MPs, including Golden Dawn leader Nikolaos Michaloliakos were arrested and the premises of the neo-Nazi party were raided.

This is not the first murder by the Greek neo-Nazis. Since the assassination of a Bangladeshi in May 2011, more than 300 racist attacks have been identified, including at least six led by Golden Dawn MPs, involving the murder of several immigrants and severe injuries inflicted on many others. These racist attacks have since been extended to trade-union and left activists. On September 12, a Nazi gang attacked Communist Party (KKE) activists who were fly posting in an area of Piraeus, seriously injuring nine of them. Did we have to wait for the victim of the Nazis to be this time a well-known Greek singer for the neoliberal government to begin to worry about neo-Nazi violence?

An ambush

On the evening of September 17, Pavlos Fyssas, along with his companion and some friends, was watching a football match in a cafe in Keratsini, in the west of Piraeus. Neo-Nazis invaded the cafe and after some tense exchanges, Pavlos and his friends tried to retreat. With his girlfriend and another couple they were intercepted by a group of 15-20

fascists in the uniform of Golden Dawn, who shouted at them: "What are you looking for? You know that there is no place for you in this neighbourhood." As the two couples moved further on, another group of 10 neo-Nazis emerged from another side-street and managed to surround them. Then there arrived, driving the wrong way down a one-way street, a car from which a local activist of Golden Dawn, Yorgos Roupakias, got out and stabbed the young antifascist rapper.

All this happened in the presence of a team of police motorcyclists (DIAS), who observed without intervening until the majority of fascists had left the scene, while Pavlos Fyssas was lying on the ground, mortally wounded. A young policewoman intervened alone, throwing the murderer to the ground, pinning him down, pointing her gun at him and handcuffing him. Apparently she shouted to her colleagues to hurry up and help her and they did not do so on the grounds that "there were a lot of delinquents about".

After the murder, the newspaper *Ethnos* interviewed a former member of one of the armed gangs of Golden Dawn. This person stated that the "assault squadron" based in the Nikaia area (in Piraeus), was led by Yorgos Pantelis, who himself was directly under the authority of Golden Dawn MP Ioannis Lagos. Concerning the mobilization of Golden Dawn members on the fateful night, he said that if there was anything happening in the neighborhood, "everyone would have informed Yorgos Pantelis, who would in turn inform Lagos, who controlled all the actions of the branch. If we had agreement from him, we could go out into the streets. To tag our slogans on the walls of the city, or to attack Pakistanis, Pantelis and Lagos had to be informed." According to him, Roupakias was "deputy leader" of this assault squadron, which was

trained by the police of the anti-terrorist unit EKAM. And both their headquarters (the official office of Golden Dawn in Nikaia) and their thugs were well protected: an officer from the Nikaia police station, a member of Golden Dawn, warned them of any investigation into them and took care of their members who were caught red-handed.

According to the newspaper *To Vima*, the assassin has admitted that Golden Dawn "lent" him money and employed his wife and daughter. Police found in his home, in addition to neo-Nazi leaflets, a taser gun and a club. His wife says he received a phone call ordering him to get down to Keratsini. Interviewed by the TV channel Alpha, an "ex-Golden Dawner" said Pavlos Fyssas was a target: "It annoyed them that Pavlos Fyssas had written some songs denouncing Golden Dawn (...). Yorgos Roupakias had said that this man, sooner or later, would no longer be alive. And he added: "He was paid to do this work, to be the hitman, to be up front. (...) He said: I am a Golden Dawner, I support all actions and I finish what I started."

All the evidence gathered to date indicates that the murder of Pavlos Fyssas was the result of a premeditated attack and an organized ambush.

Numerous attacks

A network formed around the National Commission on Human Rights, the High Commissioner of the UN and 18 NGOs identified 63 cases of racist attacks in 2011. In 2012 more than 150 attacks were counted, and in the first half of 2013 this number increased - the press spoke in September of more than 300 cases for 2012 and 2013. After the assassination of Pavlos Fyssas, the Greek courts have announced plans to "accelerate" the examination of...32 cases. Until then, the least we can say is that the courts have been in no hurry: on June 11 the Greek newspaper *Efimerida ton Syntakton* noted that the trial of three neo-Nazis, including Themis Skordeli, a former Golden Dawn candidate in Athens, accused of having committed in September 2011 grievous bodily harm on migrants, including an Afghan who was stabbed, "was

postponed for the eighth time"! And at the previous adjournment in September 2012, AFP reported that "this is the first case involving racist violence to have been tried since 1999."

Murders are increasing: after the killing of a young Bangladeshi in May 2011, a young Iraqi was stabbed to death in August 2012 in the centre of Athens, and last winter a Pakistani worker, Shahzad Luqman, was killed in the middle of the night on the streets of the Greek capital by a neo-Nazi of Golden Dawn. According to Radio France Internationale (RFI), the number of those injured runs into hundreds.

Let us recall some cases. In June 2012, Saleh Ibrahim, a young Somali exile, 26 years old, was in a square in those northern suburbs of Athens from where immigrants have been driven out regularly for the last three years. He was assaulted by a group of six people armed with wooden clubs, and ended up in hospital with his arm in a cast for three weeks. "Should I change my skin colour? And if I could, would they really would stop persecuting us?" He asked on RFI.

In August 2012, while Hassan Mekki, a Sudanese migrant, was walking through Athens in the company of a Mauritanian friend, motor cyclists waving Greek flags and shouting "go home, niggers!" hit him on the head. He woke up only hours later, covered in blood. His assailants had scarred him for life with two crosses cut into his back. "I do not have the necessary papers, so I cannot ask for help. I can't sleep any more. I'm afraid they are following me, that my life is in danger," he explained to Reuter's agency, which published his photo without showing his face.

Waleed Taleb, an Egyptian, worked in a bakery on the island of Salamis. He made the mistake of asking for unpaid wages in autumn 2012. His boss, a former mayor of Salamis, and two other men tied a metal chain eight meters long around this neck and led him to a stable. A fourth man joined them there. There, the Egyptian was tied to a chair and beaten. Although he was sometimes unconscious,

his assailants made him drink beer - they drank too - and mocked him because he was a Muslim. "They walked me like a dog. I thought it was the end for me. I fainted, and every time they hit me with rods to wake me up." The suffering of Waleed Taleb lasted 18 hours, after which he managed to escape, taking advantage of a moment's inattention by his captors. But that was not the end of it: taken to the accident and emergency department after being found in the street, still with the metal chain around his neck, the man was arrested by police as an undocumented migrant. "Everyone could see that I was suffering. I could not even see, and I could not eat. I thought I would die", he explained to Reuters, a month after the attack. His employer was arrested and released after three days, awaiting trial, as were his alleged accomplices... On the other hand, Waleed Taleb spent a month in a detention centre and was notified that he had to leave the country. The expulsion was finally "suspended" by a minister, faced with the outcry over the report that was published by Reuters in December 2012.

"Substitute for the authorities"

Such attacks have become commonplace. The Golden Dawn thugs sometimes benefit from the help of the police. Thus, the site Rue 89, in September 2012, told the story of a resident of Kalamata (in the southern Peloponnese), who, having seen a "black man" in his garden, called the police. The policeman at the other end of the line replied that the police would not come, but that she could turn to ... Golden Dawn, dictating for her the phone number of the local Nazi headquarters! Shocked, she refused to do so. But without having been called by her, the neo-Nazi squads appeared in her neighbourhood, and not finding the unknown man who had been reported, set fire to the nearby house of a Pakistani.

Because Golden Dawn does not hide its readiness to replace the state machine, considered as ineffective. After "cleansing" the tourist districts of Athens of street vendors, and supported by many small businesses who called them in to "restore order" (in other words, to get rid of competitors on the

cheap), the thugs of the neo-Nazi party began to destroy the stands of migrants in the markets. In September and again in October 2012, they conducted these "commando operations" in the market in Rafina (near Athens), and in October 2012 in the agricultural market in Messolonghi in the centre of the country. The parliamentary assistant to Golden Dawn has justified the attacks: "We called the police several times, but they did not come. If the police say no, what is our role? To protect our people..." In a video taken in the market in Rafina, after the destruction of stands run by migrants, a member of the gang of about thirty Nazis, including two MPs, said: "Having come to listen to the problems faced by small stallholders, good stallholders, we learned that illegal immigrants were selling goods without a license. We informed the police and we did what Golden Dawn had to do."

Dimitris Psarras, author of "Golden Dawn - The Black Book of the Greek Nazi-fascist party" emphasizes that Golden Dawn is seeking in this way to be considered as "the only group that does not just talk, but turns its words into action by 'cleaning up' the squares."

Golden Dawn militants are also posing as police officers. This was the case on July 26, 2013, during the attack against a centre for migrants in Tavros, south-west of Athens. That day, six men came to the centre claiming to be part of the police force, before revealing that they belonged to the neo-Nazi party and violently assaulting migrants, after having confiscated their work permits.

Beginning in February 2013, several Golden Dawn thugs, dressed in the black t-shirts of the party, descended on the Panarkadiko hospital in the town of Tripoli and burst into the patients' rooms, demanding in a very threatening manner to know the nationality of the "apoklistiki" (nurses hired by families to watch over one of their relatives who is seriously ill) who were at the bedside of patients. The director of the hospital, Eleni Siourouni, said in a joint press conference with the neo-Nazis, "on the question of foreign nurses coming from outside, the hospital management has a common goal with

Golden Dawn"! In this way the neo-Nazis play the card of the "competition" between Greek nurses and immigrant carers, whereas this situation is the result of cuts in funding and the decline of the hospital system.

The next day, about forty members of Golden Dawn conducted an operation of intimidation against the clinic of Médecins du Monde (MDM) in Perama, a suburb of Piraeus, where patients who cannot pay are treated, regardless of their origin. These hate-motivated activists chanted vile racist slogans against MDM.

Showing their descent from their German Nazi ancestors, the Greek neo-Nazis have attacked national minorities (in Xianthi their gang attacked a Turkish-speaking schoolteacher). They announce that "the time will come" for the disabled and for people with hereditary diseases (they advocate for them forced sterilization and euthanasia "in order to purify the blood of the Greeks"), for homosexuals (who would have to choose between "changing their sexual preference" and "paying the penalty": in August 2012 leaflets saying "you're next, after the immigrants" appeared in gay clubs in the Athens area).

In 2012 they already injured Greeks who dared to protest against their abuses (a customer expressing his outrage at the wrecking of a hair salon run by a Pakistani in Athens in October 2012, a teacher putting up posters for a demonstration in defence of education in September 2012). Acting together with fundamentalists of the Orthodox Church, Golden Dawn managed to stop the performances of an avant-garde theatre play deemed to be "blasphemous" in Athens in October 2012. In Crete, on the occasion of the celebration of the National Day on October 28, 2012, a witch hunt targeted teachers whose "patriotism" was considered "insufficient." Also in October 2012, the headmaster of a high school in Athens threatened his students with calling in the Golden Dawn heavy squad... The process of selection does not stop there: according to Golden Dawn, only "Greeks by birth and by consciousness" would have political rights, naturalized

citizens and those who "did not think in the right way" would be excluded.

In October 2012 the Greek Parliament reacted, voting to lift the parliamentary immunity of four Golden Dawn members accused of various abuses, including Ilias Kassidiaris, spokesman for the neo-Nazi party, who was charged with being an accomplice to armed robbery. This in no way hindered their actions. On 19 May 2013, at the head of a rally to prevent the construction of a mosque in Athens, Kassidiaris harangued: "If a mosque is built for the Islamist criminals in Greece, a front of 100,000 Greeks led by Golden Dawn will be created." At the same time, Muslims in Athens received a letter stamped with the logo of the party threatening them in Greek, Arabic and English with being "slaughtered like chickens" and with "blood being shed" if they did not leave the country without asking for what was due to them.

The ideology of Golden Dawn

Before constituting itself as a party, "Golden Dawn" was a review founded in December 1980 by Nikolaos Michaloliakos, at present an MP and "archigos" (equivalent to "Führer") of the neo-Nazi party, and a few other survivors of the far-right "Party of August 4th" [1]. This review, writes Dimitris Psarras, "made no effort to conceal its ideological identity. From the beginning, Nikolaos Michaloliakos appeared as the main leader. The swastika was present on the cover, interspersed with other occult forms and symbols. Some issues had the subtitle "National Socialist Review." The overall content of the magazine was dominated by Hitler himself and by some of his eminent followers, such as the Nazi theoretician Alfred Rosenberg, the lawyer Roland Freisler, who organized the Nazification of the institutional framework of the Third Reich, Leon Degrelle, a Belgian fascist and Waffen SS general, but also leading members of the neo-Nazi movement such as Colin Jordan, etc. [2] (...) In addition to Michaloliakos, other people wrote in the review (...) who would accompany him throughout the entire trajectory of the Golden

Dawn party, as far as the Parliament, such as Christos E. Pappas, number one on the party's list for the national elections in May and June 2012. In 1983, Pappas, at present an MP for Golden Dawn, wrote a hymn in honour of Hitler on the occasion of the anniversary of the fall of Nazism: "The Führer of the German Reich, the visionary of the new Europe and Eva Braun committed suicide at 15.30 on April 30, 1945. On the same day, April 30, 38 years later, we Greek National Socialists will stand to attention to give the Eternal Salute and we will observe a minute of silence. There glows in our hearts faith in the words of Hitler: 'the next generation will render me justice.' There glows in our hearts confidence in victory. Victory will be ours. A victory that will mark the National Socialist cosmogony and the annihilation of the poisoner of all peoples, international Jewry. April 30, 1945-April 30, 1983, the struggle continues, the future belongs to us."

This was not some kind of exception. The head of Golden Dawn himself, Michaloliakos, repeated almost the same words on 30 April, 1987, describing Hitler as "a great man of the twentieth century, the leader and apostle of the revolution of the swastika" and presenting his credo: "We do not aspire to political maneuvering, we do not suffer from the stress of being in Parliament, we do not seek a place under the sun of the republic, we repudiate the republic, we repudiate majority rule, we reject political marketing and we remain dedicated today, when everyone has become faithless, we remain faithful to the ideals of National Socialism."

It was in 1990 that the Golden Dawn organization held its first congress. In neighbouring Yugoslavia, the post-Titoist bureaucracy was then fostering nationalism in order to divide the rising social and democratic struggles. Echoing this, in Greece in 1992 the bourgeoisie instigated a nationalist and xenophobic wave, directed first of all against the recognition of the Republic of Macedonia and then against the influx of Albanian immigrants when the regime in Tirana collapsed. This was the resurgence of an aggressive and militaristic nationalism, which

was inspired for nearly a hundred years by the "big idea" of wanting to make the country the crucible of the reconstruction of the Byzantine Empire, by conquering Constantinople, an ambition that the catastrophic defeat of the Greek army by the Turkish army in 1922 definitely ruined. The ideology of Golden Dawn attempts to resurrect the "big idea" and claims that "the Greeks are a special people, unique, with a unique language, with roots in Antiquity and very ancient references". This caricature of history fitted in perfectly with the rise of chauvinism, the "climate of fear and insecurity" and the "national dangers" posed by the question of the name of Macedonia". "Golden Dawn made its first political appearance at the great Pan-Hellenic demonstration in 1992 on the question of the Republic of Macedonia. Most political parties at the time were demonstrating 'nationalist hysteria.' Golden Dawn was therefore an integral part of the current of political thinking at the time. What is interesting is the parallel that can be drawn between the extremism of the political messages and slogans of 1992 and those adopted by Golden Dawn today," explains Dimitris Psarras.

The organization found at that time, having decided to adopt a more "open" character, fertile ground to develop its public action. "Only Golden Dawn and a few small fascist organizations were able in this way to take advantage of the situation politically," remarks Dimitris Psarras, while the chauvinistic anti-Macedonian demonstrations were organized jointly by the Right as a whole - including the present Prime Minister Samaras - and even by some from the left. This ultra-chauvinism blends in perfectly with the Hitlerite references of Golden Dawn. Thus, the Hitlerite salute, the salute of the movement, is supposedly simply borrowed from Antiquity. And its emblem, which looks like a swastika, is said to be just a reproduction of an ancient Greek symbol...

As for the pagan, paganistic ideology of the neo-Nazi party, it has been increasingly eclipsed - at least in public - in favour of the Orthodox religion, one of the pillars of Greek national identity. "Al-

though, since its foundation, Golden Dawn has produced anti-Christian texts, it has successfully adopted the strategy of the fascist parties of the inter-war period: do not attack religion in public. It presents itself, on the contrary, as a defender of Orthodoxy, more precisely of the "Greek Orthodox race", says Stavros Zouboulatis, author of "Golden Dawn and the Church".

Appointed head of the neo-Nazi youth, the boyfriend of the daughter of the "archigos", Arthémios Matthéopoulos, also heads up a music group with a significant name: Pogrom. He is credited with, among others, the song "I will go to Parliament, I will set it on fire, I will light up the whole city" (he has since become an MP) and the revisionist song "Auschwitz" [3].

The wife of the Greek Führer, Eleni Zaroulia, MP, appointed by the Greek Parliament to the Commission on Equality and Non-discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (!) summarized in October 2012 the point view of her party. In a speech to Parliament, she launched into a tirade, denouncing the rights granted, according to her, to immigrants, whom she described as "subhuman" and demanded separate treatment for those "ethnic Greeks" who had arrived in large numbers, in particular from Albania and Russia, loudly supported by her parliamentary group: "It is unacceptable that they are put in the same category as this kind of subhumans who have invaded our country, with all the diseases they carry around with them." [4].

When the Greek authorities finally began to worry about the crimes of the neo-Nazis, Ourania Michaloliakos, the chief's daughter, addressed the members of her party, saying: "Ask yourself the question whether you are ready to die for what you believe in, without however becoming a hero covered with glory and honour."

Electoral breakthrough

In the 1994 European and 1996 parliamentary elections, Golden Dawn failed to get more than 0.1 per

cent of the vote. In 2004, having camouflaged itself in a "Patriotic Alliance" with other grouplets, it obtained 0.17 per cent of the vote in the European elections and in 2006, under the same acronym, 1.34 per cent in the municipal elections in Athens. Standing again under its own name in 2009, the neo-Nazi party won 0.29 per cent of the vote in the legislative and 0.5 per cent in the European elections.

It was not until the November 2010 municipal elections that Golden Dawn managed to make a breakthrough, getting 5.3 per cent in Athens, where Michaloliakos became an alderman. With the crisis, the traditional two-party system based on New Democracy and PASOK began to collapse. But it was after LAOS (Popular Orthodox Alert), a traditionalist far-right party, joined in November 2011 the government of Lucas Papadimos imposed by the Troika (IMF, European Central Bank, European Union) that an electoral space opened up on the right. In May and June 2012 the Nazi party obtained respectively 6.97 per cent and 6.92 per cent, 21 and 18 seats in parliament. Since then, up until the end of September 2013, the polls showed it increasing its support, indicating that it could get more than 15 per cent of the vote. And if in June 2012, according to a study, the neo-Nazi party got 20 per cent in the polling stations where members of the police vote, in summer 2013, according to some polls, its popularity among the police was close to 50 per cent.

The extremely brutal austerity policies carried out by successive governments under the control of the Troika from 2009 led to a collapse of the relationship between the representative character of the dominant political parties, PASOK and New Democracy (ND). At the same time the rules of the democratic system were being flouted. Increasingly, governments legislated by decree, strikes were declared illegal and employees were requisitioned (during the Athens Metro strike in January 2013, for example). Following on from its predecessors, the present government has made racism state policy. Veritable concentration camps

have been built for undocumented aliens. In July 2012, the government launched a massive crack-down on immigrants, cynically called "Xenios Zeus" (from the name of the god of hospitality!).

It also legitimized the participation of Golden Dawn in political life by giving echo to the so-called theory of "two extremes" in order to criminalize popular resistance movements and the radical Left, especially SYRIZA, which had become at the last elections the second party in the country. This theory, propagated by the media, legitimized the neo-Nazis. The brutal repression of anti-fascists was accompanied by tolerance of the authorities concerning Golden Dawn. For example, on 9 October 2012, the British newspaper *The Guardian* published the testimonies of dozens of anti-fascist activists who had been tortured by police after being arrested during a protest against Golden Dawn.

Real life is very far from the success that the government claims to have achieved: the unemployment rate has risen in four years from 7.8 to 27 per cent of the workforce, one in three Greeks has no income, the pensions of more than two thirds of retired people are less than €675 per month, 150,000 civil servants have been sacked, the reduction in wages is as high as 50 per cent, taxes have been steeply increased, more than half of the population can no longer afford to buy drugs ...but the public debt – which the austerity measures were supposed to bring down – is increasing, while GDP has continued to decline for the sixth consecutive year. Added to that is the way that European politicians and the media have presented a humiliating image of Greeks since 2010, which has made a growing number of them to be angry and to feel that there is a conspiracy against them.

A study of "political evolution" conducted in February 2012 showed that the vast majority of the Greek population used the terms "disappointment" and "anger" to express their feelings towards the government, the media, the trade unions and the political opposition. 50 per cent of them were afraid of losing their jobs, 90 per cent felt that their wages would be reduced and 80 per cent demanded

the immediate expulsion of illegal immigrants! In 2011, the "Eurobarometer" indicated that according to 71 per cent of those polled in Greece, the European Union has "acted in an ineffective way".

The neo-Nazi party has been able to take advantage of this social crisis. With a huge echo in the media, it has conducted "humanitarian" operations reserved for Greeks alone: a spectacular distribution of food in the central square of Athens, the establishment of an "employment agency", the announcement of medical aid which was nicknamed "Doctors with borders", an attempt to create a "Greek blood bank" (which fortunately failed thanks to the hostility of the medical profession).

According to Dimitris Psarras "there was more publicity than actual aid". Sometimes it was simply a question of scene-setting: thus the prominent newspaper *Proto Thema* carried a headline, "The 'scouts' of Golden Dawn – people are being attracted to the extreme Right," with an illustrated report covering two pages on the "real protectors of distributors in the city centre, members of Golden Dawn [who] protect especially women and the elderly who, whenever they want to go to the bank, call on "one of those guys" to accompany them." The pensioner whose photograph was spread across the front page and whose dramatic statements about the insecurity caused by non-Greeks were widely quoted, was the mother of a local neo-Nazi leader, a candidate in the electoral district of Athens-centre.

Nevertheless, the alleged social role of Golden Dawn has succeeded in this way to be contrasted with the inaction of the other parties and the indifference of a traditional political class seen as selfish, indifferent and even corrupt, and as responsible for the crisis. Golden Dawn has been able to take advantage of the confusion and disappointment and has won votes and sympathy, even in the ranks of the Communist Party (KKE), which is admittedly marked by the Stalinist tradition, sectarianism and "national communism". This is demonstrated by the interview with a certain Grigoris, described as "still a communist": "Who can I trust? As

for the Right, I don't want to hear about it. Nor PASOK. The only time I voted for them, in 1981, to finally get rid of the Right, I bitterly regretted it. And the new kid on the block, Tsipras from the radical Left, is another Papandreou who will betray us too. (...) I voted for the Communist Party until last year. But they are powerless. Nothing strong will come from there." And he announced at the beginning of September 2013 that he would vote for Golden Dawn, to "punish those who govern": "I don't agree with their ideas, they are like the Gestapo. But I admire them. They, at least, have got balls." The effects of "left" sectarianism can lead to accepting the unacceptable...

The end of impunity?

Immediately after the assassination of Pavlos Fyssas, the Greek authorities procrastinated. Although the Minister of Public Order, Nikos Dendias, ordered the transfer of 32 pending cases to the procurator of the Supreme Court and decided that the investigation of abuses by members of Golden Dawn was now to be assigned to the counterterrorism services and not to the ordinary police, everyone remembered that in October 2012 he had said that "the government will not tolerate the action of storm troopers", without that changing anything. A parliamentary debate on Golden Dawn asked for "as an emergency" was postponed, ostensibly because of the schedule of the Prime Minister. In reality, the government, which only has a majority of four seats and whose component parties have dropped in the opinion polls, is afraid of the divisions in its own camp, because some conservative politicians have established links with Golden Dawn, which they see as a possible point of support against the radical Left. In addition, this unpopular government fears the threats of Michaloliakos, who has announced that he will create "political instability" by making his 18 MPs resign one after the other in order to cause "non-stop elections." But the Samaras government found itself with its back to the wall. Greece takes over the presidency of the European Union in January 2014 and the

pressure from both Germany and the United States was becoming stronger, for the "President of Europe" not to be open to the accusation of complicity with neo-Nazis. The political base of Samaras was crumbling and Golden Dawn could potentially challenge the hegemony of ND within the right bloc. Samaras himself was under attack from within his own party, as some of its leaders hoped to be able to rely on Golden Dawn to reorganize the right bloc as a mass movement against strikes and against the Left.

Forced to attack Golden Dawn, Samaras and Deputy Prime Minister Venizelos (PASOK) have chosen to appear as guardians of democracy, hoping to regain the legitimacy they need to impose a new memorandum. Wolfgang Schäuble, the German finance minister, has made it clear that the loan of €77 billion would be subject to a new set of austerity measures. The leaders of the government parties are proposing a "constitutional arc" in the hope of creating division between, on the one hand, the denunciation of the practices and the ideology of the neo-Nazi party and on the other the social mobilization against Golden Dawn and against the austerity policies.

The arrest of six members of Golden Dawn on September 28, including its leader, Nikolaos Michaloliakos, has led some of the media to say that the neo-Nazi party has been "beheaded". But although four of them were charged on October 2 with "establishing and belonging to a criminal organization", three of them, including the party's spokesman, Ilias Kassidiaris, were released on bail and left the court victorious. Only one, Ioannis Lagos, was remanded in custody. The neo-Nazi leader Michaloliakos was indicted on October 3 for "participation in a criminal organization" and remanded in custody, as was the "number 2" of the neo-Nazi party, Christos Pappas. In addition, four police officers suspected of links with the neo-Nazi party were arrested.

The release on bail of the neo-Nazis who had been charged indicates that the "parakratos", this Greek "deep state", this apparatus that was not purged af-

ter the end of the military dictatorship in 1974, remains divided. The Greek press criticized the attitude of the courts after the three neo-Nazi deputies were released: the conservative newspaper *Kathimerini* had the headline, "Effect of surprise and questions", while the left-wing daily *Eleftherotypia* spoke of "Shameful democracy" and *Ta Nea* had the headline: "The leader is in prison, the gang is outside." Will the investigation be taken to its conclusion?

After the about turn of the mainstream media, hitherto so useful to the neo-Nazis, surveys indicate a decline in the vote for Golden Dawn. But not a collapse: a poll conducted between 25 and 30 September for the website rizopoulospost.com gave them 8.5 per cent of the vote: in other words, still more than the results that they got in May and June 2012. The neo-Nazi thugs are far from having taken flight. On October 2, there were about a hundred of them in front of the court chanting "Blood! Honour! Golden Dawn! Victory or death! "And as he was being arrested, the neo-Nazi MP Ilias Panagiotaras proudly announced: "The ideas of Golden Dawn will survive. Perhaps we will come back with another name, but we will come back."

Building the antifascist movement

It is true that Golden Dawn cannot be destroyed by legal measures or by repression by a state apparatus that is illegitimate in the eyes of the broad masses. It is no longer a little neo-Nazi group, but already a small movement that has been able to emerge because Greece is a country devastated by the shock therapy implemented over the last several years under the dictates of the European Union

and the IMF. Recession, unemployment and poverty have reached levels not seen in this part of the world since the 1930s, when democracy was destroyed and the entire society was humiliated. It is not possible to fight against Golden Dawn without fighting simultaneously against those policies which have enabled it to grow.

To fight fascism we must build an antifascist movement based on the broadest possible unity. But this unity must not, in any way, serve as a pretext for building bridges with the parties or the system that have fed the growth of fascism. This union can only involve all the forces involved in the popular resistance against austerity, against the memoranda imposed by the troika.

For four years Greece has been a "laboratory" for the European ruling classes, in order to test a policy of social dismantling. Their "experts" have hitherto considered the rise of neo-Nazism in the country as "collateral damage." This is one more reason for the Greek antifascist movement to be able to count on the solidarity of a European antifascist movement. Building such a movement is all the more necessary today because the forces of the far Right are growing in the countries of Europe, entering the government in Norway, obtaining 21.4 per cent of the vote in elections in Austria, governing Hungary, rising in the opinion polls in France, in Flanders, in the Netherlands...

Paris, October 4, 2013

Jan Malewski is editor of Inprecor and a member of the Executive Bureau of the Fourth International.

FRANCE

As National Front support grows, strategy struggle erupts in Left Front

DICK NICHOLS ·

On October 13, in the second round of the by-election for the canton of Brignoles (in the Mediterranean department of Var), the FN easily defeated the mainstream conservative Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), by 53.9% to 46.1%. Until 2011 Brignoles had had a Communist Party (PCF) mayor, but in this election the main left candidate, with a PCF background and supported by the Socialist Party, could only manage 14.6% in the first round.

On October 19, a BVA poll revealed that 65% of those interviewed thought that Rom school girl Léonarda Dibrani—taken off a school excursion bus by police on October 9 and deported with her family to Albania—should not be allowed to return to France. That poll result became public even as thousands of school students and their supporters flooded central Paris for three days to protest Léonarda's expulsion.

On October 20, when President François Hollande of the Socialist Party (PS) (down to 23% in the latest polls) appeared on national television to offer Léonarda right of return to France without her family, he simply made matters worse for himself. "With her mother and sisters", insisted PS secretary Harlem Desir. This difference between government and party didn't matter for long. From Albania the 15-year-old Léonarda told Hollande where he could put his offer.

As Hollande's authority nosedives even with PS faithful, that of interior minister Manuel Valls, the "hard man" stuck with the thankless job of expelling "illegals", keeps rising. An October 24

Figaro poll had Valls as preferred president after the next election (2017), at 33% to Hollande's 9%.

The rise of the FN at the expense of the UMP and PS has been deepening divisions within all main political trends. UMP leaders and candidates have been trying to beat Le Pen at her own game of race hatred and exclusionary nationalism while ministers within the ruling Socialist Party (PS) government have been at loggerheads over the treatment of Léonarda.

Left Front alliance debates

Within the opposition Left Front (Front de Gauche) a debate has opened up over how to orient to the rightward-moving PS. This debate is also being driven by the failure of the Left Front to make any major gains in by-elections held since the May-June 2012 presidential and National Assembly elections.

Most importantly, between October 17 and 19, Paris region members of the Communist Party (PCF), the main force along with the Left Party (Parti de Gauche) in the nine-party Left Front, voted to maintain their party's present alliance with the PS in the Paris council for the March 2014 municipal elections in France.

This decision, taken by 57% to 43%, represented a break with the strategic line of the Left Front. This is to have Left Front tickets in all towns with over 20,000 inhabitants and to support the inclusion of other left forces on these tickets only if they take a clear stand against the austerity policies of the national PS government of Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault.

(In municipal elections, the two-round French voting system allows the Left Front to stand in its own

name in the first round, while supporting PS candidates against right-wing tickets in the second round if its own vote is less than 10%. If the Left Front vote is more than 10% it is free to withdraw, stand again, or seek to negotiate a joint ticket with other forces.)

The PCF's Paris decision was possible because the party's national leadership had earlier decided that the alliance policy for the 2014 municipal elections would be decided by local membership vote. Yet the Paris decision, supported by national secretary Pierre Laurent, has been causing angst among Left Front supporters, opening the most serious crisis in its four-year history. It has also opened sharp conflicts within the PCF itself.

The reaction from the Left Party leadership was one of outrage. Left Party national secretary and deputy mayor of Paris's 12th arrondissement (ward) Alexis Corbière asked: "Now that the young people have risen up against the inhuman consequences of the policies of Manuel Valls, how is it possible to be on a common ticket with his friends in Paris?"

Paris is not France

Will the Paris region PCF vote remain an exception, or does it prefigure a return to the pre-Left Front norm of PCF-PS alliances, especially where these have run major towns?

While many PCF town branches have still to vote on their approach, decisions to date indicate that the Paris decision may well turn out to be more exception than rule. On October 25, *L'Humanité* carried the news that PCF members in Lyon, France's second largest city, had voted 52.9% in favour of a Left Front ticket for the municipal poll, rejecting a deal over program and seats similar to that accepted in Paris.

According to an October 27 *L'Humanité* article by Left Party national secretary Eric Coquerel, in "nearly three-quarters of the towns with 100,000 inhabitants" local PCF ballots had supported the option of a Left Front alliance.

At the time of writing (November 5), PCF members' decisions in towns of more than 100,000 inhabitants was as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. PCF decisions on alliances for 2014 French municipal elections (towns over 100,000, at November 5, 2013)

Town	Region	Inhabitants (2010)	Decision or likely decision
A. Towns with existing SP- or Greens (EELV)-led majority (in many cases including PCF councilors)			
Paris	Île-de-France	2,250,000	With PS
Lyon	Rhône-Alpes	484,000	With Left Front
Toulouse	Midi-Pyrénées	442,000	Undecided but leadership has rejected Left Front. Decision on November 16
Nantes	Pays de la Loire	285,000	To be decided, with leadership favouring PS
Strasbourg	Alsace	282,000	With Left Front
Montpellier	Languedoc-Roussillon	257,000	With Left Front
Lille	Nord-Pas-de-Calais	228,000	To be decided
Rennes	Brittany	207,000	To be decided, with leadership favouring PS

Town	Region	Inhabitants (2010)	Decision or likely decision	Town	Region	Inhabitants (2010)	Decision or likely decision
Reims	Champagne-Ardenne	180,000	Still to be decided. Council group leader leaning towards the PS	Caen	Lower Normandy	109,000	To be decided
Saint-Étienne	Rhône-Alpes	171,300	Local leadership leaning towards PS	Rouen	Upper Normandy	110,900	With Left Front
Grenoble	Rhône-Alpes	155,600	With Left Front	Argenteuil	Île de France	103,100	With Left Front
Angers	Pays de la Loire	147,600	With PS	Montreuil	Île de France	102,700	With Left Front
Dijon	Burgundy	151,200	With Left Front	Saint-Denis	Île de France	106,700	Left Front supporting PCF mayoralty
Brest	Brittany	141,300	With PS	B. Towns with existing right-wing majority			
Le Mans	Pays de la Loire	142,600	With Left Front	Marseille	Provence-Alpes-Côtes d'Azur	850,000	With Left Front
Clermont-Ferrand	Auvergne	140,000	With Left Front	Nice	Provence-Alpes-Côtes d'Azur	343,300	With Left Front
Amiens	Picardy	133,400	With PS	Bordeaux	Aquitania	239,200	With Left Front
Tours	Centre	134,800	Still to be decided. Proposal to go to citizens meeting, November 7	Le Havre	Upper Normandy	175,500	With Left Front
Limoges	Limousin	139,100	With Left Front	Toulon	Provence-Alpes-Côtes d'Azur	164,500	With Left Front
Villeurbanne	Rhône-Alpes	145,000	With PS	Nîmes	Languedoc-Roussillon	142,000	With Left Front
Metz	Lorraine	120,700	With Left Front	Aix-en-Provence	Provence-Alpes-Côtes d'Azur	141,400	With Left Front
Besançon	Franche-Comté	116,900	With PS	Perpignan	Languedoc-Roussillon	117,400	With PS
				Orléans	Centre	114,167	With Left Front
				Mulhouse	Alsace	109,600	With Left Front
				Boulogne-Billancourt	Île de France	114,200	Not yet decided

Town	Region	Inhabitants (2010)	Decision or likely decision
Nancy	Lorraine	105,421	Not yet decided
<i>Sources: Regional French media, regional PCF and Left Party web sites, L'Humanité, Libération, Le Monde, blog Politiquemania, web site Regards.fr.</i> The vote to date has exposed the tensions between the recommendations of local PCF leaderships and the sentiment of many PCF members, who place more value on the political potential of the Left Front than on maintaining the PCF's present council representation. (The PCF has 1709 council seats in metropolitan France, and 1857 when the "overseas territories and departments" such as Tahiti are included. There are 88,298 council positions in France and its "overseas possessions".) To date membership votes overturning leadership recommendations have taken place in Lyon, Montpellier, Le Mans and Évry. Lead PCF candidate for Lyon, Aline Guitard, explained the vote like this: "The members judged that what was being proposed with the PS didn't allow a stronger fight against austerity." In response to that decision, according to the October 30 <i>Le Monde</i>, eight local PCF councilors denounced the "vote of split", threatening not to take part in a "reductionist" ticket. In Le Mans, outgoing PCF councilors said they would continue to negotiate with the PS majority. In other centres, like Perpignan, the threat of a victory of the right or far-right (FN) convinced members that a first round alliance with the PS was a political necessity. According to lead candidate Philippe Galano: "It's reckless to say that the forces of the left, if disunited in the first round, could compete with the UMP and the FN in the second." In the light of these trends an interesting question is whether the Paris line would have carried if there			

had been a single national ballot of the whole PCF membership.

PS—best builder of the FN

How are all these dramatic developments related? The underlying issues are how to reverse support for the FN and how to orient to the PS when rapidly deepening disillusionment with the Hollande presidency—elected 18 months ago for its promise of "Change, Now!"—is what has most fed the growth in FN support.

Le Pen's outfit is seen by increasing numbers of angry people in France as the one party untainted by connections with the political establishment and with an understandable message.

Nonetheless, for sociologist Eric Fassin, writing in the October 24 *Le Monde*, the rise in FN influence "refutes the hypothesis of a rightward shift in society—cultural or economic". Rather the FN is gaining a hearing because of the growing desperation of people ground down by austerity, because of the persistent, 30-year-long retreat of the official "parties of government" before the FN message, and because the alternative left message isn't yet audible or believable enough.

The FN's "discourse" evokes a mythical French paradise lost that flourished before the arrival of globalisation, the European Union and the euro currency; when the country had its franc, there was discipline in the classroom, respect in the family and order in the suburbs, and the necks of serious criminals met the guillotine.

That *belle époque*—destroyed by one-parent families, homosexuality and homosexual marriage, lax immigration laws and oppressive political correctness—can be restored by a sane and healthy "people" led by the FN rising up against the "politicians" and their parties.

Over the years the reaction of the governing elites has been to sneer and pretend outrage at this message, while combing through the concrete issues on

which to make the concessions that could hopefully steal away some of the FN's support base.

Predictably, the area where FN policy has most passed into the mainstream is that of migrants' and refugees' rights. French policy is among the most restrictive and discriminatory in Europe.

The long-run political effect of this combination of empty moralising and concrete concessions to the FN's racist policies has been to add to the political authority of the FN as the party that has been doggedly putting its finger on French society's "real problems" for decades.

Now, UMP candidates openly compete with the FN in racist vileness while the media feel no shame in pillorying entire communities such as the Rom.

The events of October produced a speed-up in this syndrome, a race to the bottom between the UMP and PS over migrants' and refugees' rights. On October 24, UMP leader Jean-François Copé proposed that the right to French citizenship of children born to migrants be repealed—a 25-year-old demand of the FN—and that free medical service for "illegals" be confined to emergency situations.

One day later, minister Valls announced that he would produce a "reform" of the system of political asylum by mid-November.

To complete the pantomime, PS national secretary Desir (once leader of the powerful campaign movement SOS Racisme!) declared: "I say the FN is a party of the extreme right!"

As for Leonarda Dibrani, the saturation message from the mainstream commercial media was that she had it coming. What could you expect from someone whose father was a classic "gypsy bad dad"—happy to live on social security payments, showing no sign of looking for work or interest in jobs offered him, not sure whether his kids are at school, and with three different versions of why he couldn't produce an identity card?

(For sense of the present French political mood, see the accompanying TV interview with Mélenchon

[Not introduced here].)

Debates in the Left Front

Such is the atmosphere in which the Left Front has been battling to get its anti-capitalist message through to people drawn to FN simplicities. It helps explain why the strategy debate within the Left Front, centred on where and how to look for the broader alliances that will win it hegemony over the PS and enable the Left Front to be seen as an alternative for government, has become so sharp.

In an October 21 blog comment, Mélenchon summarised his view of the situation facing the organisation after the Paris PCF decision: "At the level of Paris, the situation is simpler than it appeared—the Left Front continues with [lead candidate] Danielle Simonnet. There will be a pluralist ticket for the municipal elections, hundreds of activists and sympathisers will get involved among whom no doubt there will be a considerable number of communists.

"But at the national level, the situation is much more complicated. The loss of visibility is terrible for us. It helps the extreme rights present itself as the only alternative to the system."

In the October 16 *L'Humanité*, before the PCF Paris vote began, the Left Front leader had insisted: "We are not in a logic of wheeling and dealing, but of political and ideological conquest. For us the local and the national are the same reality."

Asked about local tickets between the Left Party and the Greens, he contrasted these with what the PCF was proposing for Paris: "The line is to bring together everything we can against austerity and for solidarity rather than curling up on the old turf of alliance with the 'Solferians', who repel anything that moves or fights in the country... I am opposed to the unilateral surrender of our forces for the sake of a single town."

The PCF leadership viewpoint previously had come in an interview in the October 14 *Le Parisien* where Pierre Laurent said: "It's not a question of allying with the people who are carrying out the govern-

ment's choices, but of creating on the ground a coalition of men and women of the left who don't identify with this austerity policy. These voters, who could come from the ranks of the socialists or ecologists, have the feeling of being trapped. It's not the time to shut ourselves off in our own domain, but to extend them a hand."

Concretising the PCF perspective at the September *L'Humanité* Fair, Laurent had said: "To build 500,000 extra public housing units, to open health centres, to build new systems of public transport, to create new networks of solidarity where communities are being torn apart, for my part I am ready to take part in the broadest coalitions of the left if that is in the interest of the people."

As for the future of the Left Front, thrown into doubt by this conflict between its two main affiliate organisations, Laurent said: "I fight with all my strength against the idea that a difference of assessment over the municipal elections opens a crisis in the Left Front. We need the Left Front for today and for the future. So let's stop polemicising, dramatising, and caricaturing each other's positions."

An October 21 statement by the PCF leadership, called "A Big Ambition for the Left Front", proposed that the front adopt four campaigns in order to revitalise its work and draw in broader forces. These are an exposure campaign around the cost of capital; a campaign for fiscal justice; a campaign around the need for new solidarity- and democracy-based foundations for Europe; and a campaign for a Sixth French Republic.

Mélenchon has not been so sanguine. Describing the PCF Paris choice as "strategically incompatible" with the Left Front's approach, the PG leader was appearing to signal a struggle against "a small minority, yes prestigious and well placed, that has abandoned us" even while "the unitary dynamic of the Left Front remains overwhelmingly in the majority in the rest of the country".

Mélenchon also reminded readers of *L'Humanité* that the PS, while making endless calls for the "uni-

ty of the left", was conducting a sectarian crusade against Communist and Green mayors, especially in the Paris "red belt" around Seine-Saint-Denis, Argenteuil and Saint Denis.

In an October 26 article on his blog titled "For whom tolls the bell?", the Left Party leader reflected on the impact of the of the PCF Paris decision and on Pierre Laurent's possible motives for conducting negotiations with the PS without informing other Left Front organisations.

"A lot of my friends are flabbergasted and bewildered. All are struggling to work out what has happened. How could Pierre Laurent lie to us for months while he was selling the Eiffel Tower to [PS lead candidate and Paris deputy mayor] Anne Hidalgo?

"With what criteria and what collective goal? If alliance with the Socialists is his collective goal, why not trade off Paris for peace in towns with communist leaderships, under attack from the Socialists in the municipal elections? Why did he get personally engaged to the point of pushing for a national dramatisation of the stakes involved? Why such brutal arm-twisting of local communist leaderships? On [national TV station] France 3 we saw a communist elector say he was voting for the alliance with the socialists 'under compulsion and duress'!

"All that merely, as the press says, to save the senator's seat that he has been occupying since the departure of Senator [former PCF senator Nicole] Cohen-Seat? [1] A lot of people around me couldn't believe it. There must be another factor. Maybe a psychological one? A pressure which, for the moment, we don't know about.

However, for Mélenchon the important issue was not to reflect on Laurent's psychology, but to grasp the political ramifications of the PS-PCF deal.

"For the moments the goal of the 'Solferians' has been achieved. In Paris, disarray is total. Among the communists, hundreds of members are demoralised. But our people have also taken a big hit.

Campaigning without the communists was really not what they wanted. But that the communists will be forced to campaign against them, that's really depressing...

"At a national level the leaks in the commanding vessel can be seen from afar. The general staff has been decapitated: how can you hold campaign coordinating meetings with people who are active on opposing tickets? Moreover, our public message gets distorted: all our interviews are taken up with explanations concerning 'the end of the Left Front', demanded with gluttonous jubilation. And what is certain is that this is just a foretaste of what awaits us in the local elections."

The Paris agreement

The strength of the shock to PCF ranks is reflected in this resignation letter of Maeva Nicotra, the branch secretary in the 15th arrondissement, after the Paris decision in favour of joining PS lists.

"I am a revolutionary Left Front militant, committed to implementing [its program] Above All, the Human and to the Sixth Republic.

"Given such irreconcilable differences, there is no way I can continue to lead the branch.

"I can't on the one hand condemn the PS's machinations and on the other support it in its campaign, even at the municipal level.

"If I had wanted to be a social democrat I would have directly joined the PS.

"I respect the decision of the majority, but cannot in any case renounce my ideals."

Part of the reaction of the Paris PCF leadership to this sort of response has been to insist that the PS's Paris administration has not been applying austerity.

In an October 21 interview in *Libération*, Ian Brossat, PCF lead candidate for Paris, said: "The policy carried out in Paris is not one of austerity. The level of public investment has more than doubled since 2001. The policy carried out in Paris is not that implemented by the government. That's

why the majority of communists have judged that convergence is possible in the capital but not nationally."

The programmatic agreement for the 163-seat central Paris council assigns the PCF 13 councillors in electable positions (up from eight) and as well as 32 councillors in electable positions in the city's 20 arrondissement councils (364 seats in all).

The agreement commits the two parties to:

- Increase the rate of social housing construction so that by 2030 30% of all housing is social housing (proposal of PCF—the present level is 17.4%); Create 5000 new childcare places;
- Create a network of direct food distribution allowing cheaper prices to consumers and higher returns to producers (proposal of PCF);
- Guarantee a minimum supply of free water per household (proposal of PCF);
- Develop community health centres, especially in the poorer suburbs and oppose the closure of the emergency department at the Hôtel Dieu, Paris's oldest hospital;
- Improve cleaning services and keep those that are still public in council hands;
- Follow the example of the PCF-run council in Seine-St Denis in providing extended support services to domestic violence victims and their children, as well as boosting education around the extent of violence suffered by women;
- Create mechanisms for greater social participation, including a participatory budget structure;
- Reject "all austerity policy" and refuse to accept financial arrangements with the state that would prejudice the ability of the council to carry out the undertakings on which it was elected.
- End the freeze on hiring of council staff (proposal of PCF).

In an October 14 opinion piece on the Mediapart web site ("A Cheap Agreement with a Heavy Political Price"), Alexis Corbière commented that

the 30% social housing target was nothing more than that stipulated by law and one whose implementation was impossible to guarantee, given the distant target date. In addition, the PCF-PS deal contained no commitment to return privatised cleaning services to council ownership, its childcare places target fell well short of need and it had abandoned the Left Front demand for the €1.6 billion owed to Paris by the state for services provided but not paid.

As for the undertaking of "no austerity in Paris", how could that be guaranteed when seven PS Paris councillors were also MPs who had voted for the €75 billion austerity package of Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault? "Can they oppose, in the Town Hall, the measures they support in the Borbon Palace [seat of the National Assembly]?"

On October 24, seven Left Front affiliates announced the main points of the front's Paris campaign, led by Danielle Simonnet. It focusses on rent controls and prohibition of evictions, requisitioning of unoccupied housing, priority to social housing, re-establishing council ownership of privatised services, increased extracurricular activity for school children, as well as reforms to the health system, an extensive program of housing insulation and free public transport—all to be financed by greater use of taxes on capital.

Their statement said: "Paris is a rich city (with a budget of more than €7 billion) which has the means of financing an ambitious solidarity-based anti-crisis program, at the local and metropolitan level."

The statement ended: "We want to make Paris the capital of resistance to austerity, of struggle against real-estate speculation, of eradication of casual work, of promotion of new forms of solidarity, of implementation of real equality of rights, of an ambitious collective urban development process, of international cooperation with the South, and of a democracy that serves citizen participation and allows Parisians to take back their town!"

PCF differences elsewhere

The internal PCF discussion has also been sharp outside Paris, such as the department of Hérault and its capital, Montpellier. In the October 16 edition of *L'Hérault du jour*, PCF departmental secretary Michel Passet criticised the party's Montpellier branch for voting to support a Left Front ticket when "in Montpellier there are things that need changing, but the town is on the left and that's where it should stay. It would be terrible if elected communist representatives didn't take part in the new majority."

Two days later the secretary of the Montpellier PCF branch, Claude Avenante, replied: "Why the rush to be on a PS ticket at any price, run by [PS mayoral candidate] J-P Moure, whose proposals are still unknown but whose political practices and neoliberal orientations can be measured?"

He added: "Today we are engaged in a process of jointly evolving an alternative project for Montpellier that will be up to meeting the social needs, expectations of democracy and environmental requirements of the people of our town. We do not look for convergence around the Left Front, but look for a convergence of the majority, with the Left Front as the tool that we communists have chosen to bring that about..."

A similar contest broke out in the Brittany department of Finistère when departmental secretary Eric de Bour came out in support of an alliance with the PS from the first round, provoking the circulation in the PCF's Brittany region of a pro-Left Front petition, "For a Clear Left Alternative".

Repercussions in the far left

These struggles are also beginning to affect France's far-left forces, particularly the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA), whose predecessor, the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) promoted "100% Left" tickets in the 2008 municipal poll and achieved results like 15.3% in Clermont-Ferrand,

7.5% in Nancy, 7% in Limoges and 6.5% in St Denis.

To date the NPA has yet to announce a general approach to the 2014 municipal poll, but has already taken several local initiatives, including the creation of a ticket with the Left Party in Évry. Évry is the base of Manuel Valls. The PCF in Evry voted not to maintain its alliance with the PS but is critical of the NPA-Left Party ticket and is proposing a Left Front ticket.

In St. Denis the NPA is promoting a far left "mobilisation" ticket against the PCF-Left Front list.

In Arles, the NPA has joined the Left Party and other Left Front affiliates in supporting an opposition ticket to the incumbent PCF mayor. According to Christian Schwab, member of the Left Front affiliate Anti-Capitalist Left, "The orientation of the municipality is not what you would expect from the Left Front, there's no break from what the PS could do."

In the Channel port city of Dieppe, the PCF mayor could face a PG and Greens challenge over the issue of the transition to sustainable energy.

Some underlying issues

Above and beyond the heated debate of motives revealed by the PCF's Paris decision lie important differences on the key issue—how to broaden the Left Front's base of support, specifically which sections of a potential broader social base to focus on winning. Disappointed PS members and voters? The less "political" disillusioned masses being tempted by the FN? Young people, especially the unemployed?

The prevailing approach within the PCF is to try to build anti-austerity and anti-right majorities that are as broad as possible, involving, wherever possible, parts of the PS, especially its official left tendencies. The call is on these currents and the PS membership and sympathisers to drag the Hollande and Ayrault government away from austerity policies.

Supporters of this approach often find Mélenchon's tone towards the PS too abrasive. On October 28, author and PCF local councilor Antoine Blocier wrote on his blog: "His main argument revolves around the idea that Hollande's policies are disastrous and must be fought at all levels and that Hollande must 'be punished' (his words).

"Obviously, I share his point of view on the policies being carried out at the moment and the cruel disappointments they bring. But I find this business of 'punishing' too strong a coffee for me.

"Who indeed would be 'punished' if the elected representatives of the Left Front (and in particular the communists, whose competence is recognised in the municipalities), were absent from local councils? Not François Hollande, not the employers, but the people living in the towns..."

Blocier then asks: "Do we go along with Mélenchon's injunction or do we decide case by case?"

"If it's to play a bit part and have no impact on the real debate, I'm against agreements with the PS... But, yes, wherever it's possible for us to have agreements with the PS and the Greens without selling our soul but on the basis of clear human values and ambitious social objectives, I am for..."

"I don't want to demonise PS members as a whole. Some of them are real left citizens. Some of them are just as angry as we are with the backsliding of the government. There are mayors who have resigned from the PS. In short, they are the sort of people we can get somewhere with."

Among the comments on Blocier's piece appeared this note (from Paris PCF member Christophe Adriani):

"I agree on the basic point, even if I didn't make that decision [in the Paris vote] because I didn't find it relevant. The [Paris] majority decision breaks the momentum of the Left Front not because one should never ally with the PS nor ever govern with them, but because accords between chiefs-of-staffs (even with 'steps forward') rob us of

a Left Front campaign—participative, inventive (you'll remember 'the order is—there are no orders'), broadening the base of the movement by bringing together not just organisations but citizens ...

"Your arguments are above all valid to justify technical mergers in the second round, to move towards taking part in executive (yes, let's be useful), but after having campaigned for a project as a whole, for a political alternative."

In an "Open Letter to the Communists of Paris and Elsewhere" on the Mediapart web site PCF member Jean-Jacques Barey made a similar point before the Paris vote: "If we stand broad Left Front tickets in all the arrondissements on the basis of our analysis and program and we run a an aggressive, popular and dynamic campaign (something, pardon the reminder, that will not be the case in the event of a joint first round list with the PS), we will confront the question of a merged ticket in the second round with a strengthened balance of forces. And if we get over the 10% threshold, a realistic goal, we'll achieve very good negotiating conditions for obtaining a lot more elected positions."

Underlying such positions is the sense that the Left Front can't advance much without helping build a popular fight back against the demoralising impact of the PS government, and that its election campaigns and tone have to aggressively promote that. That is what Mélenchon embodies, including for thousands of PCF members. In the words of Corbière: "What Hollande is doing weighs upon people's morale. His message has ideological consequences: he disorients people and the first result is abstention. To be understood you need strong voices."

In the October 25 *L'Humanité* PCF executive committee members Isabelle Lorand and Frédéric Genevée published a "Letter to Jean-Luc Mélenchon" that, while regretting the decision of the Paris PCF majority, sought to bring out underlying issues.

"If what bring us together is stronger than our differences, it remains the case that we have differences. Some are trivial. Others are more serious. We see two—over convergence and centralism. In an interview with *Inrocks* you show that your intellectual point of departure is a choice that's thought-out, tenable and one for which you take responsibility: 'What interests me is the most determined fraction of our people, that part that is ready to mobilise to construct an alternative. I build on what keeps going.' And you add: 'I believe conflict creates consciousness'.

"The least that can be said is that your point of view is coherent. But you can't be unaware that another point of view, sustained for a long time by the PCF, exists inside the genuine left. The majority of the people of the left must be brought together. Rather than divide, it is necessary to seek out the highest levels of convergence, in order to struggle and win together."

The PCF leaders continue: "As for centralism, it will be at the heart of our future debates. From the autonomy of parliamentarians to that of campaign and policy areas we don't have the same approach. We communists broke with democratic centralism in 1994. That wasn't so it can be revived in the Left Front ..."

The writers end with an expression of support for Laurent and an appeal to Mélenchon to stop flirting with the idea of a rejigged Left Front including the Greens and the NPA.

"Like so many others, we don't want that because it would be a feeble Left Front without a future. What would France be without the Left Front? Deadly thought! Of course, the Left Front is going through a turbulent patch and some put that to good use: the Left Front will be dead, and Mélenchon and Laurent with it. We must put an end to these speculations.

"The astounding election campaign that you led produced a dynamic that overcame our differences. It did not erase them...Let's never lose sight of the

essential, let's carry out the debate fraternally so that the Left Front lives."

What phase?

What can be realistically expected for the Left Front in the present phase of French politics? Mélenchon has set the organisation the task of getting a higher vote than the PS in the 2014 European elections, but is that really feasible? It seems clear that such a perspective cannot be met unless there are favourable changes on the ground of social struggle and boosted support for the Left Front arising from that.

In an October 17 note on his blog, Christian Picquet, spokesperson for Left Front founding affiliate the Uniting Left, explained that the rise of the FN was an inevitable phase among "the weakest and most disoriented sectors of the popular classes".

"That's doubtless what explains why the Left Front, while henceforth a point of reference on the political chessboard, has not been able to expand the influence acquired at the last presidential poll ... We are therefore prey neither to a crisis of dissolution that some interested parties proclaim, nor to a growth crisis that a bit of agility would allow us to overcome."

For Picquet, the Left Front has now to focus, on the basis of "that unity which is our greatest achievement", on showing the mass of people that even

partial victories against austerity are possible and helping prepare them.

"For the popular sectors to overcome their lethargy and or a devastating feeling of powerlessness, it is critical that hope returns and a perspective is re-opened of victories, be they partial in the immediate term. The present weakness of mobilisations, as revealed in the battle over retirement and pensions, is basically explained by the feeling of wage earners and citizens that they don't have the means to turn the situation to their advantage."

Whether the Left Front, after the turmoil of the last period, is in condition to provide the inspiration, organisation and leadership necessary to turn the tide will become clearer in coming months.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon, on the basis of the trend to majority PCF vote for Left Front tickets, is lately more hopeful: "I am not afraid of seeing communists in the streets distributing leaflets alongside Paris socialist MPs who voted for the National Interprofessional Agreement [2], retirement at 66 and all the rest. It will not happen. Never. No way. Hidalgo has bought the wind! The communists are in the resistance. They are massively and fundamentally Left Front and not Huists [3].

"As for us, let's be patient. The split in the PS and the Greens is inevitable, just like the decomposition of the official left... But hold firm, because none of that will happen if we do not advance down our chosen road."

*From **Links**.*

MIDDLE EAST:

No Easy Victories

AGAINST THE CURRENT ·

Putin, of course, is motivated by purely cynical Russian state interests. We also recognize that the suspension of the Obama-Kerry-Clinton drive to bomb Syria does nothing to resolve the carnage resulting from the Assad regime's determination to drown its population's democratic aspirations in blood. But as president Obama himself stated, U.S. bombing would not have done so either. Indeed, as the Russian government must have been terrified to contemplate, and as everyone else should be, the unintended consequence might have been to weaken the Syrian regime's command and control of its gruesome chemical weapons — which might wind up in Chechnya, Dagestan or the Moscow subway, or for that matter Lebanon or anywhere else.

Despite Moscow's evasive diplomatic cover stories, Russian intelligence must have known that the August 21 chemical attack was, in fact, perpetrated by the Syrian regime. The use of poison gas against a besieged civilian population truly is a war crime like few others. But achieving justice for the manifold atrocities of that regime is a long way off. Right now, actually getting rid of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal depends on the U.S.-Russian deal subsequently approved by the UN Security Council.

No single power could accomplish that, least of all militarily. And the United States' demand to include a threat of force in the UN resolution was bound to fail — because the Russians weren't going along with that any more than the U.S. Senate would accept repealing Obamacare.

The civil war in Syria began with a democratic popular uprising, which became militarized in the face

of massive regime brutality and now confronts not only the vicious Russian and Iranian-backed Assad military but external jihadist intervention too. Religious-totalitarian fanaticism has become another powerful obstacle to the struggle for freedom in Syria, as elsewhere.

The killing and destruction appears set to continue without letup or resolution any time soon. The Syrian tragedy is also unfolding in the context of maneuvers by multiple regional and global actors. Pushing back the immediate U.S. bombing threat, although giving no short-term relief to the people dying and millions of desperate refugees fleeing the Syrian slaughter, has helped open a political channel between the United States and Iran.

This development is potentially a breakthrough in more than three decades of U.S.-Iranian enmity that has become, perhaps, the biggest single threat of a catastrophic regional war. It's no wonder that this opening angers the hawks and militarist Zionists (not only neoconservatives) in U.S. politics and the Netanyahu government in Israel, the Saudi monarchy that prizes its own oil-fueled special relationship with U.S. imperialism, and for that matter some hardcore clerical and Revolutionary Guard elements in Iran's factional whirlpool. (Saudi Arabia is also the main supporter and financier of Egypt's current military regime.)

The sound and fury of the longstanding U.S.-Iran conflict is all about Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program, but the underlying issue is Iran's conventional military strength, and its expanding regional influence over the past decade. That's what upsets Israel's political and military elites who demand nothing less than overwhelming Israeli strategic superiority over all other regional states combined. The United States of course is the longstanding

guarantor of this formula for so-called "regional stability."

The Decline of U.S. Power

This arrangement is now colliding with a decline in U.S. power over the politics of the Middle East. The overwhelming U.S. supremacy following the collapse of the Soviet Union was inevitably impermanent, but its decline was dramatically accelerated by George W. Bush's catastrophic war in Iraq and the lunatic project of "transforming the Middle East" into a lake of loyal U.S. clients. It was Iran that "won" America's imperial adventure in Iraq.

In today's "new Middle East" with its cauldron of Arab upheavals and the likelihood of longterm revolutionary processes, the United States cannot dictate terms unilaterally. The spectacle of the government shutdown and default brinksmanship in Washington doesn't exactly enhance its prestige either.

A U.S.-Russian-Iranian bargain to end the Washington-Iran confrontation might possibly even deliver some external "settlement" to Syria, however unsatisfactory such a deal may be to its people's desire for freedom. Whatever such a bargain might turn out to be, it won't be on the terms of Israeli demands for abject Iranian surrender. This explains Netanyahu's visible anger over president Obama's overtures to the new Iranian president Rouhani.

Netanyahu's U.S. friends in the Israel Lobby are an unholy three-headed alliance of major Jewish leaders and neocons warning of doomsday, the Christian fundamentalist Armageddon-mongers praying for it, and the military-industrial complex laboring 24/7 to make it profitable. These forces, along with the Saudi monarchy, do not want tensions with Iran to relax. On the contrary, they want stronger sanctions to strangle Iran's economy to the point, they hope, where a desperate Iranian regime might actually make a push for nuclear weapons capability — giving a pretext for a U.S.-

Israeli military strike, which they know full well Israel cannot carry out alone.

A rogue Israeli war with Iran is not a prospect that the Obama administration, or any sane U.S. government, will entertain. So long as a shooting war with Iran contradicts vital U.S. imperial interests, Washington will impose a veto on a less than fully sane Israeli effort to provoke one. On the other hand, when strategic interests are not at stake, U.S. allies are free to run amok in their own front or back yards even when their behavior embarrasses and discredits the American president.

Hence Israel builds new colonial-apartheid settlements, making negotiations with the Palestinian Authority meaningless even as the comical John Kerry promotes "the revival of the peace process." The Egyptian military solidifies its dictatorship and murderous repression even while Obama pleads for a "democratic transition." The Bahraini royal house calls in Saudi troops to crush protests right in front of the U.S. Sixth Fleet, which of course is based there in order to bring "democratic values" to the Middle East.

In president Obama's speech urging Congress to vote for war, or maybe not, at least not right away, and later in his address to the UN General Assembly, he cleared up any apparent ambiguities in the U.S. position. We are an exceptional and indispensable nation, motivated by the highest standards and human rights principles, which will go to any necessary lengths to ensure U.S. access to the oil we need to keep the world safe and free. What could be clearer than that?

Middle East in Revolution

Great-power rhetoric and imperial maneuvering aren't the only games in town, even if it sometimes seems that way. Against all odds, people in the Middle East continue their struggles for the dignity, democracy and decent lives that are theirs by right, and by virtue of the sacrifices they have made. For us, it's these struggles more than anything else that

will make or break the future of the region, and where we must focus our attention.

In Egypt, the democratic political revolution has been hijacked by the military-bureaucratic-capitalist "deep state" — twice. When the January-February 2011 uprising toppled the Mubarak regime, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces proclaimed itself the savior of the nation, set up a hasty constitutional and electoral process, and formed a partnership with the Muslim Brotherhood to rule Egypt under a rammed-through Islamist constitution.

When millions rose up in July 2012 against the repressive, arrogant and incompetent MB government of Mohammed Morsi, the military intervened again, deposing the president with mass arrests and large-scale killings of the ensuing resistance — not to bring democracy but to again entrench the military's power under the Bonapartist general al-Sisi.

These successive regimes, Mubarak, Morsi and the neo-Mubarak general al-Sisi, have something important in common: neoliberal economic "adjustment" policies that push more and more Egyptians into deeper poverty, thus ensuring that the social upheaval will continue. In the field of economic policy, the same is true of the regime in Syria, which is why Bashar al-Assad's government was hailed as a pro-western moderate force right up until the popular uprising triggered by its kidnapping and torture of children. It's also the case in Sudan, where the removal of fuel subsidies has now led to street protests which are met with murderous violence by the regime of Omar al-Bashir.

There will be no easy victories for the popular movements, as came to be expected in the euphoric early days of the Arab Spring. Liberation will not come from benevolent military elites, or from U.S. Cruise missiles. The notion that entrenched family dynasties and kleptocracies would fold up in the face of nonviolent civil protest alone was at best a well-intentioned western delusion. The hard fact is that armed struggle — not as a surrogate for mass

popular and workers' movements, but as a component of them — becomes necessary and inevitable in the course of confronting entrenched state power.

Elsewhere in this issue of *Against the Current*, we explore some of the dynamics of the Arab world's revolutions and possible consequences of a U.S. military intervention in Syria, which had appeared imminent. We will continue to cover the unfolding events in future issues, but some brief observations are relevant here.

The Arab world upheavals arose after decades of what seemed to be a "permanent counterrevolution" in the region. Nationalist regimes in the 1950s and '60s (Egypt, Syria, South Yemen, Algeria) could not fulfill their promises of development. Illusions of pan-Arabism, under the banner of this or that self-styled savior, collapsed. National liberation movements weakened under the pressures of imperialism and reactionary regimes financed by oil monarchies, and even further with the decline and collapse of the Soviet bloc in which they had placed too many hopes. Israel, of course, waged an unceasing drive to crush every expression of the Palestinian people's desire for self-determination.

The defeats of Arab nationalism and the left, combined with policies of "structural adjustment" imposed by western financial institutions, left the field clear for the rise of that toxic phenomenon called "Islamic fundamentalism." Appearing as a kind of anti-colonial resistance, filling a vacuum left by the failures of progressive resistance movements, this anti-woman, anti-modern, anti-cultural and anti-scientific force has ironically spread its poison into societies where Islam was not traditionally intolerant or monolithic — from Pakistan and Afghanistan to Somalia, Mali and Nigeria.

Imperialism and the United States in particular forged deadly alliances of convenience with some of the worst of these elements — most notably in Afghanistan and Pakistan — under the banner of anti-communism. But now that these viciously reactionary forces have themselves become a menace

to western powers, the international left must never see them as allies in the guise of a superficial and illusory "anti-imperialism."

Neither in Syria, or Egypt, or Palestine or anywhere else does a decisive democratic breakthrough appear imminent. But the clock won't turn back to the days before the Tunisian and Egyptian masses launched the Arab Spring. If the notion of a quick and mostly pain-free road to a progressive and democratic future was utopian, the long hard struggle for that future is all the more inevitable and urgent.

Supporters of that struggle in the international left must begin with anti-imperialism — no bombing of Syria, or anyplace else! — but that's only the beginning. We have to stand with those who are to liberate themselves and their countries. Most important perhaps, we need to learn about and build solidarity with the workers' movements that can ultimately break the combined stranglehold of neoliberalism, dictatorship and fundamentalism. No easy victories, but no surrender.

Against the Current

ECONOMY:

Cancelling debt or taxing capital: why should we choose?

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

How can we escape the snare of the debt? This crucial question that was raised at the start is also at the core of our activist actions and deliberations. We have therefore wished to carry on this fruitful exchange through the following collective text, which comments on and questions the respective points of view and arguments which the two authors put forward.

Cancelling the debt or taxing capital?

Piketty and Graeber's dialogue revolves around the respective merits of taxing capital and cancelling public debt. Relying on an extensive historical and anthropological erudition Graeber stresses the fact that cancelling all or part of public or private debts has repeatedly occurred in the history of class struggles over the past 5,000 years. Considering that debt is a central instrument in capitalist domination today, he does not see why it should be any different in the coming years.

Piketty considers that the burden of the debt can be significantly relieved through taxing large fortunes, this would be socially more appropriate since it would not hit the small savers who are holders of a large part of public debt (via mutual funds run by banks and insurance companies).

Though it was not made explicit by either of the two, we can probably trace their different approaches to different political and philosophical assumptions. Belonging as he does to an anarchist tradition Graeber sees cancellation as preferable because it does not rely on the action of a national State and even less on some supranational institution: it can result from the debtors' direct action (see the 'strike debt' project [2] put forward by

Occupy Wall Street), or from popular pressure on governments. Piketty, who belongs to a social-democrat tradition, sees a global taxation of capital as a necessary move and national tax measures taken by reformist governments as a first step forward.

In the light of the two authors' arguments, we suggest that there is no need to choose between taxing capital and cancelling debts. The two measures can and should be carried out simultaneously.

Is cancelling debts a socially unfair measure?

Piketty rejects debt cancellation on the ground that most creditors would be small savers who would be unfairly deprived while the very rich would have invested only a small part of their wealth in public debt securities. But we object that the debt auditing that we support aims not only at differentiating legitimate (i.e. debts that serve the general interest) from illegitimate debts, but also at identifying creditors so as to treat them differently according to their status and the amount they hold. In fact suspending payment is the best way to find out who holds what since it compels security holders to show themselves.

According to the Banque de France, in April 2013 French negotiable government debt was held for 61.9% by non-residents, mainly institutional investors (banks, insurance companies, pension funds, mutual funds...). Of the 38.1 % held by residents, banks held the lion's share with 14% of French public debts, next to insurance companies and other asset managers. [3] Small investors (who run their security portfolio themselves) are a tiny minority among public debt holders. When public debts are cancelled, small savers who have invested in public securities as well as wage earners and old-

age pensioners who had part of their social security contributions (old-age, unemployment, disease or family benefits) invested in institutions or bodies that run the same kind of securities can very well be protected.

The cancellation of illegitimate debts has to bear on major private financial institutions and the very rich households. The rest of the debt must be restructured so as to radically reduce both its stock and its charge. Such reduction/restructuration can indeed rely on a tax on the patrimony of the very rich, as proposed by Piketty. [4] Cancelling illegitimate debts and reducing/restructuring the remaining part of the debt must occur simultaneously. A wide democratic debate must decide on where to place the cursor between small savers who must be protected and those who can be dispossessed. We can then set up a progressive tax on capital that would hit hard on big money, the 1%, who Piketty has shown hold over a quarter of the total wealth in Europe and the US. [5] This one shot tax would make it possible to absorb all public debts. Subsequently a strongly progressive taxation on income and capital would prevent further patrimonial inequality, which Piketty rightly sees as incompatible with democracy.

Who profits from debt cancellation?

Although we disagree with Piketty when he says that "debt cancellation is not at all a progressive solution", he is right to doubt the kind of piecemeal debt forgiveness accorded to Greece since March 2012 by the Troika (the European Commission, ECB, and IMF). The accompanying measures are violations of the economic, social, political, and civil rights of the Greek people, and are sending them further down the stairway to hell. It is in fact a mean trick, to help the foreign banks (mainly French and German) wriggle out of a tight bind with the least losses, to recapitalise Greek banks at the cost of the taxpayers and to durably tighten [the hold of] the Troika's hold on Greece. In 2009, Greek public debt was equivalent to 130% of GDP, in 2012, after debt write-downs, it had nevertheless jumped to 157% and reached a new peak of 175% in

2013. Over a similar period unemployment has grown from 21.6% in 2010 to 27% in 2013 (50% for the under 25s). In agreement with Thomas Piketty, we also refuse the 'haircut' approach supported by the IMF that keeps the captive alive in order to keep sucking its blood. Debt cancellation or sovereign default must be decided by the debtor country itself, and under its own conditions, to achieve the greatest benefits (as did Argentina in 2001, and Ecuador in 2008-2009).

Debt and wealth inequalities are not the only problems

Graeber and Piketty disagree on whether it is debt or [if it is] unequal distribution of wealth that is the principal political issue. In our opinion, the problems encountered by our societies are not limited to these issues. First, it is worth remembering - and Graeber reminds us of this systematically - that the level of private debt is much greater than that of public debt [6], and the recent sharp increase in the latter is largely due to a great deal of private debt being transformed into public debt when the banks were bailed out. Second, and most importantly, the debt issue must be understood in the global economic context, from which it has emerged, and of which it is only one aspect.

We argue that taxes on capital and debt cancellation must be part of a much larger programme of far-reaching and complementary measures that would spark-off a transition towards post-capitalist and post-productivist social forms. Such a programme, which must become pan-European, even if it may start in one or a few countries, would notably abandon austerity policies, reduce working hours while maintaining wage levels and hiring the necessary supplementary workforce, socialise the banking sector, introduce widespread tax reforms, take measures to guarantee gender equality, and apply ecological transition policies in a determined manner.

Graeber insists on debt cancellation because he believes, as we do, that this objective, although insufficient in itself, can be politically motivating and part of a radically egalitarian and anti-capitalist

project. The essential criticism that can be made of Thomas Piketty is that he thinks that the solution may be found within the current framework. To redistribute wealth and maintain democratic rule he proposes a progressive tax, but does not question the system and conditions that have produced the problems. He considers only one aspect of the situation without tackling the underlying causes. If a tax on capital were applied as a result of social struggle, the great danger is that its product would be swallowed up by repayment of illegitimate debt if it is not first cancelled. We cannot be content with a fairer share of the wealth produced by a system if this system is predatory, has no respect for people or common property, and destroys the planet at an ever faster rate. Capital is not only a useful means of production that deserves a regular 5% return as Piketty mentions, it is also an important vector of social relationships of domination by the possessing classes over society as a whole. Capitalism as a means of production is not only the cause of more and more unbearable social inequalities, domination, exploitation and alienation of the people, it is also a menace to our ecosystem, the justification for the plundering of common property, accumulations that turn humanity into spiritually enslaved individuals obsessed by owning things to the detriment of the underlying immaterial basis of our relationships.

The big question that Piketty does not raise, but which is obvious to anybody who observes relations of power in our society, and the hold that the financial oligarchy has on States, is the following: Which government, which G20 will decide on a Worldwide progressive tax on capital without a powerful social movement first forcing the dismantling of the global financial markets and the cancellation of public

debt, which is one of the oligarchy's principal sources of domination?

Like David Graeber, we think that debt cancellation must be achieved by the "pressure of the social movements". This is why we are active in the Citizens' Audit Collectives (CAC [7], so that the cancellation of illegitimate debt would flow from the people upward. We remain doubtful about the idea that "current production methods are based on moral principles more than on economic considerations", because "neoliberalism has favoured political and ideological considerations over economic considerations". We do not think there is any contradiction between these domains, which the neoliberal system manipulates in its own fashion. Capitalism has not favoured political and ideological considerations over economic considerations; it has brought them to heel and put them at the service of maximum private profits, with a certain amount of success if we are to judge by the data presented by Piketty. This system certainly creates enormous disequilibria – like the levels of public and private debt – and is not in the long term compatible with an emancipated society, but for the moment it continues to dominate.

Beyond our differences – less significant with Graeber, more profound with Piketty – which we have just made clear, we are of course prepared to go along the path of illegitimate debt cancellation AND that of a progressive tax on capital. Once we come to a point where one of the paths indicates a way out of capitalism, we will have the choice, all together, to take up the discussion again in the light of the lessons we have learned.

Translated by Christine Pagnouille, Mike Krolikowski and Charles La Via.

CADTM

CANADIAN STATE

New Brunswick, Canada: Elsipogtog First Nation Resists the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Southwestern Energy

TUSHKAHOMMA ·

Real News Network segment on the incident in New Brunswick

This marks yet another incident in the cycle of boiling antagonisms between grassroots First Nations people and the Harper government and corporations over issues of sovereignty and ecology, as evidenced last year in Idle No More [1]. In fact, hydraulic fracturing ("fracking") has been a key issue throughout Mi'kmaq Country [2].

Protesters of Richibucto Reserve have been using direct action tactics since early summer 2013 to block SWN Resources Canada—the Canadian subsidiary of Texas-based Southwestern Energy—from conducting seismic testing. On October 1, Elisipogtog First Nation Chief Arren James Sock delivered an eviction notice to SWN Resources Canada, by which time protesters blocked Route 134 to prevent the company from moving in additional equipment and setting up a camp. In response, the Canadian government issued an injunction on behalf of the company. About a week later, a video was released following discussions between Premier David Alwad and Chief Arren James Sock [3], where the chief said the injunction was illegal, but voiced willingness to participate in an ongoing "dialogue."

Following the attacks on protestors by mounties, solidarity rallies and events began almost immedi-

ately and will continue throughout the weekend, happening south of the colonial border in the United States as well. The Nez Perce tribe came out immediately in support for the Elsipogtog. The uprising in New Brunswick shows us that the fire of Idle No More has not gone out (interestingly, Elsipogtog (L'sipuktuk) means "River of Fire" in the Mi'kmaq language). The Elsipogtog demand respect for their sovereignty, including that corporations and the provincial and Canadian governments acknowledge their rights over Crown Lands held in trust (including the land where the encampment was located) and show respect for the earth, including protection of lands, waters, and natural resources, as expressed in treaties.

The underlying growing corporate power in an age of austerity means that the Canadian state will not address other underlying issues and continuing injustices unless it is forced to do so. First Nations people have expressed not only frustration about the violations of their treaty rights and destruction of the earth, but also the need for adequate housing, educations, food, water, adequate and respectful child and family services, and the need to end violence against First Nations women both on and off-reserve. More of the same from corporations and the Harper government will mean that First Nations warrior societies will only continue to grow and resist [4]—and it's critical that they get all the support we can lend.

October 19, 2013

INDONESIA

The power of the working class - national strike in Indonesia

ZELY ARIANE ·

In Jakarta, workers demand that the minimum wage, which varies from region to region, be set at Rp 3.7 million (\$334) monthly. Jakarta is known to have an exceptionally high cost of living by Indonesian standards. An inflation rate that is predicted to hit ten per cent end this year is also pressuring real wages. Apart from wage increase, the movement demands universal health care by 1 January 2014 and the elimination of outsourcing.

The ruling classes, through its business associations, media and government, are arguing that such an increase of the minimum wage would be impossible because of economic difficulties. As they always do, the ruling classes and their mouthpieces claim that a wage increase will force investors to leave the country. This cliché has not lost its power to influence the petty-bourgeoisie or scare the most vulnerable and precarious workers. But the well-organized industrial workers who took to the streets and joined the two day strike at the end of October and early November did not let themselves be intimidated.

Unity

One positive development was the willingness of the majority of the Indonesian trade-unions to support the call to strike launched by the Konfederasi Serikat Pekerja Indonesia (KSPI, Indonesian Trade Union Confederation). In the last few years, the KSPI has developed a reputation as an activist union. The strike was originally planned for August but was postponed to October as it became clear more time was needed to transform the growing

support for the call into an effective, united strike. Many workers feel they have exhausted all possible ways of negotiation and dialogue with the bosses and the strike was felt as the best way to win new gains.

A patient process of dialogues and meetings built unity among different trade unions. Finally, a joint meeting decided to hold a strike on 31 October and 1 November. Representatives of trade unions and workers organizations from at least 50 different cities took part in the 500 person strong meeting. [1] Rather spontaneously, the meeting gave birth to a new coalition: Konferensi Nasional Gerakan Buruh (KNGB, National Conference of the Workers Movement). Since then, the KNGB already set up its own news portal: <http://kngb-portal.blogspot.com>.

The atmosphere at the meeting was filled with hope and enthusiasm. Participants hope the unity will not only inspire the fragmented workers' movements in other regions but that it will also make it possible to mobilize a growing number of workers.

Such unity is needed because, since the last national strike, the ruling classes have launched a media campaign to denounce the workers' demands as "unreasonable". This idea has a lot of influence within the petty bourgeoisie and the somewhat better paid white-collar workers who often feel they have little in common with industrial workers. This division between industrial workers and white-collar workers is one of the lasting results of Soeharto's New Order regime's attempts to dissolve class consciousness.

Since the national strike of 2012, Indonesia has seen vicious counter-attacks by the bosses and the state apparatus who use violence and legal threats

against the workers movement. Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (popularly known as SBY) also issued a decree to halt previously won wage increases, declaring that the minimum wage should not rise more than 5 to 10 per cent above the inflation rate.

But too many people have been working for poverty wages too long for the confrontation to be avoided. To give just one of countless possible examples: Lufti is one of many previously unorganized workers who joined the strike. For years, he has been working for around 2 dollars per day. His wife works as a garbage collector and his underage children work as well. Workers like Lufti have put their hope in the union and the strike. The issue of wage increases is emerging as a point of polarization in Indonesian society. The workers movement is not only fighting the individual bosses but also to win support in the public opinion.

Test of strength

The decision of KNGB left less than a month to organize the strike and mobilize workers across Indonesia. From 28 to 31 October, activists mobilized for the strike. From early in the morning of 28 October on, activists were busy leafleting and visiting factories to convince workers to go on strike and support the call for a 50 per cent wage increase. In different locations, students mobilized to show their support for the workers and were sometimes attacked by police.

On 29 October, a march in the Pulogadung industrial zone of Jakarta, where industrial workers are concentrated, went from factory to factory and grew from 150 to 6000. Another industrial zone, Berikat Nusantara Bonded Zone (home to mostly garment and textile industries), also saw a large gathering. Police and company thugs unsuccessfully sought to prevent workers, almost all women, from joining the rally. Other industrial zones also saw protests. Not only throughout Java, but also in other regions workers mobilized, such as in Kalimantan and Sulawesi.

In Jakarta, female garment workers in left their factories large numbers to join the strike. The Berikat Nusantara Bonded Zone was paralyzed on 31 October as at least 50.000 women workers went on strike. In the industrial port 5000 transportation and dockworkers joined the strike that day and closed one entry gate. Several industrial areas were reported to have been "paralysed" during the strike itself, such as Cimahi in eastern Java and the Ngoro industrial zone in Mojokerto, Central Java.

In Bekasi, a commuter and industrial satellite city of Jakarta, workers were viciously attacked by company thugs. On 29 October, a march that started with 4000 workers and grew to over 10.000 was attacked by company thugs. The most serious attack was on the first day of the strike, on 31 October. Protesting workers were attacked by hundreds of thugs, including members of the infamous *Pemuda Pancasila* militia, while police and army stood by. Workers were beaten up and stabbed and nineteen of them were heavily injured. Earlier reports that at least one worker was killed turned out to be false however. There was also material damage: many motorcycles, the favorite means of transportation of workers and often their most valuable possession, were broken. Earlier protests in Bekasi have also been met with unusual high levels of violence. [2]

The attacks have not broken the workers will to fight: despite earlier repression, seven industrial complexes in Bekasi were paralysed and workers from all over Bekasi took part in the protests. After the attack, on the second day of the strike, angry workers armed themselves with bamboo sticks to defend themselves. This time, the thugs did not show up. The police and army, who were earlier seen fraternizing with the thugs, now found the opportunity to search workers for weapons.

As during earlier campaigns, social media and mobile telephones played an important role in the diffusion of the call to go on strike and in exchanging information and news between workers and activists. Of around 247 million Indonesians, 64 million use Facebook. As the strike and protests took

place, activists spread news through social media. Facebook and even Twitter (usually considered to be the domain of the "middle classes") were used as agitation tools. This way, news about for example the attack in Bekasi was spread. This helped to counter the portrayal of the movement in the regular media and to motivate workers to continue.

According to police-figures, throughout Jakarta and its neighbors 60.000 workers went on strike. This claims lacks all credibility. Considering how many factories were affected, the participation must have been in the high hundreds of thousands.

Results and prospects

On 1 November, the movement in culminated with a protest at the office of Jakarta governor Joko "Jokowi" Widodo. Jokowi has won a lot of sympathy with some populist policies and his "man of the people" image. But now he showed his real face as he rejected the demands of the workers. In Jakarta, the minimum wage will be increased by only 11 per cent, one of the lowest increases won in this strike. When after the strike in 2012, Jokowi significantly increased wages, he was attacked by employers and in liberal media. Instead of confronting them, this time he chose to be on the bosses' side. In Bekasi, workers won raises of between 40 and 50 per cent.

After the historic strike of 2012, this movement was again a sign the Indonesian working class is gaining strength and confidence. True, only a minority of all workers joined the strike but in the important manufacture for export sector, participation was almost total. Workers feel the difference unity can

make. In only one month, KNGB succeeded in bringing together movements in 20 provinces, 150 regencies and 40 industrial zones. To appreciate this accomplishment, one must keep in mind that Indonesia's near 247 million people are spread over the largest island country of the world. Demands like a 50 per cent wage increase, social security and banning of outsourcing proved effective in winning the support of an increasing number of workers.

The most urgent task for the Indonesian workers movement now will be to beat back the inevitable counter-attacks. Already, right-wing media outlets are spreading stories about spoiled workers who rather block the streets than "work to succeed in life", and intimidate their colleagues if they do not go on strike. Media pundits claim wage increases are not necessary as long as workers can afford motorcycles (an absolute necessity for many of them) and that further wage increases will lead to economic collapse.

But right now, the workers have the wind behind them. Even if the victories remain limited, the real gains they have won in the recent strikes have built their confidence and trust that more is possible. Indonesian leftists and labor activists are learning to counter the propaganda of the ruling class. The demand of a 50 per cent wage increase has not been dropped and will be one of the central issues in Indonesian politics in the coming period.

On 3 November, the KNGB decided it will start planning another strike. We have seen only the beginning, the struggle continues.

LUXEMBOURG

Luxembourg elections open new political chapter

MURRAY SMITH ·

For several decades legislative elections in Luxembourg have taken place every five years, regular as clockwork, coinciding since 1979 with the European elections. So the next ones were due in May 2014. This time it was a little different. The October 20 elections were the outcome of a political crisis. For months before they were called, political life in the country had become increasingly dominated by the scandal surrounding the state "information service", the SREL. In the first place it emerged that the SREL had assembled and maintained files on many thousands of Luxembourg citizens as well as on political organizations and campaigns. All those in fact who while engaging in perfectly legal political activities were considered as a potential threat to the existing social and political order. The claim that this was done only in the context of the Cold War has been proved false; in some cases at least it continued well beyond that, and there is no guarantee that nothing of the sort continues.

A parliamentary commission of enquiry was set up, on which the one MP of déi Lenk sat. Its summary of the activities of the SREL is illuminating: illegal phone-tapping; spying on private individuals without any legal mandate to do so; misappropriation and theft of public funds; attempts at corruption; establishment of a secret police; use of internal confidential information for private purposes; functioning outwith clearly defined hierarchical rules; unacceptable behaviour towards the parliamentary control commission responsible for supervising the SREL, by giving it no or incorrect information on its activities. The allegations of phone-tapping also

concerned politicians and very probably the grand-ducal family. The cloak-and-dagger aspect of the whole business was best exemplified by the scene, like something out of a James Bond film, where the then head of the SREL taped a conversation with Prime Minister Jean-Paul Juncker using a specially adapted wristwatch.

In parallel a court case finally began (it still continues) concerning a series of bomb attacks in the 1980s, considered at the time as terrorist attacks, known as the Bommeleer affair. Subsequently involvement of the state forces was suspected (a brigade of gendarmerie, since dissolved, two of whose agents are now on trial); it now appears very likely that the attacks were carried out (as a training exercise...) by SREL officers acting along with American operatives, in the context of the NATO and CIA-inspired Stay Behind programme.

All of this posed many questions concerning the functioning of the Luxembourg "deep state" and of the state in general. Concerning the SREL, the question of the responsibility of government figures (who knew what and when? who did what and when?) was posed. This targeted in particular the Prime Minister (since 1995) Jean-Claude Juncker, to whom the SREL was answerable. Also under the spotlight was Luc Frieden, Minister of Finance and leading representative of the hardline neoliberal wing of the CSV and the government. Frieden had previously been Minister of Justice and of the Police, and was suspected of having used his position to try and bury the Bommeleer affair before it came to court. But there were also wider questions concerning the whole way of operating of the government, the aura of secrecy, decisions being taken behind the backs of and without informing elected representatives. This has emerged in a number of affairs over the last couple of years. Several of them

have involved Qatar – Qatari capital, encouraged by the Luxembourg government, has shown a lively interest in investing in the Luxembourg financial sector: it has now taken over two banks. The shady dealings behind these takeovers (on very favourable terms for the Qataris) involved government ministers and members of the grand-ducal family. An attempt by Qatari capital to take over the air freight company Cargolux was stopped by a very strong mobilization of the company's employees and its repercussions in the political sphere. Other affairs involved collusion with property speculators. All of this was seen as an integral part of the functioning of the "CSV-state": the party has been continuously in government since 1945, except for a five-year break in the 1970s.

In June Frieden was only saved from a motion of no confidence by the support of the Socialists (LSAP) the junior partner in the governing coalition. On July 10, when the parliamentary commission made its report on the SREL, the Socialists intimated that they, like every other party except the CSV, would vote to adopt it. Before the vote could be taken Juncker announced that he would ask the Grand Duke to dissolve parliament and that new elections would be held.

In the context of the crisis that had provoked the elections the questions of democracy and clean government took on more importance than they might have done otherwise. So the first chapter of the electoral programme of déi Lénk dealt with those questions, calling for a profound reform of state institutions, transparency, direct intervention of citizens in political decisions, strengthening parliamentary control of the government, abolition of the monarchy, separation of Church and State and dissolution of the SREL. In the context of a proposed reform of the Constitution which was already under discussion before the elections déi Lénk calls for the convocation of a Constituent Assembly and for a wide-ranging debate in the country.

However the most important democratic reform concerns undoubtedly the question of extending the right to vote to residents who are not

Luxemburgish citizens. This would be a correct thing to demand in any country, and déi Lénk is of course in favour of it, but in Luxembourg it takes on central importance, because foreigners make up 44 per cent of the population. And in fact it is not simply a democratic demand; it has a strong class aspect. A majority of the working population is made up of non-Luxemburgish citizens, both residents and frontaliers ("border workers") who commute daily from neighbouring France, Belgium and Germany. This is illustrated by the fact that the electorate in the October 20 elections was 238,000 (the population of Luxembourg is 537,000), while for the social elections on November 13, which elect workplace representatives, and in which both resident foreigners and frontaliers can vote, it is 430,000. The percentage of Luxembourg citizens in the working population is about a third and it is heavily concentrated in the civil service and the public sector. Most workers in the private sector are non-Luxemburgish – in the building industry and the hotel-restaurant sector the figures are over 90 per cent.

Of course democratic issues and demands were not the only and not even the main questions preoccupying Luxembourg electors. Social issues were very much to the fore. Luxembourg may have the highest GDP per head in the EU, there is still poverty. Not only is there rising unemployment – 8.6 per cent according to ILO criteria, more than double that among young people – there is also the phenomenon of the working poor. The minimum wage is below the officially-recognized poverty level and 14 per cent of the population live below this level. One of the main problems, and a central axis of déi Lénk's campaign, is the question of housing, where both house prices and rents are astronomical and there is a severe shortage of social housing.

In the construction of neo-liberal Europe Luxembourg has always played an active role, most recently seen in Juncker's tenure as president of the Eurogroup of eurozone finance ministers from 2005-2013. Nevertheless, neo-liberal reforms have not – yet – been pushed as far as in many other

countries and substantial elements of the Welfare State, or social state as it is known here, subsist. Juncker has opted for a slow but steady - and duplicitous - approach, gradually eroding social rights while verbally defending them, seeking to maintain social peace. Thus, he has limited the indexation of wages on the cost of living, but not abolished it as he has been repeatedly called upon to do by the employers' organizations in Luxembourg, supported by the IMF, the European Commission and the OECD. Similarly, the pension reform, whose effect was to give people the "choice" between working longer, having a pension cut by up to 15 per cent, or, preferably, taking out a private pension, was criticized by the same forces as being inadequate. Nevertheless, at whatever speed, the direction of travel is unmistakable. On this trajectory, the index will go, there will be a new pension reform, creeping privatization will continue, as will cuts in public spending. The outcome of these elections may well accelerate the process.

The objective of the CSV was to limit the damage from the scandal around the SREL and other affairs. In the event it lost around 5 per cent of its vote and went down from 26 to 23 seats (out of 60). That still left it as the biggest party, with the arithmetic possibility of forming another coalition. But a new project was emerging, that of a tripartite government between the LSAP, the Greens and the Democratic Party. So the campaign was filled with calls for renewal from these parties, which did not concretize into a clear governmental perspective during the campaign, since the three parties did not know whether they would have a majority or not: in which case at least one of them would have to ally with the CSV.

No one needed renewing more than the LSAP. This party has spent all but five of the last 30 years in coalition with the CSV. It had to try and make people forget its responsibility for the outgoing government's balance sheet, present a more left image, while repeating its usual refrain, "without us it would have been worse". It chose a new leader, the minister of the Economy Etienne Schneider, sup-

posedly to give a young and dynamic image. Schneider was not necessarily the best choice: he is the representative of a clearly neo-liberal wing of the party, little concerned with the party's historic links with the unions. The LSAP went into the election with 13 seats and came out with 13 seats and just over 20 per cent of the vote. It lost just over one per cent compared to the previous election, but 3 per cent in the more populous and working-class South and Centre regions. Thus continued a long, slow erosion of the party's vote, since 1964 when it was the first party with over 37 per cent.

The main victor was certainly the DP, which went from 9 to 13 seats. Added to the 13 of the LSAP and the 6 of the Greens, that gave the trio 32 out of 60. The tripartite wagon was on the road and the DP was in the driving seat. Its leader Xavier Bettel was duly charged with forming a government, a process which may take some weeks. But barring a big surprise, that is the government that is likely to take office. So what will it do?

The initial reaction of many people, including some on the left, was to feel somewhat relieved at the prospect of this government. First of all, because Juncker and the CSV are finally gone. Secondly, because the three parties are all committed to modernizing Luxembourg society and to implementing certain societal reforms: separation of Church and State, same sex marriage, the right to vote for non-Luxemburgish citizens. The concretization of this latter measure appears complicated: it would require a two-thirds vote in Parliament, which the new coalition does not have, not even with the help of *déi Lénk*, which it would get on this issue. The CSV is against, as is the small right wing populist party ADR. But the question merits another look.

In supporting votes for foreigners, the coalition is expressing the view of the Luxembourg employers' organizations, which are all in favour. Surprising? At first sight perhaps. But there is a logic. As elsewhere, the aim of the Luxembourg employers is to weaken and dismantle the public sector, remove job security, introduce private-sector management methods, open it up to market forces, privatize. Not

so easy when the public sector provides most of the electorate. Granting the right to vote to non-Luxemburgish citizens would be accompanied by attempts to mobilize them against the "privileged" Luxemburgers, with the aim of "leveling out" the differences between the public and private sector – in a downward direction, of course. So to maintain and build unity between Luxemburgish and non-Luxemburgish workers is a challenge for the trade unions and the Left. On the trade-union level the question is taken seriously and many non-Luxemburgish workers are unionized. On the political level, much remains to be done: in the last local elections, where resident foreigners can vote, only 17 per cent did so.

The election campaign of déi Lénk was centred, along with the question of democracy, on social questions: education, housing, employment, social protection. Beyond these immediate questions, there is the question of a different economic perspective for Luxembourg. Déi Lénk was the only party which challenged the dogma of the centrality of the financial sector – a reality which has developed since the crisis of the steel industry in the 1980s. All the other parties (except the small Communist Party, KPL) accept that the financial centre will continue to be the centre of the economy, even though they make noises about developing the productive economy – the LSAP even talks grandiosely about a "Marshall Plan". This concentration on the financial sector is all the more dangerous in the present context of cut-throat competition between the main financial centres in Europe, in which Luxembourg has a lot to lose.

Déi Lénk proposes first of all to defend existing public services and enterprises and oppose privatization and outsourcing. Secondly the establishment of a public banking pole which can subsequently be extended and whose purpose would be public investment in and the provision of credit to the productive economy, centred on municipal, cooperative and private small and medium enterprises and on the perspective of sustainable development. In the particular situation of Luxembourg, economic

policy and planning would immediately involve co-operation with the neighbouring regions of France, Belgium and Germany, what is known as the Grande Région. This is above all the case of the steel industry, with the ultimate objective of its socialization on a regional level.

In these elections, déi Lénk obtained 4.94 per cent of the vote (3.3 per cent in 2009) and went from one to two MPs, narrowly missing the election of a third. Its vote increased by 50 per cent compared to 2009. In many communes (boroughs) it won over 5 per cent, in some over 6 and in two over 7 per cent. The first analyses show that our votes came firstly, from previous LSAP voters, but also from the CSV and the Greens. On this occasion the KPL got a third of the vote won by déi Lénk (half in 2009). Its vote really collapsed in most of the country, except in the South where it retains some local implantation. The Pirate Party got a respectable 2.94 per cent on its first outing. Its politics are something of a mixture of societal libertarianism and economic liberalism, but they are not entirely crystallized. They probably took some votes that déi Lénk might otherwise have had.

The only two parties who gained votes and seats in these elections were the DP and déi Lénk – the most consistently liberal party on the one hand, and on the other the only party which will provide an opposition inside and outside Parliament to neoliberal capitalism. Without over-exaggerating this can be seen as the beginning of a certain polarization. In these elections the LSAP was seriously worried about déi Lénk and spent a lot of time attacking us in the latter part of the campaign. And déi Lénk is increasingly appreciated by trade-union activists. A rather clear expression of this came from Jean-Claude Reding, president of the main trade-union confederation, the OGBL. Reding came to a picket organized by déi Lénk in solidarity with the November 14 strikes last year, where he said the following: "At present, I only hear one voice in support of the workers and the unions, and that is the voice of this party. That is also why I came this evening. The other parties say they are in solidarity,

but in reality they are not". Reding has repeated this on a number of occasions, including in a newspaper article during the election campaign words. What he says reflects the reality, and apart from being very encouraging for *déi Lénk*, it also reflect the scale of the challenge that faces Luxembourg's anti-capitalist party, which can be summed up as follows: make the political majority correspond to the social majority, open the way to a government that breaks with neoliberalism. That will involve challenging the political orientation of the LSAP and the Greens, all the more so if they are in government with the DP, and it will be a conflictual process.

It is too early to know the exact programme of a DP-LSAP-Green government – and for that matter to take full stock of the news situation where the CSV is out of power. But no one should be lulled into a false sense of security by the fact that the

LSAP and the Greens outnumber the DP in the majority. The DP will be the locomotive of the government: it has a programme that corresponds to the interests of financialised capitalism and will have no qualms about applying it. Furthermore it will have the backing of the Luxembourg employers' organizations and their international supporters. All this in the context of increasing pressure from Brussels via the fiscal pact and an array of other measures to make national governments conform to neoliberal policies of austerity and structural reforms. Looking at the record of the LSAP and the Greens in the previous Parliament, it would be unwise to rely on them to resist such a front. But very necessary to point up the contradiction between the politics of the government of which they are members and the concerns of those who voted for them.

1 November 2013

GERMANY:

Merkel triumphs ... what now?

MANUEL KELLNER ·

Add to this the weakness of the alternative proposed by the SPD led by Peer Steinbrück, a frosty technocrat and an avowed partisan of agenda 2010 and a symbol of the high living aspirations of politicians close to the business world, who was not capable of credibly transmitting the messages of the SPD concerning social justice. The SPD nonetheless gained 2.7 % to reach 25.7%.

The parties who did not reach the 5% threshold necessary to gain parliamentary representation together scored nearly 15% of the vote: the FDP won 4.8%, while the new Alliance for Germany (AfD) scored 4.7 % after centring its campaign on exit from the euro, while other small parties scored around 5 % collectively.

Of 61.8 million Germans on the electoral register, 71.5% voted. In 2009, it was 70.8%. Even if the candidacy of the new forces energized some voters, electoral abstention remains significant and witnesses to the degree of erosion of the credibility of the political system.

The defeat of the FDP was spectacular. If it succeeded in obtaining representatives with 5 % in the Land of Hesse (which held a regional election parallel to the federal ballot), at the federal level it lost 9.8% in comparison with 2009 and failed to obtain representation in the Bundestag. Its loss of 400,000 votes mainly benefited the AfD, which also took some 300,000 votes from Die Linke and a little less from the CDU/CSU. The AfD concealed its chauvinist motives by claiming that exit from the euro would be in the interests of the economically disadvantaged European countries. Die Linke should ask itself whether it has been capable of

clearly articulating its opposition to EU policies inside the Troika.

Another spectacular fact of these elections was the 8.4% scored by the Greens. They only lost 2.3% in relation to the elections of 2009, but after Fukushima and the big anti-nuclear mobilizations the polls gave them more than 20%.

The Left Party (Die Linke) became the third biggest force in the Bundestag with 8.6%. In 2009 Die Linke had won 11.9% so it could be seen as a defeat. In fact, given that in spring 2012 it was below 6% in the polls and that it had since then lost all the elections in the Länder of western German, it did quite well. In the Land of Hesse, Die Linke scored more than 5% for the third time. Also, in the western Länder where it is much weaker than in the east, Die Linke scored an average of more than 5 %. So we can say that Die Linke has consolidated its position and is rising electorally by presenting a certain number of social, democratic and anti-militarist demands, without however clearly formulating an overall alternative to the power of capital.

What will the strategists (or rather tacticians) of the parliamentary parties do now? In the Bundestag as in the Landtag of Hesse, the representatives of the SPD, Greens and Die Linke have a majority, which would allow them to overthrow the CDU/CSU and form a government. But the SPD and Greens do not want a coalition with Die Linke. And if the latter makes advances, it stresses at the same time its profound divergences. To govern with the SPD and Greens at the federal level, Die Linke must accept the participation of the Bundeswehr in global military interventions. For the moment, that is not imaginable. The most realistic hypothesis seems then to be a "grand coalition" of the CDU/CSU with the SPD. The tradition of a left-right opposition thus becomes more distant in Germany.

Difficulties of a governmental coalition

For the CDU/CSU, its electoral triumph was relative because of the loss of its preferred partner, the FDP. In the final phase before the elections, the latter had relied on what are known in Germany as "borrowed votes" ("Leihstimmen") hoping those who wanted Merkel as Chancellor would vote for the FDP. The CDU/CSU did not accept this, saying that each party should fight to maximize its vote. And now they have two options, to compromise either in the area of the minimum wage (SPD) or on energy policy (Greens). And the CDU/CSU does not yet know if one of these two options could be realized or if new elections are needed.

The breakthrough of the AfD, which nearly broke through the 5% threshold, is threatening for the CDU/CSU. The list of leaders and candidates for this formation includes university lecturers, lawyers, doctors, and leading company managers. The AfD is accused of being a disguised far right formation, and not only because of its anti-euro position. For example, one of its posters inveighs against "immigration in our systems of social protection", which is a typical theme of the far right populists and neo-Nazis. The leaders of the AfD responded to this by citing the programme of the Bavarian CSU, where the same miserable and revolting words can be read. The Christian Democrats fear that a new political formation could in the medium term eat up the votes of their right wing.

In the SPD, the debate rages between those who tend to the "responsible" solution of being once again the junior partner of the CDU/CSU and those who reject this option. The candidate for Chancellor, Peer Steinbrück, has himself very clearly come out against this option and said that he will not again be a minister under Angela Merkel. Now a good number of city sections and prestigious regional representatives of the SPD (like Hannelore Kraft, minister-president in North Rhine-Westphalia) have publicly rejected a CDU/CSU-SPD coalition.

There are different reasons for this, and the most important for the SPD leaders is probably at the tactical level: the fear of having no possibility of preserving a party profile in such a constellation and again experiencing a serious erosion of its electorate. Maybe the SPD leadership will attempt to up the ante — already, it is not just demanding changes in the minimum wage and an adjustment of taxes on high incomes in the governmental programme, but also the same number of ministers as the CDU/CSU — and opt for the "responsible" road. But it isn't certain.

In the Green party, heads are down. Their result is seen as a serious defeat. Responsibility is assigned to the leadership of the party and the Bundestag fraction and above all to Jürgen Trittin, accused of taking the party "too far to the left". This concerns primarily tax policy - the Greens demanded higher taxes not only for the wealthy, but also for the more prosperous layers in the broadest sense of the word (nearly one third of the population would have been affected) which is a significant part of its electorate. The polls show that the Greens lost votes among these layers.

The debate inside the Greens could then lead them to the right. It should not compete too much with Die Linke in terms of social policy, it is argued. It should go more towards "the political centre of the electorate" with themes linking ecology and economy. And it should emerge from the prison of an alliance at any price with the SPD, whose non-majoritarian character had already been very clear before the elections (since the option of including Die Linke is excluded).

But that does not mean that the hypothesis of a "black-green" government (CDU/CSU plus Greens) is a very likely hypothesis. First, the Greens like the SPD had very clearly ruled out this option during the electoral campaign. Secondly, there are reasons to say that this would be "too soon", given the hereditary political-cultural alienation of the most conservative wing of the parties of the Union and above all the Bavarian CSU. Thirdly, the divergences on energy policy remain sizeable, above all

so far as coal is concerned. That said, as with the SPD, nobody can foresee the outcome of the negotiations to form a government, which will probably take several weeks or even months.

Die Linke had readjusted its profile before the electoral campaign. There was a choice between the more "realist" approach of Gregor Gysi towards the SPD and the Greens and the more confrontational approach incarnated by Oskar Lafontaine. At the party congress it was Gysi who triumphed. Invoking the "end of public disputes damaging to the party" he emerged as the sole principal spokesperson of the party at the federal level. Sahra Wagenknecht was number two behind him. If she is popular and has a good media profile, it should also be said that she has watered down her "left" profile inside Die Linke, speaking for example of the heritage of Ludwig Erhard and the social market ideology which should be revived to combat neoliberalism.

Of course, the Die Linke spokespersons attacked the SPD and Greens, denouncing the fact that these parties prefer a Merkel government to a government based on the majority of the SPD, Greens and Die Linke in the Bundestag. Janine Wissler of Die Linke in Hesse says the same thing. She is on the left within Die Linke.

But, above all at the federal level, the realization of the dream of the partisans of "Realpolitik" inside Die Linke does not seem very realistic for now. This is not only because of the categorical "no" of the SPD and Greens. Also, the polls show that only a small minority of the German electorate favour a "red-red-green" coalition. And the main leaders of Die Linke, even the more "rightist" like Gysi, in the context of a party with several organised currents, stress the significant divergences between Die Linke and the SPD/Greens.

The most significant of these divergences concerns foreign policy. Die Linke is against the participation

of the Bundeswehr in military missions "outside the zone" and also missions under UN cover. It is also against arms exports, which are important for German capitalism. There are also divergences in the area of social and economic policy, although these could be subject to various compromises. In the event of a compromise on foreign policy, Die Linke would sacrifice positions with deep support in its own electorate and party. That doesn't go only for its left currents, but also for example its base in eastern Germany: if in this electorate the tendency is to the Realpolitik of governmental participation, hostility to an aggressive world role for the Bundeswehr remains dominant. But in the medium and long term, the trend towards this Realpolitik at the federal level (and not only at the level of the Länder, where Die Linke co-governs Brandenburg), gets stronger. Only popular mobilization for solidarity based solutions, including for wage earners and the jobless in the economically weakest countries in Europe, could reverse it.

Results of the federal elections of September 22, 2013:

CDU/CSU, head of list Angela Merkel: 41.55 %, 311 seats out of 630 (+ 72)

SPD, head of list Peter Steinbrück: 25.74 % (192 seats (+ 46))

Die Linke, collective head of list: 8.59 %, 64 seats (- 12)

Alliance 90-Greens (heads of list Katrin Göring-Eckhardt and Jürgen Trittin): 8.44 %, 63 seats (- 5)

FDP, head of list Philipp Rösler: 4.76%, 0 seats (- 92)

AfD, head of list Bernd Lucke: 4.70 %, 0 seats (± 0)

Pirate party, head of list Bernd Schlömer: 2.19%, 0 seats (± 0)

NPD, head of list Holger Apfel: 1.28 %, 0 seats (± 0)

Others: 2.75 %, 0 seats (± 0)

EGYPT

Questions to Hany Hanna on the situation in Egypt

HANY HANNA ·

On the Muslim Brotherhood

How can we explain the rise to power of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2012?

By engaging in the struggle to "kick out" Mubarak, Egyptians clearly knew what they wanted: bread, freedom, social justice, dignity. But for the great mass of them, without knowing what were the tools and the political programmes most likely to achieve the objectives of the revolution. They had not been able to engage in political activity for 60 years and had to learn as they went along. This partly explains why when on 25 January 2011, the army did not open fire on the crowds, most Egyptians concluded that they could have confidence in it to ensure the transition to democracy and to achieve the other objectives of the revolution.

This was not the case, and during the 2012 elections, many Egyptians said to themselves that they had to "try out" the Muslim Brotherhood. It had never been in power and enjoyed some sympathy because it had suffered repression.

A misunderstanding exists about the electoral victory of the Brotherhood in 2012. Some people believed, and it was presented in this way in the media, that Egypt had fallen into Islamism. It was actually a question of "trying out" the Brotherhood. It was the most important organized political movement; moreover it organized social welfare on a significant scale. And most importantly, the Brotherhood used the fact that, as in many Arab countries, it is difficult to separate religion from morality. Many people said that since the Brotherhood were men of God, they had moral principles, which they would soon put into practice by carrying out policies of social justice. But that's not what happened.

Why did the social base of the Brotherhood erode so quickly?

In France, it is difficult to understand what the Muslim Brotherhood is. They are primarily presented as a political movement. But they are not only that. They are also a terrorist organization and a religious sect.

* The terrorism of the Brotherhood does not belong only to the past, especially to the 1940s and 50s. When they came to power in June 2012, it was said that they would fit into the democratic process and become a political movement like the others. But that was not the case: when the police sometimes refused to repress certain demonstrations as hard as the government wanted, the Brotherhood sent its militia to attack the demonstrators; there were injuries, deaths, abductions and torture.

* It is also a sect because they did not play the game of democracy: in a democracy, elected officials are accountable to voters. But it was found immediately after the arrival in power of Morsi that important decisions were taken immediately after the meetings of the Bureau of Guidance. There, the Guide plays the role of a guru, and takes major decisions. The Egyptians realized that it was not the elected officials who had power but the Guide, who is not elected by the people.

* Simultaneously, there was no progress on social justice. On the contrary, prices soared, and there was no law on trade union freedoms, nor on the minimum and maximum wage. It is symbolic that half of the businessmen accompanying President Morsi to China were former supporters of the Mubarak regime and his party. This demonstrates the continuity between the ultra-liberal economic policies of Mubarak and Morsi. And this is what the people understood.

The outcome of all this was many waves of protest, the most important being the one on 30 June 2013. It took place on the initiative of the Tamarod (rebellion) movement, which had collected over 22 million signatures demanding the departure of Morsi, much higher than the 12 million who voted for him (to start with, the goal was only to exceed 12 million signatures!).

What was the number of demonstrators on 30 June 2013?

The Islamist government talked about 17 million demonstrators. The figure of 33 million comes from CNN, and it was calculated using images from Google Earth.

In my case, I was on June 30 on the long Mirghani Avenue, which is overlooked by the Presidential Palace, and we were packed like sardines, whereas this place is more spacious than Tahrir Square. I was afraid that at that moment there would not be many people in Tahrir Square, but there were actually as many people there as there were under Mubarak.

That does not even take into account the fact that in the south of the country, the mobilization was very important, whereas in 2011 it was almost nonexistent. It was the same story in the provincial towns that had not moved very much at that time and which did this time.

What is happening inside the Muslim Brotherhood?

The Brotherhood is both a sect and a political movement. So those in the Brotherhood who criticized Morsi reasoned as members of a political movement, but others reasoned as adherents of a sect who had to obey the orders of the Guide. This is part of the doctrine of "listening and obedience." They kiss the Guide's hand and therefore it is the sectarian aspect that prevailed over the political aspect.

For me, the Muslim Brotherhood as such is finished. They can only return to centre stage if they recompose as a political movement which has got

rid of the sectarian aspect. But since the Brotherhood operates as a sect they are from my point of view finished.

There are of course dissidents among young members of the Muslim Brotherhood, who may constitute themselves as a political organization on the basis of the ideology of the Brotherhood, but stripped of its sectarian dimension.

On the army

Can we speak of a military coup?

The petition and the demonstrations did not manage to get rid of Morsi; it was ultimately the army which actually deposed him. There is a whole debate about whether or not it was a coup. For me, the fact that the army intervened is not enough to say that it was a coup.

When the army deposed Mubarak, I did not hear anyone in France talking about a coup. Whereas the army had directly deposed him and replaced him. If we now say that what took place in July 2013 was a coup, we have to say that it was even more the case in 2011, since there were in June-July 2013 between 17 and 33 million people in the streets to demand the departure of Morsi, twice the number of demonstrators there were in January 2011. So for me, in both cases, it was not a coup.

Are Egyptians now faced with a military government?

The return of the military to power on July 3, 2013, was to some extent the repetition of what happened with the Brotherhood a year earlier. The present government is not only a military government, but a "mixed" government. The military do not in fact have the means of imposing a "complete" government, even though they are trying to do so. Real internal struggles exist at the head of the state and on the political scene, and things are not settled.

Egyptians feel they owe General Sissi a debt of gratitude for having got rid of the Brotherhood and for having protected them, but that should not be interpreted as unconditional support for the army or

the new government. I think it is only support for the specific action of having got rid of the Brotherhood. And as soon the army goes beyond this role, and this is already the case, people will take notice. This sudden and massive support may then very well disappear as quickly as it came.

For 60 years, there was no real political life, and 40 per cent of the population is illiterate. There is a lack of political culture and people do not necessarily have the tools needed to analyze the situation. But they learn quickly and react much faster than one might think. So we should not bury the revolution because of the support for a government that is not democratic. It is only a stage that has to be gone through.

Are we moving towards a return to a "military-police order" to liquidate the revolution?

We cannot put it like that, because the military-police regime never actually fell, neither with the government of the Military Council in 2011, nor with that of the Brotherhood in 2012. The irony is that the two main people responsible for the present repression against the Brotherhood were appointed by it: that is the case of General Sissi and of the current Minister of the Interior. The latter was appointed in December 2012 after his predecessor had refused to repress the demonstrators who had come to protest outside the presidential palace against the constitutional decree by which Morsi gave himself the powers of a dictator.

What is the policy of the present government?

We are witnessing the pendulum swinging between repression and an attempt at integration. Kamal Abu Aita, the former president of the independent trade union confederation EFITU, who has become Minister of Labour, is trying to play the role of an intermediary and to remain in government to achieve the objectives he has set himself. But he has also on occasion called in the police against the workers, for example to remove the workers of the

textile industry who had staged a sit-in at the Ministry of Labour.

What complicates the situation is that, given that the workers' movement is unstructured, political quarrels sometimes predominate. For this reason it is quite common for unions to accuse each other of acting in a particular way because they represent a particular political movement. This argument is also used by supporters of Kamal Abu Aita against those who oppose government policy.

Will General Sissi run for president?

There are pressures or manipulations for him to do so, with a petition signed by about a million people.

But it is not sure that he will run. The army has actually more to lose than it has to gain by putting itself in the front line: as happened with Morsi, there are already videos circulating showing occasions when Sissi made clumsy remarks. Sissi has for the moment a certain aura, but if he runs for president, he will very quickly come down from the pedestal where he is at present.

However, it is more than probable that the army will play a role in the elections. This is already the case. Samy Annan, the former head of the General Staff and former number two of the Military Council is said to be already a candidate. Hossam Kheirallah, a former senior office in military intelligence, has also announced his candidacy.

There is therefore a strategy that is being put in place. The military are proceeding cautiously and testing to see which way the wind blows.

On the situation of the population and struggles

Where are we in terms of achieving the goals of the revolution?

We do not always see the colour of them.

* On the economic and social level, the present government is somewhat "right-wing social-democrat." The social measures that it has taken are just mini-measures that are not at all what is necessary in the present situation. They have been conceded only to

try to calm people's anger and prevent a new revolutionary wave that could sweep away everything.

Let us consider some examples of social measures adopted recently:

- Free tuition;
- Reducing the price of bus tickets;
- A minimum wage of 1200 pounds (135 euros) in the public sector.

This minimum wage is the amount demanded by the confederation of independent trade unions EFITU in January 2011. But since then prices have increased greatly, and the EFITU has refused such a small amount, which is not up to what is needed. And that is all the more so because the calculation of these 1200 pounds includes both salary and bonuses; for many people, it actually results in no significant increase.

The example of education is for me important and symbolic. The government has announced exemption from payment of tuition fees, but education is officially free already. Parents pay less than 100 pounds (15 euros) per year. Certainly, for very poor people, that is not negligible. But the real problem is that this free education that is proclaimed is in reality very theoretical. Because they are very badly paid, many teachers do not earn enough to live decently. As a result, many teach their lessons badly and/or give bad marks so as to then be able to offer paid tuition, which represents the bulk of their income. In order to establish really free education, it is not enough to dispense the parents from paying 15 euros per year. We should start by paying teachers properly so that tuition is no longer necessary!

* A new constitution is being written and new elections are scheduled. But given the lack of political culture and organization, as well as the divide between young people and the political parties, there is a risk that this leads again to the establishment of a government that does not represent the revolution. From there, it remains to be seen whether a new revolutionary wave will sweep away the future government, or if this government can establish sufficient safety valves to avoid a social explosion.

What is the situation concerning social struggles?

There are certainly a lot of social struggles, but the workers' movement is poorly organized and does not have the capacity to transform the movements into a tool for achieving demands.

Over the past year, there have been approximately 3,000 strikes, protests and sit-ins. But most of them are poorly organized. As the struggles come up against a wall, and there is the pressure of daily life when workers are not paid, many of them end up being discouraged and their movement runs out of steam.

This problem will only be resolved gradually by the organization of the trade-union movement. It will also be necessary for the law to change and finally enable the independent trade unions to organize themselves.

The old official confederation, the ETUF, does not serve the interests of workers and at best pretends to be on their side. As a result, workers who engage in a struggle have difficulty in knowing who is with them and who is against them.

In search of a third way

How can you distinguish yourselves from both the Muslim Brotherhood and the army?

That is what a recently created movement called "The Front of the Path of the Revolution" intends to do. It was formed by activists in the mobilizations of 2011 and 2013.

It is based on quite a broad political spectrum, including in particular the Revolutionary Socialists, liberals and activists of the traditional Left.

What is the influence of the Revolutionary Socialists?

They have very little direct influence. But on the other hand their indirect influence is important: they are present in the demonstrations; they distribute a lot of pamphlets. A number of the ideas

they stand for are taken up in a diffuse way on the political scene, even though people often do not know who is behind these ideas.

What is the situation of Haitham Mohamedain?

This activist lawyer was detained from September 5th to September 7th and then released, but charges are still hanging over him like a sword of Damocles. These charges are ridiculous: terrorism, membership of an illegal organization, a plan to overthrow the government by force, etc...

Sexual harassment of women and the specific oppression of certain social categories

In what context is the sexual harassment of women taking place?

Harassment against women has been rooted in society here for a very long time. It is a real disease of Egyptian society. It is on the rise and is getting worse, especially in the city centres.

In the existing legislation, there is nothing about sexual harassment. Certainly, there are texts concerning indecent assault and others relating to rape. But sexual harassment, which is not directly either one or the other, is not punishable by law!

Alongside "traditional" sexual harassment there has emerged a real sexual terrorism, aimed at forcing women to stay at home and at preventing them from becoming activists.

Do other categories of people experience specific oppression?

In Mubarak's time, there were two categories of people who were not very involved in politics: women and Copts.

– It is no coincidence that during the big demonstrations, highly organized sexual harassment took place: about a hundred men would form a square around a woman and isolate her from her comrades, before tightening the square around her. It was a really military-style tactic.

– Similarly, a demonstration for the rights of the Copts was bloodily suppressed in October 2011 in Maspero (outside the headquarters of the public television). There were about thirty people killed, mostly crushed by tanks.

– A similar kind of repression was used on football fans, such as at the end of January 2012 in the stadium in Port Said, because they had started to get involved politically.

We are facing widespread repression, but it is more particularly aimed at the categories that were previously not involved in politics. The purpose of such actions is that every time a new category begins to get involved, they try to drive it back so that the level of political participation of the people is as low as possible and that politics remains in the hands of the "elites" and of the regime that has not yet fallen.

USA

Capitalism's government shutdown scam

JEFF MACKLER ·

Added to the mix was the Tea Party/Republican Party threat to prevent the government from raising the debt ceiling another trillion dollars or so to avoid an almost unprecedented default of the U.S. government to its creditors around the world.

Capitalism's media played these themes to the hilt, bringing in the top leaders of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank to warn of the catastrophic consequences to the world economy of a U.S. default. The "liberal" New York Times attacked the Republicans and their Tea Party associates for brinksmanship and praised President Obama for standing firm in refusing to de-fund his Obamacare. Obama swore that he would not budge in defense of his plan and took to the airwaves to denounce his "fanatic" Republican opponents.

The Oct. 17 New York Times captured the hype attendant to the debate in a six-column banner headline: "Republicans Back Down in Fiscal Standoff." The "news analysis" article stated, "For the Republicans who despise president Obama's health care law, the last few weeks should have been a singular moment to turn its botched rollout into an argument against it. Instead, in a futile campaign to strip the law of federal money, the party focused harsh scrutiny on its own divisions, hurt its national standing and undermined its ability to win concessions from the Democrats. Then they surrendered almost unconditionally."

All the while, the pollsters chimed in with near daily reports regarding who was scoring the most points and what that might foretell for the next election cycle. Wall Street's biggest bankers threatened disaster—a plunging stock market, a damaging rise in interest rates, an end to the tiny housing

construction "recovery," and the beginning of a worldwide economic meltdown.

But excepting the undeniable fact that U.S. and world capitalism do face an unprecedented crisis—which we will explain below—it was all a lie! In that regard, we recall that Shakespeare had the beleaguered Macbeth cry out in anguish over what he perceived as the meaningless of our passage through this world: "Life ... is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." In the current context, Macbeth's cry would handily sum up life in Washington politics, except that, in the present case, it would signify almost nothing.

Bail-outs for the rich

This "almost nothing" took place in a series of secret and concluding negotiations between the representatives of the twin parties of capitalism to hammer out an agreement, already signaled by Obama himself, to impose massive cuts in Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and other social programs, while lowering the tax rates of the corporate elite and ruling-class few to virtually unprecedented levels.

Indeed, Obama had already signaled his intention to reduce corporate tax rates from 35 percent to perhaps 28 percent and to essentially reduce tax rates on the accumulated billions and trillions held by U.S. multi-national corporations in foreign banks to sufficiently low levels so as to entice their repatriation.

These provisions are expected to become law when Congress meets to "debate" the Tax Code Overhaul legislation now in preparation. To be sure, the fine print will reveal additional trillions in grants to the rich. Working people are never a party to preparing such legislation. This is left to the corporate elite,

who literally draft the desired language that is ratified by their "democratically elected" representatives.

The result, as with the December 2012 Fiscal Cliff "crisis," wherein trillions of dollars were slashed from social programs—"sequestration" was the term employed at the time—and trillions more were gifted to the elite by extending the Bush-era tax cuts for the rich that "saved" them a neat \$4 trillion. This was yet another finger in the dike to prop up their failing predatory system.

In each and every instance U.S. and world capitalism's deepening crises are temporarily "solved" by robbing the working masses and bailing out the plundering rich.

George Bush's last days in office saw Federal Reserve chief Benjamin Bernanke and Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson rush into the Congress to proclaim that if the three-page \$700 billion bank bailout proposal they had drafted in consultation with the richest bankers in the nation were not approved immediately, the nation's entire banking and insurance systems would face a catastrophic meltdown. For those who might think that this image is a bit exaggerated, not long afterward, the *New York Times* published a photograph of these corporate titans sitting around the stereotyped long corporate boardroom table! Paulson himself had left his position as chairman and chief executive officer of Goldman Sachs, the fifth largest bank in the country, to take the Treasury post.

The two high stakes players, Bernanke and Paulson, top guns at the pinnacle of the financial pyramid, took just a minute or so to tell George Bush the bad news before they entered the awaiting corporate legislators. Bush's few words spoke volumes regarding who really rules America. "Why didn't they tell me?" he uttered pathetically, according to on-the-scene reporters.

A few days later, when it became clear that the money trough was wide open for the taking, Congress upped the bank bailout figure to \$840 billion and called the new law, TARP, the Troubled

Asset Relief Program—a device wherein the government bought near worthless mortgages at full value. In the months and years that followed, Obama's new Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner added \$20-\$25 trillion more to give to the same elite bankers to keep their failing system afloat. TARP did include \$50 million (not billion!) to help working people avoid foreclosure. To date less than \$5 million of this has been allocated.

Meanwhile, the Republican/Tea Party sound and fury about cutting Obamacare came to nothing. Neither Democrats nor Republicans had any intention, rhetoric aside, of gutting this proposal, which in its essence granted private health insurance corporations, whose monopoly profits are among the highest in the nation, \$2 trillion in additional rip-offs. This was done with full knowledge that a simple single-payer system would have saved \$1 trillion in taxpayers' money while providing qualitatively better and cheaper coverage for everyone.

The \$3 trillion differential in real dollar savings between Obamacare and single payer was a vital concern to the twin parties of capital. They sought to avoid it at all costs! In this particular instance, Obama's plan was the preferred choice of the health insurance corporate elite, who contributed far greater sums to the president's campaign coffers than to his Republican "opponents."

Indeed, Obama had already agreed in behind the scenes negotiations to amend his plan in several places to further advance the financial interests of the rich. In contrast, the pathetic spectacle of the recent AFL-CIO national convention's sending its president, Richard Trumka, on a hurried mission to the White House to demand that Obama amend his plan to avoid drastic reductions in some of the comprehensive medical plans unions had negotiated over decades was telling. Obama told Trumka that he did not play favorites and would not bend to "special interest groups"—that is, trade unions that represent millions of working people.

Thus, the well-orchestrated charade over Obamacare was nothing less than the smokescreen

behind which the ruling elite negotiated how much to steal from working people. Obama's 2014 budget proposal already includes proposed cuts in Social Security and Medicare to the tune of \$630 billion. This is the starting point on the sum to be cut.

To be sure, the final figure, as "both sides" of these "reasonable" negotiators reach agreement, will no doubt be in the trillions! The agreed upon amount will, of course, be transferred to the pockets of the billionaire and trillionaire few, qualitatively more to help save their stagnating and declining system than to satisfy the inherent qualities of greed and avarice that are sometimes alleged to be their prime motivating factors.

An October Wall Street Journal article had Tea Party presidential candidate Paul Ryan more truthfully stating, "let's focus more on general spending and entitlement cuts," as opposed to Obamacare. Similarly, Tea Party billionaires like the Koch brothers explained that Obamacare was subordinate to entitlement spending and corporate tax cuts. Tennessee Republican Senator Bob Corker told Bloomberg News that "for the past two months we've been focused on the wrong subject." His real priority was entitlement cuts.

Catastrophic rise in U.S. debt

None of this is to say that there were not immediate consequences to working people during the government shutdown. While the furloughed federal workers and all the others will likely receive back pay, local small businesses undoubtedly suffered, and millions who relied on a variety of public services and facilities suffered from the disruption.

But the single and most critical issue during the phony budget debates was never seriously addressed. The ever-mounting U.S. debt, currently standing at a historic high of \$16.8 trillion, a figure that now exceeds the entire Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the United States, was absent from virtually all the flame wars.

Since the beginning of the present recession in 2008 when the U.S. debt stood at \$10 trillion, the

debt has increased, on average, by an astounding yearly sum exceeding \$1 trillion. In order to "balance" every year's budget shortfall – to have sufficient funds to pay its bills, including the interest owed to U.S. and foreign creditors, congress is required to pass legislation to increase the debt ceiling, that is, to approve legislation adding yet another trillion dollars to the debt. The \$16.8 trillion owed will now be increased to \$17.5 trillion, give or take a few billion.

This increase was essentially approved in the final bipartisan agreements just concluded; or more accurately, an agreement was reached to fund the deficit for at least three months, with the expectation that the full trillions of dollars that are required would flow from continued negotiations over how much to cut from entitlements and to reduce corporate taxes.

The Bush era tax cuts alone, continued by the Obama administration, gifted the ruling rich some \$2 trillion annually, an amount sufficient to more than balance the budget and to therefore avoid and need to raise ceiling. Similarly, the massive military expenditures, annually exceeding another trillion dollars, if eliminated, would have more than balanced any budget on record.

But these sacred cows of capital are central to the functioning of the system itself. In short, what Congress annually steals from the income side of the budget, whose largest component is the taxes paid by working people, they seek to compensate for by austerity measures imposed at the expense of the general population. This direct transfer of trillions from us to them is today the iron law of a failing capitalism. Literally, 99 percent of all new income generated since 2009 goes to the top 10 percent of the population, an undeniable statement that working people are suffering an attack of greater proportion than in any time of the modern era.

This scenario is generally repeated throughout the world. In the U.S. the total present debt, \$16.8 trillion, represents roughly 100 percent of the GDP, in

Japan the figure is 192 percent; in Italy, the ratio of the debt to the GDP is 240 percent!

Everywhere in the world, capitalist budgets are "balanced" either at the direct expense of the working class or by "borrowing" money from other nations or banks. I use the term "borrowing" in quotation marks because in the U.S. what this really means is that the government effectively prints money or sells bonds to pay its bills. Since 2008 this has amounted to some trillion dollars annually.

The question of questions is therefore: How long can the government print money or sell bonds to pay its debts until a limit is reached? Most of capitalist economic history was based on the previously indisputable assumption that money, in paper or coinage form, had real value—that is, it was based on gold or on real commodities manufactured by working people in the course of capitalist production. The expression that "the dollar was as good as gold" rang with a certain truth. Gold itself is a commodity whose value, like all others, is based on the amount of human labor power needed to extract it from the earth.

Nations printed money to facilitate the purchase and exchange of real commodities—to aid in the normal circulation process. One could practically go to a bank to exchange cash for gold. In 1944 the U.S. held gold reserves that covered 75 percent of the cash in circulation, although by 1971 the figure had been reduced to 18 percent due to the printing of excessive dollars.

Those nations that violated this fundamental economic principle and printed paper money without regard to its representing real commodities suffered the consequences—massive inflation wherein what cost x amount in a currency one day, cost $100x$ or $1000x$ shortly after.

The fact that the U.S. inflation rate has been relatively low in recent years is due to the fact that the paper money printed has not been circulated to the general population, therefore increasing demand for new products. Instead, the printed paper money

circulates among the elite few—the banks and other speculators who play the capitalist casino game.

The U.S. formally abandoned the gold standard under the Nixon administration in 1971, when the first serious signs of the weakening of the economy appeared as U.S. hegemony was increasingly challenged by competing international rivals. The price of gold has since risen from about \$35 per ounce in 1971 to today's levels, when the dollar's price madly fluctuates from close to \$2000 per ounce to its present value of \$1450—an approximate increase of fifty times its original value. Put another way, the value of the U.S. dollar today is one-fiftieth of what it was in 1971.

In time, printing billions and trillions of dollars, none of which are based on real commodities, i.e., real production in basic manufacturing industries, must eventually end in a catastrophic meltdown that will shake the economic foundations of the entire world.

The present stock market boom, with the Dow Jones index reaching an all time high in 2013 while the overall economy is stagnant or in decline, is nothing less than the product of today's casino capitalism. The government or Federal Reserve prints what amounts to fake money and loans it at near zero interest rates to banks and other speculative investors, who in turn invest in all varieties of new financial instruments at rates of return far greater than the government's zero percent loan rates.

With average manufacturing profit rates in the real economy on the decline in the U.S. and around the world for decades due to ever-intensifying international competition, the corporate elite much prefer gambling in speculative instruments than investing in new technologies to beat their rivals. This "financialization" of capital—the shift from producing real commodities for sale in ever stressed and increasingly glutted world markets to speculative investments—has resulted in the present worldwide crisis of the capitalist system itself, wherein pain and suffering must be inflicted on the vast majority

everywhere to pay for the system's inherent contradictions.

Since World War II, when the U.S. emerged as the preeminent world economic power, with its enemies and allies alike destroyed in a cataclysmic war that killed 60 million people, the U.S. has been the leading and unchallenged world power. Even today 60-70 percent of world trade is conducted in dollars, and a similar figure holds for the debt in dollars held by the rest of the world. But today, as the U.S. is increasingly challenged by the European Union, China, and elsewhere, its domination of the world economy is on the decline, with China, for example, now the leading manufacturing nation.

In time, the endless printing of dollars, not backed by anything other than the "good faith and credit of the U.S." cannot but lead to an inflation that reduces the value of the dollar much closer to its real value. China, for example, the world's leading holder of U.S. debt (treasury certificates, bonds and cash)—to the tune of \$1.3 trillion—can only wonder if its holdings will evaporate due to inflation. Indeed, China has begun to dump some of its large dollar holdings while opening the first debates that question whether the dollar should remain the world's reserve currency, as per the Bretton Woods agreements that so established the dollar in 1944.

The concept is simple enough: What would happen if the U.S. government ordered its money printers to print \$1.3 trillion in cash and ship it to China, marked, "paid in full." Or suppose the U.S. did the same with regard to its entire debt of \$16.8 trillion, soon to become \$17.8 trillion!

In effect, the U.S. would be exchanging a large box of paper for real commodities that it had purchased around the world. Every nation that today loans money to the U.S. does so on the basis that, as the world's leading economy, it will pay its debts in full and with interest, since the dollar, albeit declining, is still the most reliable currency on earth today.

The growing divergence between a U.S. economy on the decline and the value of its credit does frighten the most informed layers of the capitalist

elite. Yet their only solution, as with their rivals the world over, is to resolve their inherent crises at the expense of working people everywhere while printing seemingly endless dollars or bonds, to the tune of \$89 billion per month in the U.S., the so-called QE or Quantitative Easing that began in 2008 wherein the government purchased near-worthless bank mortgages at face value.

U.S. capitalism's global dominance is rapidly coming to an end. The "full faith and credit" in its dollar and economy is today undermined not only by the mere thought that it might default in the context of the present congressional wrangle over the debt ceiling, but in its essential stability itself.

The speculative real estate frenzy leading to the present recession/depression, which shook world markets beginning in 2008, was qualitatively more a reflection of capitalism's general decline rather than of the stupidity or corruption of greedy bankers. A sick system reached the point where average profits were significantly declining in the real world of manufacturing.

The 2008 bankruptcy of General Motors, once the world's largest corporation, is a prime case in point. Why invest in yet another new auto plant that would become obsolete in a matter of months? It's better to invest, so calculated America's ruling rich, in a stock market or in related speculative instruments, where government money could be had at close to zero interest rates and where speculative insurance companies like AIG literally guaranteed against any losses!

That house of cards came tumbling down, and with it capitalism's leaders intensified their shift based on the fact that the only way out of the crisis was on the backs of working people everywhere. Needless to say, the stock market has returned to and even exceeded its highs of five years ago—but again, based on unprecedented speculation as opposed to investment in real production. Wherever capitalism does invest, aside from speculation, is more often than not in low-wage, non-union, service sector, part-time industries, which give zero benefits to

workers. Whether this is done in the U.S. or in a poor and oppressed nation where workers can be had at a fraction of the cost is a matter of indifference to those that make the decisions.

The present budget, debt-ceiling, default, ObamaCare hullabaloo represents "much ado about nothing" except how best to inflict yet another blow against us.

*From **Socialist Action**.*

FEATURES

In-depth analysis from International Viewpoint's Features section



The transitional program and the tools to overthrow capitalism

MANOS SKOUFOGLOU · 4 November 2013

Introduction

When we say that we are in the middle of a deep historical crisis of capitalism, we have to take it seriously. We have entered a completely new period, so it should be clear that we cannot go on doing "business as usual":

– we have already experienced massive strikes, revolts, even revolutionary situations in various countries: in the Arab world, in Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Thailand etc), in Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria, in the core of the developed countries (like the riot in London in 2011), but also in the so-called emerging economies, which were supposed to be the new miracles of capitalist development (Brazil, S.Africa). On the other hand, the left, in practically every case, has proved unable to offer a solid perspective on how to overthrow capitalism. Nevertheless, this is exactly what anticapitalist organizations and revolutionary Marxists should be prepared for, not in the distant future, but now.

– this brings to the forefront the urgent question of what a contemporary revolutionary strategy should be like. What kind of party, what type of program, what means of struggle, what attitude towards bourgeois institutions and the state?

I will try to point out that the transitional program is an important tool in this project, a tool which is interconnected to many other key strategic issues.

So, what is a transitional program? It is a set of demands supposed to be a bridge between the present level of workers' consciousness and the revolution, i.e. the seizure of power by the working class. A series of demands or tasks that is necessary in order

to meet the needs of the working class, but at the same time it is incompatible with capitalism in its development. Starting from simple, elementary needs, one demand leads to the other. For example, if the working class refuses to pay off the public debt, this can only mean that the debt has to be canceled (no matter what "renegotiating" illusions may still exist). In its turn, this means that banks should be nationalized under workers control, so as to prevent big investors from withdrawing their money and provoking a massive crackdown. This would already be a challenge to private property, which the bourgeois class would not tolerate, most likely boycotting production. In order to confront such a situation and meet the needs of the masses, nationalization of key sectors of the economy, without compensation, and a democratically planned economy would be needed. But this would not be capitalism any more. This reflection may be still too much schematic and abstract, but it is nevertheless indicative of the transitional program method. In other words, a transitional program is a way to link the existing, partial struggles to an actual revolution.

? A historical retrospect

1. The first time that we have something like a transitional program is probably in the Communist Manifesto, issued by Marx and Engels in 1948. In the chapter Proletarians and communists, the authors of the manifesto propose a set of 10 demands:

- Abolition of property in land and application of all rents of land to public purposes.
- A heavy progressive or graduated income tax.
- Abolition of all right of inheritance.

- Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
- Centralization of credit in the hands of the State, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly.
- Centralization of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State.
- Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the State; the bringing into cultivation of wastelands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.
- Equal liability of all to labor. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.
- Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country, by a more equable distribution of the population over the country.
- Free education for all children in public schools. Abolition of children's factory labor in its present form. Combination of education with industrial production

These demands are not defined by the term transitional, however they are meant to start from the immediate needs of the exploited and the oppressed and end up to workers' power, although Marx and Engels had not made it clear yet what workers' power and a workers' state would be like (they would be able to tell only after the experience of the Commune of Paris in 1871).

2. In the following years, the program of Marxist parties gradually degenerated. This is reflected in the critique that Marx and Engels wrote against the German social democratic programs of *Gotha* (1875) and *Erfurt* (1891) respectively. The Erfurt program, actually, introduced the distinction between a "political program" for socialism and an economical one, for immediate use.

3. Despite Marx's and Engels's warnings, the program of the leading parties of the Second International eventually split into 2 parts, with a very loose or no connection to each other: a mini-

imum program of immediate demands, which is supposed to be what workers can achieve at this stage, and a maximum program for socialism, which was something to be postponed for the far future, when conditions mature. This also meant a split between economic struggles, i.e. struggles for the every day life conditions of the working class under capitalism, which were meant to be addressed by unions, and political struggles that were the responsibility of the party. According to social democracy, those 2 tasks shouldn't be mixed. Starting from the polemic of Rosa Luxemburg against the leadership of the German social democracy (mainly Bernstein), the communists of the 3rd international fiercely contested this idea, which has been repeated many times since by various currents and is still today quite common.

4. In his *April theses*, Lenin proposes a draft program, adapted to the specific conditions in Russia in the context of the World War. Apart from taking a clear position about the key issues of the war (fraternization, not the slightest concession to "revolutionary defencism") and of the provisional governments (no support), the program also includes measures such as: abolition of the police, the army and the bureaucracy, equalization of the salaries of all officials, all of whom are elective and displaceable at any time, with the average wage of a competent worker, nationalization of all lands, union of all banks into a single national bank controlled by the Soviet of Workers' Deputies etc. According to the author, these measures were meant to promote the "transition" to a second revolutionary stage, "which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants".

In September 1917, in his article *The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It*, Lenin puts forward a five point program:

- Amalgamation of all banks into a single bank, and state control over its operations, or nationalization of the banks
- Nationalization of the syndicates, i.e., the largest, monopolistic capitalist associations (sugar, oil,

coal, iron and steel, and other syndicates)

- Abolition of commercial secrecy
- Compulsory amalgamation into associations of industrialists, merchants and employers generally.
- Compulsory organization of the population into consumers' societies, or encouragement of such organization, and the exercise of control over it

5. Trying to completely break with the reformist tradition of the Second international, and also based on the experience of the Russian Revolution, the Third (Communist) International tried to elaborate a program that would overcome the distinction between minimum and maximum demands. The Third Congress stated:

The Communist Parties do not put forward minimum programs which could serve to strengthen and improve the tottering foundations of capitalism. [...]If the demands put forward by the Communists correspond to the immediate needs of the broad proletarian masses, and if the masses are convinced that they cannot go on living unless their demands are met, then the struggle around these issues becomes the starting-point of the struggle for power. In place of the minimum program of the centrists and reformists, the Communist International offers a struggle for the concrete demands of the proletariat which, in their totality, challenge the power of the bourgeoisie, organize the proletariat and mark out the different stages of the struggle for its dictatorship.

Again, this program was not called transitional, however it was defined as a program suitable for the transitional period that humanity had entered.

6. After its 5th Congress (1924), in the Third International, under the ever-strengthening control of Stalin's bureaucratic faction, the transitional method faded away once again. The corollary of this process has been the shift to the popular front strategy after the 7th Congress (1934), i.e. the call for political alliances between workers and the so called democratic bourgeoisie against fascism, in-

cluding even participation in bourgeois governments.

7. It is not a coincidence, therefore, that the founding document of our current, the Fourth International, written by Trotsky in 1938, was called *The Transitional Program, or The death agony of capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*. The second title is also not a coincidence, as Trotsky's methodology started with the conception of capitalism as a historically bankrupt mode of production that was about to die. Trotsky thought that we were facing a final battle between capitalism and socialism-an idea bitterly criticized afterwards. But was this criticism correct or not? We will come back to this later.

B. Transitional methodology

1. More than a given set of demands, the Transitional Program is a certain methodology to "overcome the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard", in Trotsky's own words. What makes a demand or task transitional is its ability to revolutionize class consciousness under the given class struggle circumstances.

2. The concept is that, on one hand, in order to challenge the bourgeois power, the working class has to start from its actual struggles and experiences and, on the other, vice versa, in order to achieve even a small conquest within capitalism, especially in periods of crisis, the bourgeois class must fear that they will lose everything (so, a transitional program is even more effective in fighting for immediate needs).

3. In this framework, the program consists of 3 types of demands or, even better, tasks:

- a. immediate (e.g. stop buying military equipment)
- b. democratic (e.g. independence of all workers' organizations from the police and the army)
- c. transitional to workers' power (e.g. substitution of the army by peoples' militia, confiscating capital

etc).

4. Here we have to make an important remark: a transitional program can be such, transitional, only if it raises the question of power from a class viewpoint. So, the corollary of the program has been the slogans for a workers' and peasants' government and for soviets and dual power.

a. The second one refers to the matrix of a workers' state, which is the objective goal of the program. As Lenin pointed out in 1917, in *The State and Revolution*, the quintessence of a revolutionary communist project is not just to change the head of the bourgeois state, but to destroy its whole structure. Nowadays, it is even more important to be clear that strategically it is not possible to reform the bourgeois state, nor can we conquer it from the inside, but we have to build our own means of self-organization and dual power outside and against it

b. The first slogan is more complicated, as its content has not always been the same

i. in the case of the Bolsheviks, according to Trotsky, it was practically a synonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat

ii. later, in the early 20's, there seemed to be a real possibility for short-lived governments of workers' parties coalitions, in various combinations and of different types, still within capitalism. Communists could consider differentiated tactics towards different possible versions of such governments, including also support or participation, provided, though, that a workers' government would be a concrete path to workers' power, and not a substitute for it.

iii. In the hands of Stalinists in the 1930's, the same slogan turned out to be a synonym of class collaborationist governments.

iv. By the time of the creation of the Fourth International, the real revolutionary currents were too small to determine any alliance for a real workers' government, i.e. a government actually defending workers' rights. Even the possibility was almost totally excluded. So, in the Transitional Program, the "workers' and peasants' government" was

mainly a slogan of agitation, meant to unveil that social-democracy and the Communist Parties would rather ally with the so called democratic bourgeoisie than fight for an independent worker's government.

v. Today, the slogan for a workers' government is still important when the question "what government" is raised by people, although it is interpreted in various and contradictory ways and despite its common abuse, which tends to assimilate it with a reformist stageist demand, restoring the illusion that capitalism may be reformed or overthrown by conquering the bourgeois state, and not challenging it itself.

C. Criticism

We should now pose the following question: is the idea of a transitional program still relevant today? Is it really a useful tool in our struggle against capitalism? We will try to answer though examining some popular objections against the whole concept.

1. There are currents, such as eurocommunists or the late stalinist Communist Parties, who claim that the transitional demands are invented, something like lab experiments with no connection to the actual needs of workers. Instead, they promote only those claims already adopted or easy to adopt by social movements.

2. On the other hand, there are others (anarchists, some maoists) who claim that putting forward such specific demands, like for example a sliding scale of wages and hours, will inevitably lead to incorporation into a project to manage capitalism. How can we ask the bourgeois state to do something against its own interests?

Both arguments reveal a misunderstanding not only of the transitional program methodology, but also of the role that a revolutionary anticapitalist organization has to accomplish. It is neither to just reflect what workers and the oppressed think right now (in this case, then why not simply dissolve ourselves in the mass movement?), nor to ignore the present state of the class consciousness, avoiding

the crucial question: how to help it improve towards a revolutionary direction? In both cases, though, as much as they may seem opposite, the result is the same: a return to the old social-democratic concept of dividing the program into two irrelevant parts: a minimum and a maximum one.

3. Another type of criticism is the argument that the *Transitional Program* is not timely any more. It is absolutely true that any program has to be updated, that it is not a doctrine for all times and that there is no eternal recipe. In the original of 1938, the program was already differentiated in three different versions, regarding bourgeois democracies, backward countries and fascist regimes respectively. Conditions have changed since that time. But are the fundamental idea or the general outline of the Transitional Program also outdated?

4. Actually this question was raised from the very beginning. Fighting against comrades who thought that to raise all those demands was premature in the US, in his well-known discussion with some members of the American SWP, Trotsky explained that the Transitional Program is not to adapt to the consciousness of the working class as it is, but to promote the objective interests of workers, even if the latter are not fully aware of them. He rejected excluding the task of equipping a workers militia, because for him the fundamental criterion was not whether the whole working class was ready to adopt it or not, but the fact that fascism was objectively threatening the American working class, and at least a vanguard minority of the latter should be aware of this. Just after the World War II, Tony Cliff supported that the Transitional Program was founded on the hypothesis that the crisis in the 1930's would be the final crisis of capitalism, which proved to be wrong, as capitalism entered a new upward phase. So, since we are not in a revolutionary period any more, we have to replace the Transitional Program with a list of radical immediate demands, not meant to question capitalism at once.

It is maybe true that there are some fatalistic elements in the articulations of Trotsky (revealed also

in the title itself). However, in his work *The Third International after Lenin*, Trotsky clarified that by speaking about a revolutionary period he did not mean that a revolution would inevitably happen or that a counter-revolutionary victory was impossible, but that in the period to come we have to anticipate abrupt shifts of both the objective situation and the class consciousness. Regardless of our estimation about previous periods, I think that this is exactly the case nowadays.

D. Misinterpretations

In order to better conceptualize the transitional method, maybe it is helpful to examine also some frequent misinterpretations of it.

1. Firstly, a program split into different stages is not at all transitional. We can't and shouldn't fight for democracy now and just put aside the social question, to deal with it in the future. Nowadays, this is a key issue in the Arab Spring revolutions, but it is also raised in Greece. Let's recall the "emergency plan" of SYRIZA, that is to say renegotiating the debt in order to "save the country" now and postpone the debate for socialism for another time, or even the illusion of more radical trends that a progressive, national economic development against the omnivorous imperialism but without confronting capitalism itself is feasible.

The transitional methodology is based exactly on the liquidity of the social consciousness and of the real course of the class struggle, which proceeds with leaps and gaps, and not in a linear way that can be divided into distinct phases. A country that today has only a weak workers' movement may experience monumental struggles tomorrow – and vice versa. Who could tell some years ago that we could have a revolt in Bahrain? In the 1980's, this was the main argument of Ernest Mandel in his polemic against Doug Lorimer of the Australian SWP, who questioned the idea of the permanent revolution and endorsed the older "Third Worldist" argument that a revolution in the developed capitalist countries was extremely unlikely because their working class had turned into "labor aristoc-

racy" (Lorimer, unfortunately, passed away recently).

2. Secondly, the transitional program is often treated as a list of demands, proposed to reformist or/and social-democratic parties by small revolutionary groups. In my opinion, this has been, for example, the methodology of the Militant (Ted Grant) current all the time (as well as of the Pabloite current, in a different form). According to this conception, the revolutionary Marxists' role is to carry this genuine program and fight for its adoption in the congresses of mass reformist parties. This concept has led to picturesque small groups that claim extreme orthodoxy, but in practice always spin around reformism. Of course it is important to fight for your position when being part of a broader party or front, but the main aim is for the transitional program to be adopted by the mass movement itself, including radical trade unions. It is more of an action plan for the working class, than a plan proposed with the illusion that it could be adopted by reformist left governments. Besides, in his work *Where is France going?*, Trotsky already remarked that a transitional program means nothing if adopted by parties that are not willing to do anything about its implementation.

In general, we have to avoid what we could call "objectivism", i.e. the idea that any program, even the best one, has an automatic effect in itself. On the contrary, the transitional program, as part of an overall revolutionary program to overthrow capitalism, is tightly connected to the subjective factor, i.e. to a conscious and voluntarily disciplined political instrument. This cannot be but a party, a workers' party, and, moreover, a party independent from reformism. A revolutionary program cannot exist without a revolutionary party and vice versa. Therefore, rather than trying to reform the old workers' party bureaucracies, we have to consider what revolutionary anticapitalist parties have to be like nowadays. How can they be prepared to challenge capitalism in deed? How can we use our his-

toric experience? How can we actually build such parties?

E. The Transitional Program today

What is the actual relevance of this discussion today? In the context of the crisis, the need for a transitional program becomes obvious even to currents who had nothing to do with it before. This is, for example, the case of ANTARSYA in Greece. The biggest organizations that form the front used to be hostile to the transitional methodology, more or less on the basis of the objections described above. However, nowadays everybody in ANTARSYA speaks in the name of a contemporary transitional program. No matter how different the interpretations of such a program may be, it is still a fact that actually ANTARSYA is the only visible left force in Greece that put forward a transitional program, even incomplete, and call it by this name.

Even if it is rather impossible to make a list of demands suitable for all cases, it is crucial to engage ourselves in an attempt to form a new transitional program, in the framework of a broader revolutionary program which will be suitable for our time and constitute a real bridge to the workers' power. We can think of some universal demands, like the cancellation of the debt, the nationalization of banks and key sectors of the economy without compensation and under workers control, the prohibition of lay-offs etc. In certain countries there are other, more specific key issues: in European countries, especially in the periphery, a rupture with the EU and an internationalist struggle to destroy it and replace it by the free right of the peoples to unite in federations. For the Arab world, the dissolution of all institutions connected to the dictatorial parties. In Greece and other countries, the need for massive self-defense structures against fascists etc.

Apart from underlining the need to formulate a timely list of remarks and tasks, though, it is important to make three concluding remarks:

1. The role of the working class and its organizations in the battle against capitalism is indispens-

able. We have to help the working class unite in action, by bringing different working class layers together: private along with public sector workers, domestic workers along with immigrants, women along with men. This means including the fight for the special needs of all oppressed groups. An objective of the transitional program is also to provide the political ground for a united front, a front meant to promote class self-confidence by joining its scattered forces, not by tailing everybody behind reformists, though.

2. We have to find the means to make the transitional program a really useful tool in the hands of the oppressed, and not just put it on a shelf and leave it there. We have already underlined that no demand is transitional in itself, regardless its actual function in the class struggle. People usually learn by their own experience, through their own actions. Therefore, means of struggle like the general political strike can be a strategic element of great importance in this direction.

3. To say that the working class and the oppressed strata are not militant or conscious enough is not an excuse for our inertia. The recent experience shows the contrary: there are more and more struggles. If they are not always conscious enough, it is also our fault. Besides, we cannot postpone our answer to the challenges that the crisis brings with it until the class matures – the concrete task is to prepare for revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situations on the specific ground that the current state of class consciousness, even if quite low, offers. How to build parties able to do that is something to discuss (through radical trade unions? by regrouping revolutionary groups and anticapitalist currents? by independently building our own section where possible? by taking advantage of splits from reformism?). But the need for such parties and for such an International is not.

Let's do as the slogan says: from Sao Paolo to Istanbul, from Athens to Cairo, from Revolt to Revolution.

| OBITUARY:

General Vo Nguyen Giap (1911-2013): Military hero, revolutionary intellectual, environmentalist

MICHAEL KARADJIS · 3 November 2013

Giap died on October 4, aged 102.

While mainly remembered as a military leader, Giap was also one of Vietnam's most significant political leaders, a revolutionary intellectual, an environmentalist and a campaigner for progressive change within his own country.

According to Vietnamese law, state funerals are only given to former heads of state or government. Giap never attained any of these titles. Defence minister for long periods, deputy prime minister was highest official post he rose to. Heads of the armed forces don't get them.

Yet there was never a chance the ruling Communist Party wouldn't break the rules for Giap, regarded to be a national treasure. The very suggestion of it over the last few years provoked outrage. The mass outpouring for his funeral demonstrated the enormous esteem in which he was held.

Born Vo Giap in the north-central province of Quang Binh in 1911, the surname Vo in Vietnamese refers, coincidentally, to a fighter, a warrior. It was a most appropriate name for someone who would go on to defeat the most powerful imperial states on Earth. But one of Giap's nicknames was Brother Van – where "Van" means literature. "Vo" and "Van" represented the two sides of the character of this very widely read, intellectual military officer.

Just one example of how these two aspects of his character were combined was his skill with languages. When he was building the people's army in the 1940s in remote mountain regions, he learnt four languages of ethnic minority peoples who would be fighters in that army. He even wrote poems in one of them.

Giap came from a nationalist family. His maternal grandfather had joined the Can Vuong Resistance against the French, and his father had also joined uprisings against the French in the 1880s. His father was arrested in 1919, when Giap was eight, and died in prison. One of his older sisters was arrested soon after, and died soon after being released due to prison conditions. These two events, in addition to the later arrest of his first wife and fellow revolutionary, Nguyen Thi Quang Thai, in the 1940s, who also died in prison, left indelible marks of justified hatred for the colonial oppressor on the young Giap. His first daughter, Hong Anh, told Cecil B. Currey, Giap's biographer, that "he carries in his soul wounds that even time cannot heal".

Giap was already an organiser of a student movement at his high school, Quoc Hoc High in Hue, for which he was expelled and returned to his village. There he joined the Tan Viet party, which introduced him to communist ideas – in 1926 reading Ho Chi Minh's *Colonialism on Trial*, which would change his life forever. Following further arrests and a jail sentence in 1930, Giap moved to Hanoi, where he joined the Communist Party of Vietnam in Hanoi in 1931. In Hanoi, he studied law, and also worked as a high school history and French teacher.

Giap briefly left for China in May 1940 when France outlawed the party (it was during this time his first wife was arrested and died), but on his return with Ho Chi Minh in 1941, they set up the precursor to the famous Viet Minh, first to fight the war-time occupation by Japan, in collaboration with the fascist Vichy French government, and later the French when they returned.

After driving out the Japanese, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on September 2 1945. However, the revolutionaries were well aware that the French planned to return, and in the meantime a mind-boggling assortment of Chinese Kuomintang, British and retreating Japanese troops were crawling over Vietnam like vultures. Giap founded the Vietnamese People's Army on December 2, 1944, consisting of 31 men and three women.

By the time of the independence proclamation, the VPA had some 5000 troops. Some of their weapons had come from the US Office of Strategic Services (OSS, the precursor to the CIA) to help fight the Japanese, but as history showed, the Vietnamese revolutionaries' pledge from the outset to not be used by any colonial or foreign power was meant seriously.

Giap and 'Peoples' War': Defeating France

Most obituaries have dealt heavily with Giap's role in leading the Vietnamese people's war against French colonialism, and particularly the smashing victory at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 – one of his history's more significant battles, one that actually changed something major, as a small and poor country brought about a devastating defeat to a major imperialist power, an extraordinary encouragement to hundreds of millions of other peoples throughout the colonial world trying to throw off the colonial oppressor. It is above all due to this victory that Giap, along with Ho, acquired mythic status among the world's peoples.

"All citizens are soldiers. All villages and wards are fortresses, and our entire country is a vast battlefield on which the enemy is besieged, attacked and defeated", Giap proclaimed. This is not the place to discuss Giap's military strategy, which would require another article, or articles. In essence, however, Giap was one of the 20th century's leading practitioners and theoreticians of "people's war", involving a vast array of tactics, ranging from the simplest guerilla operation, or even just providing water to troops, right up to main front battles and

much in between, that aimed to involve ordinary people at every level in the fight to defeat the oppressor, who had overwhelming superiority in advanced weaponry.

Much has been written about the final battle of Dien Bien Phu, a strategic French military post in the mountainous north-west of Vietnam, so rather than repeat, this article will quote an excellent description by Jack Smith in the October 12 Liberation News:

"Giap figured out what to do — one of the most audacious maneuvers in modern military history. ... Giap had artillery but he kept it a secret until the right moment. His plan required 50,000 troops, thousands of support forces, 24 howitzers, and anti-aircraft guns, ammunition and supplies for an army. Each howitzer weighed between 3 and 7 tons, depending on the type Giap used.

The problem was how to get the howitzers up the mountains without being detected despite roadless, very difficult terrain. He decided that large teams of porters would push and haul each piece up the back side of the mountains, facing away from the base. Once there, they would tunnel and drag the howitzers to the forward slopes on the other side facing the enemy down below, and position them to cause maximum damage to various parts of the sprawling base. It was an incredible accomplishment.

The French — who numbered about 13,000 — discovered the Viet Minh had heavy weapons on March 14, 1954, when the first shot came crashing down upon them. After two weeks of this bombardment, Giap sent in the troops. It was a tough fight, including in trenches. On May 7, Giap sent 25,000 Viet Minh on a final assault on the remainder of the garrison-and it was over."

Land reform disaster and rectification

Following the supposedly temporary division of Vietnam into north and south at the Geneva Conference in 1954, the ruling Communist Party government in the north set about carrying through its social revolution. However, the nature and

speed of the social transformation were important issues where differences naturally arose, especially in such an underdeveloped country.

Meanwhile, the very division of the country also led to different views on how much stress to put on aiding the liberation movement in the south and pushing reunification, before getting too bogged down in transformation in half a country.

Nevertheless, as the peasant masses had been the major base of the resistance to the French, the elementary democratic issue of carrying through the party's land reform program was not something that could wait, and the party set to the task soon after victory. In late 1954, Ho Chi Minh announced a "land to the tiller" campaign.

However, as the depth of the sheer class hatred of the poorest peasants, after centuries of oppression, was unleashed, an element of the ruling party, led by general-secretary Truong Trinh (whose name means 'Long March'), rode this wave in an opportunist fashion. By most accounts, this "poor-peasant" ultra-radicalism occurred with the encouragement of Chinese advisors then in Vietnam, who did not fully understand the Vietnamese reality.

Though the land reform began modestly as planned, by its second stage it had turned into a fiasco, with poor peasants encouraged to denounce large peasants and even middle peasants and village teachers as bourgeois class enemies, many of who were unjustly stripped of land, in conflict with explicit party guidelines. Ho Chi Minh also made clear that while the land of the landlords was to be redistributed, no retribution was to be dished out to those who had supported the anti-French struggle, and they were not to be left destitute themselves. Yet many land reform committees did just that, and that was the least of it; several thousand people lost their lives before the campaign could be brought to an end.

Ho Chi Minh and General Giap continually denounced the excesses and demanded the carnage come to an end. Yet their voices had little effect on the combination of unleashed raw class hatred on

the ground and the opportunism mixed with ideological obsession that was playing with this fire. Certainly, the idea of either Ho or Giap being "dictators" was shown to be demonstrably false.

But then when those masses on the receiving end began to organize themselves, their voices could become effective. Aggrieved peasants began making their way to Hanoi to gather outside the party Central Committee to demand redress. These even included Vietminh cadres from the French war, who had also been targeted. There were even peasant uprisings in some provinces against the crazed "land reform" committees.

Finally, the protesting peasants were all invited to a major sports ground in Hanoi and addressed by Giap, who admitted that grave errors had been made, and the campaign was brought to heel, with a rectification campaign restoring land to those who had lost it unjustly. Ho Chi Minh also chose Giap to go and campaign around the country to calm the situation. The campaign had distributed land to 10 million peasants, but the price had been heavy, and had bogged down the party at a time when the right-wing dictatorship of Diem in the south was stepping up its violent attacks on the Vietminh cadres there.

By 1959, it was clear that the northern cadres had to step in and deliver military aid to the struggle in the south, especially as the US was already sending massive aid and advisors to Diem. The pressure of the south led to the party leadership choosing a leading southern cadre, Le Duan, to replace Truong Trinh, dumped due to the land reform fiasco, as party general-secretary. It is widely believed that that Giap was expected to have been given that position, and that this was the beginning of the famous rivalry between these two leaders. Whatever the case, it did become clear that the two had a number of political differences in the following years.

War in the south: Disputes over strategy

As the Sino-Soviet split widened in the early 1960s, while concurrently, the US intervention into the war in the south grew deeper, differences emerged over these related issues.

In 1963, the party decided it needed to step up support to the military struggle in the south, while at the same time, resolving to remain neutral and remain friends with both major Communist-ruled states.

However, several cadres, led by Hoang Minh Chinh, adopted a pro-Soviet position. Their view was that the division of Vietnam could only be resolved by diplomatic and not military means, in line with the Kremlin's philosophy of "peaceful co-existence." While China had also been advising caution, the widening of the split led it to verbally play the "revolutionary" card against Moscow's "revisionism", so by 1963 it was supporting a greater military role for Hanoi in the south.

While both Giap and Le Duan recognised the necessity of military intervention given the reality on the ground, different conceptions emerged over the nature of armed struggle and its relation to political struggle, including a semi-public debate between Giap and General Nguyen Chi Thanh, supported by Le Duan, in the party's theoretical journals. All agreed in principle that the struggle would involve a mixture of main force battles, guerilla warfare, winning people politically, and diplomatic struggle, but the weight of each was sharply contested.

While Le Duan and Nguyen Chi Thanh believed the strategy of "big battles" involving large "main force" units should take primacy, Giap stressed instead the primacy of guerilla war, in the form of "prolonged people's war". This latter conception meant that military struggle had to go hand in hand with gathering popular support, and was done in a way to gather further support, at no stage going beyond where the people were at.

Both conceptions had the ultimate aim of taking the largely rural-based struggle to the cities via popular insurrection, but Giap's conception once again put greater stress on coordinating with the

popular masses in the cities, a precondition to moving onto this stage.

To undermine his opponents, Le Duan adopted a verbally pro-Beijing position. In practice, however, this was largely just a device to use to denounce his opponents and rivals as "revisionists", thus falsely putting Giap and his co-thinkers in the same bag as the pro-Moscow "negotiations only" wing of the party.

In reality, however, Le Duan had little in common with Maoism other than "fighting revisionists." Beijing, for its own reasons, in fact advocated a prolonged people's war strategy, in common with Giap. However, unlike Giap, Beijing wanted it prolonged as long as possible, had no interest in moving onto the insurrection stage, still less in winning over people in the cities, and above all had adopted a verbally ultra-left position of opposing the Vietnamese entering into any negotiations with the US. Beijing's position was thus concerned with limiting Vietnam's options in emerging as a strong power independent of Beijing, and its agreement with Giap on people's war was thus largely coincidental.

In fact, to focus on "main force" battles, Le Duan ultimately would have a greater need for the Soviets' more advanced weapons, and he did later turn to them; at this point, however, as the Soviets only pushed negotiations and no war, for Le Duan (and for Giap) this could only mean capitulation. Moreover, the specific "main force" battles strategy put forward by Le Duan's camp was suggestive the Maoist "surround the cities" strategy: a rural-based army would ultimately take over cities, but little importance was given to winning the urban working classes over. Ultimately, even though Beijing opposed main force battles which Le Duan advocated, and even though Le Duan was not opposed to negotiations whereas Beijing was, the impression that both were adopting a "hard" position, even if in very different ways, was a useful ploy for fighting "revisionists".

Thus the Sino-Soviet dispute intersected with inter-Vietnamese differences in rather indirect ways. Ultimately, neither Giap nor Le Duan (nor many in the CPV) had much faith in either Moscow or Beijing, and for both the issue was always what was good, in their view, for Vietnam's struggle, never about being someone else's tool.

Tet Offensive

Most commentary on Giap's death claims he was the master of the famous Tet Offensive of 1968. In that offensive, North Vietnamese and southern National Liberation Front troops launched massive simultaneous surprise attacks, involving some 80,000 troops, on five cities, 36 provincial capitals, 64 district capitals and 25 airports throughout Vietnam. Some of the most spectacular attacks were on the central city of Hue and on Saigon itself. Massive US counter-attacks by air killed thousands of NLF troops, indeed it is widely regarded as an enormous military set-back and body blow to the southern guerilla forces in particular. Some units lost the overwhelming majority of their troops. However, the Tet Offensive is also regarded to be the turning point in the war due to the political impact it had on the home front in the US, where it helped provoke widespread opposition and helped fuel a feeling of vulnerability in the US and its armed forces.

While this political impact is undeniable – and the CPV's strategy was always political as well as military – Western propaganda has demonised Giap as a "ruthless" military chief who was unmoved by how many of his troops were slaughtered "just to achieve his political ends". Bart Jones, writing in the October 4 Washington Post, asserted that "In three decades of combat, he is said to have had more than a million of his soldiers killed."

Of course, the self-serving hypocritical nature of such talk, from those supporting the side that was doing this ruthless slaughtering of millions of Vietnamese, via the most massive carpet bombing in history which dwarfed the entire tonnage of bombs dropped in all theatres of World War II, in-

cluding history's longest ever chemical war with Agent Orange, in a country far away from American shores that they had no business being in, is so stunning that it requires no analysis but only contempt from intelligent people.

Beyond that, however, recent research suggests the charge against Giap in relation to Tet is in fact unwarranted. While defence minister, Giap had only one vote within a special 5-member Politburo "war sub-committee" consisting of himself, Le Duan, Le Duc Tho, Nguyen Chi Thanh and Pham Hung.

Based on "a number of Vietnamese histories, documents, and sources have become available" in recent years, author Merle Pribbenow shows that as Tet 1968 approached, Giap and many leaders, including Ho Chi Minh, had great reservations about the idea of the offensive, as they believed the conditions were not ready for popular uprisings in the cities (Pribbenow, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 2008, vol. 3, issue 2, pp. 1–33, for this and the paragraphs below regarding Tet).

As background, in June 1966, the Politburo war subcommittee met with the Central Military Party Committee and outlined a plan to win a decisive victory. It consisted of "main force" units attacking the enemy on four main battlefields, to be combined with attacks and insurrections in three main cities.

While Giáp agreed with fighting "big battles" as one part of an overall strategy, he stressed that "the attacks on the cities should start with small military attacks and only gradually build up to the 'insurrection' stage in certain specific areas and cities, once communist military forces had attained local superiority in those areas".

In January 1967, the Central Committee approved Resolution 13, which called for "an all-out effort ... to win a decisive victory in a relatively short period of time", by inflicting heavy casualties on US forces, destroying a major portion of the South Vietnamese army, before inciting a "general offensive–general insurrection" in the cities – there was no consideration given to launching urban insurrections before

some decisive military defeats of the enemy, understanding this would mean the revolutionary forces would be smashed by the US military.

The resolution made clear that this should occur "at end of a gradual, step-by-step process: "In coordination with the political struggle, [we must] build up our strength, gradually and systematically gain control in the cities, weaken the enemy's controls, intensify our movement in the cities, and create conditions to enable us to advance toward launching a general offensive—general insurrection."

Resolution 13 underlined that the aim of winning such decisive military victories was to force the US into negotiations – which they considered urgent given the upcoming US elections in 1968 – in a situation where the Vietnamese would thus be in a stronger negotiating position. The party thus had a political-military-diplomatic strategy.

However, there was a basic problem in the plan – their military forces were not yet in a position to impose such massive defeats on the American military, in particular quickly enough to meet the timetable for an urban offensive/insurrection at Tet – Vietnamese Lunar New Year – which was to fall in late January 1968. General Van Tien Dung, recognising this problem, went behind Giap and conferred with Le Duan, who proposed the entire set of intermediate stages, including military victories, be dropped, and instead to move immediately to the final stage of general offensive/insurrection. The insurrection would coincide with main force military attacks all round the country to divert the enemy, but would not need to wait for them to cripple the enemy's forces.

Le Duan was thus proposing a radically ultraleft "insurrectionist" strategy, one that had no relation to either Moscow or Beijing views, and no relation even to the party disputes, since it called for ignoring not only popular support and guerilla struggle, but even main force military victories – but with the aim of forcing the Americans into negotiations.

When the plan was put to the Politburo, there was significant opposition, including from Ho Chi

Minh, who stressed, among other things, that they still needed to pay attention to fighting a protracted guerilla war, and that "we must also pay attention to the need to preserve the strength of our people. If our people and our resources become exhausted, then we will not be able to fight, no matter how many troops we have." Due to reservations of many members, Politburo approval of the full plan was delayed until December 1967, when both Ho and Giap were out of the country for medical treatment – Ho in China and Giap in Hungary.

Indeed, Giap was allegedly so opposed to the plan that he extended his stay there until just after the offensive begun, to underline his displeasure with this course. Once in operation, he returned to lead it as well as he could. General Tran Van Trà, who led the southern National Liberation Front forces, those who were decimated in the offensive, later criticised the northern leadership for not giving the NLF sufficient time to prepare for the offensive.

While it is true that the political impact on the US government and anti-war movement was ultimately enormous, it is also true that Le Duan's forcing of the "insurrection" did not lead to urban uprisings (though it was more successful in many smaller rural towns), and did lead to a US counter-attack which decimated the southern revolutionary forces. In Hue, both the excesses of the incoming revolutionary forces, and the extremely vicious US air attack, imposed no less than catastrophe on that city.

It is a very difficult thing to look back and suggest how things may have turned out better if the Ho-Giap strategy had been adopted instead, and the offensive was thus delayed. But while Giap, as a loyal party member, always publicly defended the offensive for its impact politically, the facts show he cannot be blamed for a strategy that resulted in so much death.

The fall of Saigon

Le Duan had meanwhile been consolidating power via building a core of close supporters among certain cadres within the party bureaucracy and secu-

riety apparatus, and he used the Tet events against Giap. In late 1967, even before the offensive, a number of Giap's closest allies were arrested. After Ho Chi Minh, who was very close to Giap, died in 1969, Le Duan went on the offensive. It is well known that in 1972-73, a great many of Giap's closest confidantes within the party and army were demoted or "retired".

However, despite being sidelined within the party apparatus, Giap continued to play the crucial role as Defense Minister in ensuring Vietnam's victory over the US in 1975. Certainly, he was not alone – Le Duan was head of the Party Military Commission, and his ally General Van Tien Dung headed the Army General Staff. However, the book written by the latter, which became a standard party text, in which he claimed all the credit for the victory, is widely regarded to be inaccurate and wildly self-serving, omitting the role of both Giap and of the southern revolutionaries under the leadership of General Tran Van Tra.

As Colonel Bui Tin, who fought with Giap in the French war and was with Giap as a journalist for the party paper, Nhan Dan, when Saigon fell, explains:

"Giap was always in direct command throughout the 1975 offensive and it was he who really led it to victory. They (people in the know) have even produced the daily command diary of the Operations Department of the General Staff which clearly and carefully recorded every order made by Giap right down to the very minute and second when it was issued. These records also show how rapidly and daringly he reacted to developing situations. Every moment counted and most of the orders are written in his own hand. Giap was always present at the command post in the Citadel in Hanoi to follow developments, make corrections if necessary and issue immediate orders." (Following Ho Chi Minh, 1995, p. 82).

Revolutionary victories however, especially after such a horrifically destructive war which had killed millions of people, are rarely pure affairs. On the

one hand comes an immense feeling of solidarity in such an achievement through such enormous collective sacrifice, and immense joy in peace after so many decades. On the other hand, the chaos of transition as a state collapses – the state of the south Vietnamese dictatorship – combined with the sense of entitlement that some may feel after so much loss and so much hell, creates openings for the twin evils of vengeance and looting, not to mention common opportunistic crime. Bui Tin reports on this moving event on May 7 1975, a few days after victory, when Giap arrived at Independence Palace in Saigon:

"An officer said that he had acquired a good-quality piano from a military base in the South which he would send to General Giap's home in Hanoi. I have never seen Giap so angry. With his eyes blazing and uttering obscenities, he replied that it was impossible for him to accept such booty: what would everybody else who had participated in the campaign expect? After that I respected General Giap even more" (p. 87).

Giap sidelined

The decade after 1975 was extremely hard for Vietnam. The US maintained a criminal embargo on the country, denied reconstruction aid after "bombing Vietnam back into the Stone Age" as US president Lyndon Johnson had put it, while meanwhile the Chinese regime adopted an aggressive position and encouraged the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime in neighbouring Cambodia to launch murderous attacks on Vietnam's Mekong rice bowl region. When Vietnam finally responded in 1979, entering Cambodia and helping the Cambodian people expel the Khmer Rouge, the US and China supported and armed a decade-long war by the Khmer Rouge from Thailand bases.

China even briefly invaded Vietnam in early 1979, and although it was beaten back by heroic Vietnamese resistance, this caused significant destruction and deep psychological scars. The criminal US embargo was joined by the European Union, China, Australia, the southeast Asian capitalist dic-

tatorships and countless other countries, crippling Vietnam's ability to recover. These circumstances also tied Vietnam more closely to the Soviet leadership and its policy choices than it would have preferred.

In such conditions, an inappropriately rapid and radical economic policy was pushed internally under Le Duan's leadership, while the conditions of siege facilitated the exercise of a "war communist" style of political leadership. The exodus of millions of "boat people", from where come Australia's large Vietnamese community today, can neither be blamed simply on the extraordinary poverty of a country destroyed by war, nor on these people, often owners of micro-businesses, being expropriated "capitalists". Big capital fled in 1975, on planes, not rickety boats. Bad policy decisions pushed through in a rush, informed more by ideology than concrete circumstances on the ground, played a major role.

It was in such circumstances that Giap, always far more a "leader of the people" than a machine man, was first removed as Secretary of the Central Military Commission in 1977, then replaced as Defence Minister by Van Tien Dung in 1980, and finally dropped from the Politburo at the 5th party congress in 1982 (but remained on the much larger Central Committee). Following the beginnings of political and economic opening (Doi Moi) after the 6th party congress in 1986, which the military were strongly supportive of and involved in, Giap got one of the deputy prime minister posts until 1991, following which he retired at 80 years of age.

Giap however never lost interest in his country's politics, or world politics, in the very broadest sense. His first portfolio after being dropped from the Politburo was science, and he was appointed chairman of the National Committee on Population and Family Planning. Some ridiculed this (and his opponents may have even intended it this way) – as poet To Huu was concurrently made deputy prime minister, people quipped "the poet does economy and the army general places IUD contraception". Yet Giap, always anything other than a one-dimensional military man, was in fact eminently suited to

taking on jobs relevant to his country's development.

Giap in later life: environment and democracy advocate

One of his close friends, world famous Vietnamese ecologist (and party member since 1954) Professor Vo Quy, explained to me that, in the 1980s, Giap had held largely the same ideas about "development" as most of his comrades, influenced by the Soviet model. That is, that a poor country needs to go rapidly for "large-scale" development in order to catch up. While no-one denied that Vietnam needed a good dose of this, as a "one size fits all" policy panacea it had enormous implications for a poor country that could ill-afford it, not to mention massive environmental consequences.

One day Vo Quy gave Giap the famous book *Small is Beautiful* by E.F. Schumacher. Giap, always a prolific reader, read it in one night. While he may not have accepted the book's arguments in toto – it basically replaces a "big" development schema with a "small" one as a panacea – the effect on him was immediate, according to Vo Quy. He asked for more books on environmental issues, and since that time Giap maintained an enormous interest in these issues.

This came to a head in recent years, even with Giap at a very advanced age, with the state and party leadership falling in behind a massive project to mine bauxite and smelt aluminium in Vietnam's Central Highlands. The Highlands have already been heavily deforested due to war and post-war development (much of the latter ill-conceived); large numbers of Vietnamese scientists and environmentalists held great fears for the environmental impact of this development on the region. In addition, the region is home to a large number of ethnic minorities, whose livelihoods depend on the forest. The potentially disastrous impact on them is also a major concern.

According to Vo Quy, the Central Highlands is an "area of stunning beauty with rich eco-tourism potential and a highly productive agricultural zone".

The damage to the environment likely caused by bauxite — including the production of thousands of tones of toxic "red sludge" "far outweighs any economic benefits".

In January 2009, Giap wrote the first of three open letters to the party and state leadership. He argued against the project on three grounds. The first two were that it would destroy the environment, and that it would displace the local ethnic minority people. In late April, 135 Vietnamese intellectuals and scientists signed a petition that was presented to the National Assembly, protesting this development.

In fact, Giap pointed out that Vietnam had proposed a similar project in the same region to Comecon, the Soviet-led economic bloc, in the 1980s, but Comecon advised against it, warning of devastating ecological damage, not only for residents of the highlands: it warned it "would also harm the lives and environment of people in the southern plains of the central provinces". And China itself, hoping to exploit Vietnam's bauxite, had closed 100 bauxite mines in China in 2004-2008 precisely due to the ecological impact.

While Giap the environmentalist was concerned with the ecology, Giap the old military man had a third concern. The bid for the project had been won by the China Aluminum Company (Chalco), a gigantic Chinese state-private share company, in a joint venture with Vietnam's National Coal Mineral Industries Group (Vinacomin). Giap protested that, by allowing a major Chinese company into such a strategic region, bringing in thousands of Chinese workers, the project was also a threat to national security.

On May 7, on the 55th anniversary of Dien Bien Phu, he told visiting leaders that the Central Highlands "is a strategic site of the country, which is very important in defence and security, not only for Vietnam but for Indochina".

In recent years, the Chinese government has claimed the entire South China Sea (known in Vietnam as the East Sea) as its own, including all

the islands within it. Vietnam and a number of other countries also have claims to these islands. As the Vietnamese government has tried to walk a difficult fine line, between continually stressing Vietnam's sovereignty over the islands, but refusing to contemplate war as a solution, a noisy opposition, originally focused on human rights but increasingly on nationalism, has demagogically accused the government of softness towards China. One may well ask, since the government has never conceded the islands to China, is the opposition demanding war?

There is no evidence that Giap had any sympathy with such views. However, while his issue was always primarily environmental, it is hardly surprising that a man whose entire life had been devoted to liberating his country from powerful imperialist states would have qualms about such a large-scale interest in such a strategic region from a powerful neighbour that had invaded Vietnam in recent times and which was now treating Vietnamese interests in the East Sea with aggressive contempt, including via large-scale kidnappings of dirt-poor Vietnamese fisher-folk who try to fish in the islands.

As well as the environment, Giap made his name over the last two decades as someone willing to continually speak out on the need for political reform, for the promotion of socialist democracy and more openness.

Just before the Communist Party's 10th Congress in April 2006, Giap joined several other military veterans in demanding a full-scale investigation into a massive corruption scandal that had just been unveiled, involving officials of the PMU 18 unit under the transport ministry, which was caught diverting millions of dollars targeted for infrastructure projects to gambling on premier league football matches. They demanded action "even if it led to the highest levels".

Giap also said that such scandals have "frozen the leading role of the Party and the management of the State and the supervision of the people".

Giap and socialism

The image of someone of Giap's stature as a kind of in-house, loyal party "dissident" has tended to excite many Western journalists and analysts. When he visited several years ago, US Republican leader, and former Vietnam veteran, John McCain claimed Giap had said the Americans, while wrong, were a "worthy opponent." If true, it probably reveals that Giap had a sense of humour; but just as likely it is the kind of fantasy that has become common.

A common form of fantasy is to suggest that, as an advocate of democracy, Giap might also be pro-capitalist. While I can't currently place them, I have seen media articles that sometimes ended with some vague assertion that Giap advocated a bigger role for small business, or some such fantasy. Under the Doi Moi economic renovation program, launched in 1986, Vietnam now has tens of thousands of private businesses (even while the larger strategic areas of the economy remain state-owned); there is no known tendency in the party known to oppose this overall course; and Giap is not known to hold any fundamentally different view on this overall strategy.

Such journalists probably asked him whether it was good that there was a lot of business activity, Giap replying in the affirmative; the reporter then interpreted that through his or her own framework.

The simple fact is that in all these years of speaking out on democratic, environmental and other issues, Giap has never uttered a single pro-capitalist statement, none at all. If anything, some statements can well be interpreted as frustration with the kinds of vices the market economy has brought with it.

Indeed, as pro-capitalist Vietnamese politicians never stop talking about the need for endless, classless "economic growth", often decrying that Vietnam's world class growth over the last two decades was "slow", Giap's emphasis on the environment, in particular in the bauxite case, could well be interpreted as a protest against voracious

capitalism and its ignoring of the human and environmental cost.

When Fidel Castro visited Vietnam in 2003, the picture of Fidel and Giap sitting and chatting together under a portrait of Lenin spoke so many more words than all the blather of those opportunistically, and laughably, trying to associate one of world socialism's living legends with the grubby world of "free market" capitalism and the soul-less commercialisation of all human values and merciless exploitation that it offers.

And when Hugo Chavez visited in 2006, Giap praised Chavez as part of a new generation of socialist fighters: "You together with President Fidel Castro have raised the flag of nationalism and socialism." He was certainly a lot more forthright in identifying with Chavez as a socialist firebrand than most of the Vietnamese leaders at the time. The two exchanged gifts — Chavez offered a gem-encrusted replica of a sword owned by Latin American liberation hero Simon Bolivar, while Giap gave signed copies of his books on military strategy. Giap's sympathies seem straightforward enough.

Of heroes and legends

The thousands upon thousands of Vietnamese that have publicly paid their last respects to Giap, and the outpourings in the media and social media, indicate the kind of esteem Giap is held in. Many a time the views they expressed to the media were along the lines that, other than Ho himself, there are simply no other leaders comparable to Giap; no other CPV leaders, before or after Doi Moi, have ever come anywhere close to having such stature among Vietnamese people.

Meanwhile, among the Western left and socialist movements globally, the feeling exists that "one of the greats" of 20th century revolution has died, comparable to only few.

It is certainly true that not all human beings can be made of the same stuff as Giap; countless aspects of our social existence determine where we go in life. However, it is great movements of peoples for so-

cial liberation, for liberation from the chains of class society and its ruthless exploitation, that create the environment for people such as Giap to come forward and lead.

In this sense, it is hardly fair to even try to compare any current Vietnamese leaders, with responsibility for the more mundane tasks of developing a poor country, to Giap. They cannot be blamed for not rising to such heights. That said, however, a situation in which the "market", however necessary as a tool to be used in development in a country not ripe for full socialism, has come to ride roughshod over so many of the basic human values that Giap and generations of Vietnamese revolutionaries devoted, or sacrificed, their lives for, calls for new leaders with bold ideas.

Not the "bold" ideas continually pushed on Vietnam by Western governments, multinational corporations, international trading bodies and lending agencies, and all manner of "consultants" and "experts" – that Vietnam needs even more "market", even more orientation towards the "values" of pure profit seeking, more power to big capital.

But quite the opposite: that enough is enough. New leaders are needed to push a genuinely popular de-

mocratic socialist program and free the country from the nightmare view that its only salvation from its problems is even more of the rotten system of capitalism that Giap proudly spent his life trying to end. None of this requires a return to the pre-Doi Moi straightjacket that the market fundamentalists try to scare the Vietnamese people with. The country still needs lots of market in its current stage of development, but this does not require ruthless market fundamentalism. A modern, democratic socialism that uses the market as necessary and ignores and supersedes it when it can and must, a socialism that really puts working people in control in deed, not only in word, is a worthwhile goal for Vietnam.

Of course, regardless of my own views, the Vietnamese people will be the ones to decide how to get out of their current impasse. What is certain, however, is that no new heroes, no new Giaps, no new national treasures, can arise from the task of trying to push the country even further down the path of the toxic system of capitalist exploitation, greed, corruption, massive inequality and the swapping of all human values for dollar values, precisely the source of the problems Vietnam faces today.

*First published in **Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal**.*

| OBITUARY

Norman Geras: "An adult life divided into two distinct chapters"

RJURIK DAVIDSON · 1 November 2013

Fewer people attended Geras's lecture, and he spoke without the charisma of Davis or the superficial complexity of Spivak. He had just written *The Contract of Mutual Indifference: Political Philosophy after the Holocaust* and his talk – from what I recall – recapitulated many of its themes. He railed against the kind of amoral society that could allow cruel poverty to co-exist with the riches of a sportsman like Greg Norman and he outlined his notion that our society rested on mutual indifference: unless I know you, I do not care for you and I cannot expect you to care for me. It was a presentation which might have equally been at home at an activist conference and after the high-theoreticism of some of the papers (there was an ongoing stoush at the conference between Althusserians and others) it was fresh and endearing.

Geras himself was polite and reasonable, in the best sense of those words. When I complimented him afterwards, he was equally warm. I was already familiar with his early work, and I left the conference thinking a great deal of him.

What I didn't know was that at that point Geras stood on the threshold of a series of decisions which would divide his adult life into two distinct chapters.

Born in Rhodesia in 1943, Geras moved to England to study at Oxford in 1962. In the UK, he became a part of the brilliant circle around *New Left Review* and for the best part of thirty years wrote as a 'classical' Marxist, defending the essential categories es-

tablished by the lineage leading from Marx through to Trotsky. His articles on Rosa Luxemburg were acute examinations of the richness of her thought. His most original work, *Marx and Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend* argued that Marx did indeed have a conception of human nature.

In the late 1980s, Geras defended Marxism against the theories of the 'Post-Marxists' Laclau and Mouffe in a pair of devastating articles that became standard reading of the time. These two articles were of immense importance to those who were still cleaving to Marxism. More importantly, for me at least, they were models of argumentation: Geras was hard, but also showed a fairness too often missing from Left discourse. He showed how the post-Marxist claims were made 'without regard for normal considerations of logic, of evidence, or of due proportion.'

'Of due proportion' – how that phrase rang in my ears the first time I read it! Afterwards, I saw that lack of due proportion again and again in the culture of the Left. How often I've wished that the Left's political culture could hold to Geras's standards!

In his critique, Geras showed that Laclau and Mouffe relied upon an argumentative strategy of 'All or nothing at all'. That is, on the notorious claim that the economic base determines the political and ideological superstructure, we must answer that either the base determines in the most economic way all superstructures, or we must admit that it does not determine it at all. There can be no middle ground. If the base/superstructure concept is more problematic than Geras presents, his critique of this kind of discursive method is devastat-

ing. Again, this kind of either/or method is too often used on the Left today.

Importantly, Geras explained that these kinds of ideas have a material context:

"In the advanced capitalist world from the mid-1960s a generation of intellectuals was radicalised and won for Marxism. Many of them were disappointed in the hopes they formed – some of these wild but let that pass – and for a good while now we have been witnessing a procession of erstwhile Marxists, a sizeable portion of the generational current they shared in creating, in the business of finding their war 'out' and away. This exit is always presented, naturally, in the guise of an intellectual advance. Those of us unpersuaded of it cannot but remind its proponents of what they once knew by seem instantly to forget as they make their exit, namely, that the evolution of ideas has a social and material context. We cannot help wondering how far their recent trajectory may have been influenced by a range of factors which they themselves would doubtless prefer to overlook: the pressures upon them of age and professional status; the pressures of the political time and environment we have been passing through, not very congenial in the West at least, to the sustenance of revolutionary ideas; and then the lure of intellectual fashion, a consideration not to be underrated by any means."

If there were reasons to question Marxism, Geras argued, the claims of the post-Marxists weren't among them. Rather, he found Marxism lacking on the field of morality. He began to shift his interests in this direction, first in a couple of articles, then in his books. According to Geras, the definitions of morality and ethics given by Trotsky in his book *Their Morals and Ours*, for example – that the good is whatever furthers the class struggle – were signally inadequate.

Geras' attempts to develop a new moral structure for Marxists were laudable but they were also the moment that he started to engage more and more with the abstract universalist principles of liberalism: 'human rights,' 'democracy,' 'freedom' and so

on. Unlike, say, Norberto Bobbio, Geras was never able to reconcile these two worlds. The concerns of liberalism began to overwhelm the Marxism to which he had adhered his whole life.

Recent obituaries of Geras have focused on this last period, where, to the shock of many (including me and his former comrades at *New Left Review*), Geras began to move to the Right. He launched his well-known 'Normblog', partly to explain his support for the invasion of Iraq and his support of the Israeli state. He was co-author of the *Euston Manifesto*, written by a group of leftists who called for a 'new alignment' and which codified his concerns.

The manifesto reached out beyond the radical Left to 'democrats'. Its principles stated that the writers stood for: 'no apology for tyranny' and opposed 'Anti-Americanism'. It's not hard to see how these principles – borrowed from Western governments – were used to justify intervention into the Middle East. Geras became the Right's favourite 'Blairite Marxist', a kind of intellectual complement to Christopher Hitchens's vacuous journalism.

Geras seemed to forget the very things he had claimed the post-Marxists had forgotten. Worse, he forgot all the arguments against imperial interventions like those in Iraq: that this method of overthrow of a dictatorial regime will never result in the liberation that Geras was claiming.

In the later years, I could not bear to read Geras's blog, though I understand it became very popular.

The friends Geras made during his final years are now writing his obituaries. I suppose that is not surprising, but they provide a skewed view of the man, based mostly on his last decade. In his polemics with Laclau and Mouffe, Geras noted that 'times change and people change. Their ideas change; develop, progress – and regress ... But each person has to take his leave or make her peace, as the case may be, in a way comfortable to his or her own sense of dignity.'

For me, the Geras with the greatest dignity was the author of those lines, the Geras who sought to develop a theory of human liberation, not the one

who supported the imperial adventures of Western governments. He is the man I choose to remember.

First published at Overland Literary Journal