

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV491 December 2015

MIDDLE EAST

What Happened to the Arab Spring?

SYRIA

Response to Tariq Ali 2015, or the need for internationalist solidarity

DOSSIER

USA France

Ukraine
Catalonia
Russia, Syria and Latin
America
Middle East
Spanish state
Greece
Climate change
India

Syria and Iraq
China
Latin America
Climate
Debt
South Africa
Migration
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Denmark

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

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USA

Bigotry vs. Black Lives, Muslims, Immigrants

MALIK MIAH ·

Today's rightwing bigotry and quasi-populist appeals are based on an extension of the same ideology, targeting minorities who are seen by the white working and middle class as the source of their socio-economic decline and insecurities for their lives and futures.

Donald Trump and other Republican presidential candidates use hate and fear of these "others." Could this strategy win the 2016 presidency? Possibly yes, because the Republican Party tactic is to limit the voting rights of minorities, given that if 65% of whites who vote go their way it doesn't matter if 90% of Blacks, Latinos and Asians vote for the Democratic nominee.

So far this approach — with district gerrymandering and thinly disguised voter suppression laws — has helped Republicans win control of more than half the states.

Rooted in History

When the U.S. Declaration of Independence was written by slaveholder Thomas Jefferson, Blacks were excluded. After independence and in the new Constitution, Black "Americans" did not exist. Black slaves were considered part of the new country only as property, while those lucky enough to be "free" suffered legal discrimination and possible enslavement.

From British rule to U.S. independence Blacks fought to be recognized first as humans, second as citizens and lastly as equals (which is still to come). African Americans operate under the reality that "the struggles continue," since they never end so long as institutional racism and structural inequality persists.

For every step forward in history (end of slavery, Radical Reconstruction, end to Jim Crow segregation) there has always been a vicious backlash. Since the 1970s, for example, school desegregation has been reversed in practice for the most part; affirmative action programs mostly ended; and wealth inequalities between Blacks and whites have widened.

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement stands on these 400 years of struggle in response to white power. It faces the same rightwing backlash, and even pushback from liberals and some leftists. The BLM leaders are often asked a question others are not. "Don't other lives matter too?"

But if whites faced the same police violence and society's assumption of guilt, there would not be a need for a BLM movement. Whites are rarely subject to random attacks and murders by cops (or by Blacks) or face discrimination for jobs or decent housing. What is called "white privilege" underpins white supremacy. Even when whites deny the reality, few if any would change places with Black people.

Many liberals and some leftists don't accept the term "white privilege" because it makes it more difficult to convince white workers to stand up for Black equality. But privilege is not simply subjective; it is rooted in a reality established by written laws, white vigilante violence and oppression.

Any objective study of the history of the country proves this. The only way to educate whites and everyone else is to speak the truth and demand radical institutional changes by the power of the state. Both the Civil War in the 1860s, and the use of federal troops in the South in the 1960s to enforce court-ordered desegregation, illustrates this point.

Criminalizing Muslims

A similar rightwing ideologically-driven attack is directed at Muslims (the most feared "other" today). Muslims are supposed to prove that they are loyal to "American values." Trump says what many believe: keep all Muslims out of the United States.

The shooting death of 14 people in San Bernardino, California illustrates the problem. At first, before the shooters were known, a discussion about guns and mental illness occurred in the media since many thought the shooters might be white. But once it became clear that the two shooters were husband and wife with Muslim names, the focus immediately turned.

The New York Post displayed the hypocrisy with brutal clarity, changing its front page headline from "Murder Mission" to "Muslim Killers" within hours of learning the identity of the shooters.

All Muslims (Shia, Sunni, nonbeliever, secularist or atheist) are challenged by the mainstream media to speak out. When a white Christian male murdered three people, targeting a Colorado Planned Parenthood clinic, the New York Post did not put "Christian killer" on its front page.

Muslims had already been targeted around the issue of admitting a small number of Syrian refugees. Now conservative and anti-Muslim demagogues are whipping up a "war on radical Islam" to justify targeting U.S.-born Muslim citizens too. Any person with an Islamic name now faces possible physical attack.

The fact that millions of Muslims are culturally Muslim but secular and even atheist (like me) is irrelevant. It's like being Black: Cops or racists don't ask your ideology, wealth or education. They assume "reasonable suspicion" of possible criminality.

Even liberal Democrats like talk show host Bill Maher, who likes to ridicule religion in general, has been on a rant that only Islam teaches hatred and violence. The fact that a majority Christian country

(Germany) carried out the Nazi genocide in the 20th century means little.

Fear-mongering and demonization has occurred many times in U.S. history, and not just by rightwing demagogues. The New Deal president Franklin D. Roosevelt refused to integrate the military and take on Jim Crow segregation.

Blacks had to organize a March on Washington Movement in 1941 for a share of jobs in the war industries. It was FDR who issued the Executive Order for the swift internment of Americans of Japanese ancestry (prison camps) with no due process or justification except that Japanese Americans looked like the people of Japan.

Immigrants Also "The Other"

The mainstream right also continues its racist and horrific scapegoating of immigrants from Mexico and Central America. In Trump's view all 11 million undocumented immigrants and their legal American children must be deported.

The demand for a border wall, and especially internment of immigrants before deportation, has won popular support from a significant minority. It is a reminder of the anti-Jewish propaganda in early 1930s Germany, the most "enlightened" country in Europe at the time. Yet the demagogue Hitler and his Brown Shirts turned the tide, even against the ruling elites.

Can it happen here? White supremacists have served as the "fascist"-like thugs against Black people, especially in the Old South where laws and force were used by states to oppress African Americans.

Today's new laws suppressing the right to vote in southern states like North Carolina shows how history can repeat itself. White power is getting stronger in the state as African Americans are politically isolated.

The immigration issue, combined with the anti-BLM backlash and scapegoating of Muslims, repre-

sent the potential breeding ground for a fascist movement to be spawned.

Trump is not a classical fascist — he doesn't have an organization like the Brown Shirts to go after his opponents and enemies. But those attending many of his rallies have shown how demonizing the "other" can lead to violence, as happened to a BLM supporter at one of his events.

Trump is distinctive in that he is not religious. Declaring that he's a man of the people, this billionaire's appeal uses economic anxieties, much more than social issues like abortion or marriage.

He plays to working-class whites' victimhood. He even denounces his own class including Big Business and Wall Street (not that he means it).

The Fightback

While the right appears strong — it controls the Republican Party and Congress and a majority of state houses — the broad population is divided.

The Black Lives Matter movement of the past two years, along with the immigrant Dreamers movement, has set the example of what to do. It starts with self-mobilization and without reliance on the two major parties or its politicians.

Its extension to college campuses, where Black students are leading the way against racism and discriminatory practices, is a big advance. The victory at the University of Missouri, including the unprecedented stance of the football team, inspired students around the country.

The protests exposed the lie about "political correctness." The term itself is derogatory, since the issue is racism and discrimination — are you for rooting it out or pretending it is okay because it happened in the past? (A similar debate occurred about removing the Confederate flag and monuments.)

At Princeton in New Jersey, Black students have pushed an issue that has hung over the school for

decades — honoring a former president who was an arch-segregationist. Woodrow Wilson served as Princeton's president from 1902-1910, New Jersey governor from 1911-13 and president of the United States from 1914-21.

Wilson used his cabinet to re-segregate federal government departments and forced civil servant applicants to include photographs, which were understood by African Americans at the time as a move to weed them out.

The Muslim community for the most part has not used social media or street mobilizations as the BLM, Black students and Dreamers have done. It is out of genuine fear. At some point, however, this must change to push back the anti-Muslim bigots.

Islam, like most religions, almost by definition, is hierarchical and about holy texts. It is not the texts, but the political ideology of religion that teaches its followers of their superiority and domination over other religions, that cause the problem.

ISIS wins followers precisely because it combines doctrines of religious superiority with a political ideology claiming to oppose Western and neo-colonial dominion.

Youths radicalized by Islamist appeals in the United States, as in Canada, France and other European countries, see the violence of Western militaries in the wars of occupation in the Arab countries and north Africa.

The ruling elites' "solution" is a bigger police state where Muslims are targeted and lose their rights as France is doing. This will worsen the problems and reinforce the reactionary Islamists' narrative.

The challenge is to build a social movement to fight Islamophobia and bigotry, and at the same time to oppose the reactionary ISIS ideology and terrorist methods without aligning with the same Western imperial countries that are carrying out the "war on Islam."

Against the Current

Recipes for curbing the conference

Ideological barrier

Pavlo Kutuev, the Head of the Department of Sociology of KPI who hosted the event, addressed a welcoming speech on behalf of professors of the institute.

Referring to the title of the conference, he said that the current global crisis should not be perceived as a "natural phenomenon" but rather as a sequence of implementing a specific ideology, namely that of neoliberal policy (privatization, market deregulation, reducing state intervention in the economy and cuts of social benefits). He also drew attention to the countries whose governments allegedly do not agree with this system but at the same time tend to be authoritarian. Usually, they justify their authoritarianism with some social or economic efficiency which seems to be at least controversial. It is important how government is accountable to the masses, the speaker highlighted. The task of the academic community is to find viable alternatives.

Left-wing anti-Putin politician Ilya Ponomarev, the only Russian MP who voted against the annexation of Crimea, now a political emigrant, started his speech by congratulations on the occasion of the 1917 Revolution anniversary. Then, he underlined the general problems faced by Ukraine. He shared his experience in communicating with the international donors that complain about the lack of reforms in Ukraine. "I tell these donors: you are not helping but just giving the money – it's not the same". The funds received by the Ukrainian government are mainly financial loans that need to be returned, rather than the needed investments in real production.

Criticizing Arseniy Yatsenyuk's current cabinet for its underestimating of industry, Ilya Ponomaryov stressed that Ukraine has the capacity to produce

goods that would find their buyers from across the globe. He believes that it's quite erroneous when Ukrainian government replicates Thatcherite policies of closing the mines considered unprofitable: the number of unemployment would increase while the amount of funds saved would be negligible. In total, the policies of de-industrialization and increasing tariffs which are implemented in Ukraine leads not to modernization but rather to something quite opposite. The guest also explained the relevance of writing off the foreign debt (not just debt restructuring), because the value of the default risk is included in the interest rate of the loan and is already being paid.

Referring back to the controversial issue of the relationship between Ukraine and Russia, Ilya Ponomaryov noted that the taglines of Kremlin propaganda are changing. A year ago, Putin's advocates used to justify the Russian intervention in Ukraine by the need "to save the Russian-speaking brothers from the bloody junta"; now it comes to "preventing from the return of 1990s".

In both countries, unholy alliances of nationalists and neoliberals retain power, and in Ukraine, the latter seem to dominate. He urged Ukrainians to make away with popular delusions about the forthcoming collapse of their northern neighbor, the Russian Federation; no matter what the price of oil is, Russia is able to maintain stability due to the low cost of its extraction.

Ukraine is in a difficult situation: the industrial capabilities of the Soviet era are lost, and Western investors are reluctant to invest. But Ilya Ponomaryov still retains hope for the changes in economic policy and the probable progress of Ukraine in order to become an example of a democratic and socially oriented alternative for the other post-Soviet countries.

The recent adoption, on first reading, of the Labor Code of Ukraine curtailing workers rights is a manifestation of global trends, said French author Catherine Samary. She is a lecturer at Dauphine University (Paris), a veteran left militant and an important figure of the reunified Fourth International and member of the radical left in France. At present, the process of destruction of the welfare state is observable both in poor countries of the periphery and in capitalist core countries such as France and Germany (at the beginning of 21st century they had also reduced the salaries and the protection of the employees).

The Pinochet/Reagan/Thatcher-style offensive of the market fundamentalist forces exerted in the last quarter of the twentieth century under the mottos of "trade not aid" and "workfare not welfare" ultimately led to the current crisis of capitalism that has been simmering since 2008. The capitalist "anti-crisis" policy has class priorities; particularly, budget funds have been allocated to bailout indebted private institutions: the state had been saving "the banks, not the people".

According to the researcher, in 2009 the ruling classes used the crisis as an excuse to start a "new international anti-social war" that continues today. The speaker expressed her doubts in the idea that the aggravation of inter-imperialist contradictions in terms of the crisis means a "new Cold War". In her opinion, rather it could be called "Yalta-2": the great powers bargain on the division of spheres of influence, and events in Ukraine and Syria serve as corroboration. Neoliberalism must be stopped to give the Ukrainian people an opportunity to defend their social and ecological rights, as well as the sovereign right to rule their own destiny rather than obey the dictate of the imperialist forces.

Specific causes of the local crisis lie in the war, debts, and dynamics of the Ukrainian capitalism, noted Marko Bojcun, a British researcher of Ukrainian origin from the London Metropolitan University. Transformation to a market economy after gaining independence led Ukraine to depletion of productive forces. Wage arrears reached

record levels. The situation requires a significant strengthening of the working class, which is now effectively deprived of political voice and representation. Therefore, development of "large-scale party of labor" is necessary. Mutual support of the oppressed social groups and horizontal solidarity between them are the priorities on the way of bringing together the working classes. Marko Bojcun concluded by stressing the need to combine social movements around the struggles of miners against the closure of coal mines.

Specter of the Greek scenario

We are constantly frightened with the "Greek scenario", even though Greece represents an extremely important experience of victories and defeats in the struggle against austerity and the "vicious circle of debt", stressed Denis Pilash, opening the session on the issue of external debt. Several highly competent experts, including a guest from Greece and the founder of the global movement for debt relief, provided their analysis of the debt issue, Syriza-led government accomplishments, and the possible option of Ukrainian default.

The analysts believe that developing countries are not able to pay their debts off to the IMF and other financial institutions. Under these conditions, the peripheral countries are doomed to lag behind in development, paying debts on the cost of their sovereignty and social standards.

As Judith Dellheim from the School of Solidarity Economy of Rosa Luxemburg Foundation noted, external debt becomes a tool for pushing privatization, lower wages, and commercialization of the public sector. These processes can be confronted by fighting for the preservation and expansion of social and environmental standards, as well as for radical democratization of public control over the financial sector. Speaking about the domestic economic policy, she stressed the need to allocate fund to secure common public interests, in particular through the implementation of socio-economic projects in the infrastructure sector at a local level. Like in the case of workers' self-managed factory in

Greece, the introduction of such initiatives, corresponding with the interests of communities and the environment, will be the key to the sustainable development.

Moisis Litsis, a journalist from Greece renowned for his trade union and anti-fascist activities who's also a member of the local anti-debt committee, cited facts that confirm the extent of the crisis hitting the people of Greece: over the last years, GDP fell by 25%, youth unemployment has risen to 60%, and external debt reached 175% of GDP. The so-called "international financial aid" is actually addressed not for Greece, but for the banks, while the terms of the bailout package memorandums led to further deterioration of workers' welfare and elimination of the system of labor contracts. The collapse of the public sector on the local level often made solidarity networks and civic initiatives such as "social clinics" the only hope for thousands of people.

For the first time in contemporary history, Greeks voted for a party to the left of the traditional social democracy, Syriza, to form a new government and combat the Troika. However, they were not fully aware of the complexity of confrontation with the dictate of creditors, bankers, and European bureaucrats. At the critical moment, the new government did not have an alternative – a "plan B" – in case the negotiations drop to a standstill and the creditors neglect the expression of the will of the Greek people (62% of them voted against the anti-social conditions of the new loan agreement in the national referendum).

In addition, the cabinet of Alexis Tsipras failed to conduct a decisive attack on the Greek oligarchy and had the illusion that they could gain real support from Russia and China or individual governments within the EU. So, it is extremely important now to create an international movement against the debts, appealed the speaker.

Probably the best choice to tell more about such a movement was Éric Toussaint, a Belgian political scientist and reunified Fourth International mili-

tant, author of numerous books, and the speaker for the Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt. He coordinated the audits of public debt in several countries; the most recent of these cases was the Greek Truth Committee on Public Debt. Continuing the narrative of his Kyiv lecture delivered a day before, he described how the debt bondage leads different countries to underdevelopment. He cited examples of the opposite policies as well: success stories of states that defied recommendations imposed by the IMF and the World Bank.

After a long-lasting audit of the odious debt, the leftist government of Ecuador defaulted and implemented an interesting e-currency experiment, thus freeing direct funds for economic development, education, and poverty reduction. Éric Toussaint urged the Ukrainians to "disobey the creditors" and to demand debt relief. If the "plan A" (reaching a consensus through negotiations) does not work, we should implement a "plan B" – revolutionary break with the international financial institutions. However, it is clear for the citizens of Ukraine that their government is hardly capable even for the first scenario.

Discussing the case of Greece, where the government was forced to capitulate without having used the report of the anti-debt committee, established by former President of the Hellenic Parliament Zoe Konstantopoulou, Éric Toussaint noted that even this defeat should be a lesson for the European Left: during this period, they have to figure out how a "plan B" could look like.

Back to Ukraine

So, what should be the alternative for Ukraine? To paraphrase one of the speakers of the third session, the question is only what we need to do first – either to relieve the debt or to introduce progressive taxation. There is little doubt from the view of economic analysis that both steps should be done as soon as possible. It seems that Ukraine can use its advantages only due to balanced social and eco-

economic policies for the benefit of the working classes instead of observance of the "free market" dogmas.

Aleksandr Odosii stated that agriculture can be a source of future development only in case of adequate governmental regulation. To overcome the lack of balance between agricultural and energetic sectors, alternative energy should be promoted. The potential of existing transport infrastructure should be also used to full extent. Today, the agricultural sector is beneficial for a bunch of businessmen (profit of sunflower farming can reach 300% in some cases), and the owners channel significant funds to consumption rather than production development.

Enjoying superprofits, agricultural companies pay negligible share of taxes (0.6%) to the state budget, using the offshore optimization, as noted by Zakhar Popovych, an expert of Center for Social and Labor Research and a member of organizational committee of Social'nyi Rukh ("Social Movement"), a Ukrainian left-wing political party currently under formation. Using comparative studies, Zakhar Popovych concluded: "In terms of taxation of big business, we seem to be on the last place in Europe" (like as by the level of salaries). 45% of the economy is in shade. The planned reform by the Ministry of Finance will become the "punishment" for the poor, in accordance with monetarist orthodoxy: the budget will continue to be pumped up by the employees through the personal income tax, while corporations pay less tax from their profits.

The problem of public debt has become rampant, underlined Oleksandr Kravchuk, economy expert of the Center for Social and Labor Research, and one of organizers of the conference. This year, the total public debt is set to exceed the GDP level, and loan repayment began to constitute the most substantial share (16.4%) of the state budget. These funds could potentially go to the industrial production or to the development of scientific and technical sphere. Controversial loans strangling the country became an unbearable yoke for the people and must be denied. According to the economist, the latest debt restructuring agreement secures disad-

vantageous provisions for Ukraine but is beneficial for the creditors – as the repayment of debts is tied to the economic growth of the country, it will limit the possibilities of future development.

Admittedly, Ukraine is too keen on liberal trends which have been challenged at the West long time ago. Oleksandr Antoniuk, energy economist based in Luxemburg, reported about malignancy of energy sector privatization. He instantiated this point by the facts that the majority of "developed countries" (France, Sweden, USA etc.) either have never conducted course for liberalization of the energy sector or have already curtailed this process. The introduction of "market prices" led to an abrupt increase of tariffs without improving service quality: in California, electricity prices skyrocketed by 13 times after the liberalization.

The issue should be put bluntly: what social forces will embody the demands, obvious and rational in terms of common good? One of the organizers of the conference, sociologist Oksana Dutchak stressed that the vast majority of recent socio-economic protests have been taking place without participation of political parties, because people trust none of them. So the question remains open. Demand for the existence of such political subject is indisputable: it should reflect the interests of the diverse grassroots protest groups.

The path of justice

The conference concluded with the speeches of those who themselves create wealth and require its equitable distribution: working class activists. Experience of independent trade unions is particularly valuable to restore the confidence to the workers' organizations in general.

Spectacular examples of trade union activities aimed to protect the workers were presented by Valeriy Petrovskyi from the Free Trade Union of Railway Workers of Ukraine. The union attained a collective agreement providing extensive social guarantees, including the 13th salary and even the payment of jubilee awards. However, there is a

danger that in the wake of attempts to corporatize "Ukrzaliznytsya" [Ukrainian Railways], its management tends to sack at least a part of its 300,000 employees. However, Valeriy Petrovskiy assured that no member of his trade union could be fired "without a fight".

Yuriy Samoilov, miner and lifelong union activist, made an excursion into the workers' history of Kryvyi Rih, an important ore mining and refining city in the centre of Ukraine, and spoke about the need to restore the class identity among employees. In addition, he pointed out that workers' organizations should not only respond to the arbitrary actions of the employers and government, but must move to the offensive, pushing their own agenda of social change in the interests of the working majority.

Yevhen Derkach, the young leader of the independent trade union "Zakhyst pratsi" at the "Pivdenmash" ["Yuzhmash"], a legendary factory that once constructed the most sophisticated Soviet space rockets but today is nothing than struggling for its bare surviving, depicted the importance of trade unions for the society. Describing eloquent examples of over-exploitation of employees, he stated: in order to change an individual consciousness ("from slaves to free people") and the social mood, you should always be prepared for class conflict with the employers. Yevhen Derkach and his fellow comrades experience this firsthand, facing pressure and even violent attacks in their fight to preserve the workspaces at their factory.

One of the reports concerned the workers' struggle in extreme conditions at the front-line areas. Pavlo Lysyanskyi described the experience of his Eastern Human Rights Group that works in the war-torn

regions of Luhansk and Donetsk. He listed the EHRG assistance for the protesting workers at Svitlodarsk hospital and a supermarket chain. The group is complimentary to trade unions, it assists in establishing new ones and provides a form of external pressure on the company. Human rights lawyers and journalists are in contact with workers, labor rights of whom are violated, and turn to law enforcement. Trade unions are launched at the enterprises upon successful campaigns "from outside" by EHRG members.

Coordinator of "Solidarity Center" programs in Ukraine Tristan Masat, regrettably noted the lack of constituency for progressive political subjects in Ukraine that could consolidate social movements for grassroots pressure on the government. So he advised the representatives of unions and NGOs present at the conference to develop membership-based organizations as for mass mobilization (particularly the campaign against the new Labor Code) and apply to international organizations for the protection of labor rights.

Judging by the heated discussions and lots of questions, the conference helped bring together workers and students, academics and activists from Ukraine and abroad in sharing their experience, developing the agenda of a democratic socialist alternative, and finding a way for deeper cooperation. Let's hope that such events bring us closer to the very moment when the conference theme, the neoliberal capitalism itself, becomes a mere subject for studies by historians.

Translated by Lesia Bidochko and Anton Pechenkin

<http://commons.com.ua/en/chi-ye-zam...>

FRANCE

Final warning! The situation in France after the regional elections

FRANÇOIS SABADO ·

Nothing would be more mistaken than to believe that the FN is only a party of the first round and that in the second, almost ritually, it will be blocked by a "republican backlash". That is what happened this time, but it is not sure that it will be the case the next time. Especially if the governmental left continues its neoliberal policies (which it has said it will) and if the right becomes even more radical, as Nicolas Sarkozy wants.

So the priority task is to do everything to block the austerity policies of the Valls Hollande government - and to that end to put a stop to the state of emergency, to defeat the constitutional reform that seeks to trivialize the use of repressive emergency measures.

The National Front, a real danger

The regional elections mark a new upsurge of the National Front: nearly 7 million votes, more than the number of votes obtained by Marine Le Pen in the last presidential election. In election after election, since 2012, the FN vote has increased. It has become, in electoral terms, the biggest party in the country. Without alliances, it falls short of an absolute majority, but with the deepening of the regime crisis in France, that can change. We cannot rule out the possibility of the victory of Marine Le Pen in the next presidential election in 2017.

We know the reasons for this upsurge of the National Front: the global degradation of the relationship of forces to the detriment of the workers' movement, the neoliberal policies endorsed by governments of right and left, the persistent repercussions of post-colonial domination, the new (mar-

ginalized) place of the country in capitalist globalization. The combination of the effects of a long economic depression in Europe, the political crisis related to the choices made by the government, the consequences of the terrorist attacks perpetrated by the Islamic State and a new wave of racism in the popular classes provide a breeding ground for the FN.

The National Front is now present in all layers of society. It is becoming a majority electoral force among blue- and white-collar workers (at least among those who vote). The globalized bourgeoisie has certainly not made a choice in favour of the National Front - particularly its policy on leaving the euro; but the employers are now divided. The FN today does not correspond to the rational interests of the ruling classes. However, the political crisis is such, the political apparatuses are so weakened, that an "electoral accident", even though it is not "the most probable variant", can no longer be rejected out of hand.

At the risk of disarming ourselves, we should not underestimate the danger of the National Front or the destructive effects that a possible frontist victory would have. The political struggle against the far right must be conducted - an FN government would not be just one more right-wing government. Some people think the opposite, such as Jacques Rancière, who affirms: "As soon as I analyze the National Front as the fruit of the imbalance that is proper to our institutional logic, my hypothesis is rather one of an integration into the system. There are already many similarities between the National Front and the forces present within the system."

To a question - if the FN came to power, would it have concrete effects for the weakest in French so-

ciety, that is to say, the immigrants ... - Jacques Rancière replies, unwisely:

"Yes, probably. But I have difficulty in seeing the FN organizing massive departures, an exodus of hundreds of thousands or millions of people, to send them "back home". The National Front is not the poor Whites against the immigrants. Its electorate is extending into all sectors of society, including among immigrants. So, of course, there could be symbolic actions, but I do not believe that a UMP-FN government would be very different from a UMP government..." [1].

Some ultraleft currents go further, putting the PS, the right and the National Front on the same level.

We do not agree with these analyses.

The National Front is not a fascist party in the manner of the 1930s because we are not in the 1930s. The origin of its leadership is fascist, its national-socialist themes repeat the classic themes of the far right, national preference and anti-immigrant racism, anti-Muslim in particular, remain central to its politics. This is not a classic fascist party, but nor is it a bourgeois party like the others.

A FN government is not a UMP government, much less a PS government. The vote for the PS and the vote for the National Front vote is not the same thing. Although voting for the right after the withdrawal of PS lists in the North and in the PACA region has added to the confusion and to the disappearance of the left in the fight against the National Front, there should be no hesitation about voting Socialist against the FN.

Admittedly, Valls and Hollande are conducting neoliberal policies that are destroying the living conditions of millions of workers; they want to entrench the state of emergency in the Constitution. We are sliding into ever more authoritarian political systems. Parliamentary democracy is being emptied of what remains of the "democratic".

Hollande and Valls are conducting a policy of destruction of the left, as other "socialists" already did in the past. But at this moment of the 21st century,

'social democratic' leaders are undoing what made historical social democracy

However, as severe and repressive as it is, the state of exception of Valls is not yet that of Marine Le Pen. At the centre of her programme, there is admittedly no mobilization of the petty bourgeoisie through fascist militias to liquidate the workers' movement; but there is the "national preference", as opposed to several million foreigners and French citizens of foreign origin – as well as all those who protect them.

There are many similarities between the National Front and other forces of the system, but the FN is nonetheless not integrated into the system. The orientation of Marine Le Pen is not a project like that of Gianfranco Fini in Italy. Coming from the Italian Social Movement, then founder of the National Alliance in 1995, Fini joined in 2009 Berlusconi's formation, the People of Freedom, before separating from him in 2010. He was a minister in Berlusconi's second and third governments. He is really built into the system.

The majority of the National Front does not want to make alliances in which their party would find itself in a subordinate position. Its leaders want to break the right and replace it. They cannot today go beyond a certain electoral threshold. However, they are betting on the deepening of the crisis, and on the division and the explosion of the right. Is this a hypothesis that we can rule out?

Given the current international situation, the political disarray, the lack of a credible alternative to the system based on solidarity, the internal racist pressure, the National Front can count on certain sections of society to justify discrimination, repression, or indeed the expulsion of foreigners, particularly Muslim foreigners. It is a ferment of civil war that implies a radical liquidation of democratic freedoms. There will be a noticeable difference between all the authoritarian, Bonapartist, political formulas initiated by social democracy or the centre-right and a regime dominated by the far right.

The struggle against the National Front should take on a new dimension and must therefore be reconsidered - because, to date, we have failed to conduct it. Minority central mobilizations against the FN are no longer operative. Everything must be "taken up at the grass roots", in workplaces, in schools, in neighbourhoods, in towns, with unity of action of all democratic forces – we must organize mobilizations against the measures taken at local level by the party, especially in the towns it governs, in terms of education, culture, defence of freedoms.

To emphasize the specific danger that the National Front represents is not to give any kind of seal of approval to the government and to Hollande as president! The Valls state of emergency already aims to get society accustomed to living in a state of exception, to delegitimize the control of the judiciary over the repressive apparatus and over the executive, to put citizens under general surveillance, to in fact restrict civil liberties, to squeeze the life out of social movements.

The Hollande-Valls state of emergency creates the political conditions and mental conditioning that could tomorrow favour the imposition of a "navy blue" state of emergency [2]. The attack against democratic freedoms that we are experiencing today is extremely serious, unprecedented in France since the war in Algeria. So what is urgent, the first task, is to confront our leaders with the broadest possible democratic front. It is by blocking today the implementation of "austerity and security" policies, by giving back confidence to combative sectors in the trade unions, associations, workplaces, neighbourhoods, by rebuilding an anti-capitalist political alternative that we will begin to push back the National Front.

The priority struggle against the austerity and security policies of the Valls Hollande government should not lead us to minimize or relativize the fight against the National Front - and vice versa.

The right divided

The traditional right won the regional elections, without however this relative success calling into question the central place that the National Front has conquered in political life. The right remains under pressure.

This situation is pushing towards a recomposition of political life - something that is easier said than done. "Well-informed" commentators are exhorting the political machines of right and left to move towards a "national union", particularly against the FN, evoking governmental formulas of union or alliance of the right, the centre and social democracy that are now dominant in Germany and in the European Union. However, in France, this approach is quite difficult to implement.

The pressure exerted by the National Front has made a considerable part of the voters of the right swing over to voting FN. More generally, this encourages a radicalization of the traditional right.

During the recent elections, the PS withdrew its candidates in two regions, the North and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, calling for a vote in the second round for the right in order to block the National Front – a call that was largely followed by left voters. However, the same right refused any withdrawal in favour of the lists of the left - Nicolas Sarkozy even declaring "To vote for the PS or the FN is the same thing"...

So, in the case of PS and FN candidates facing each other in an election, it is not at all clear that the electorate of the right would block against the far right. It is this uncertainty that makes possible the major "electoral accident": a defeat of Hollande by Marine Le Pen in the second round of the next presidential election.

Nicolas Sarkozy wants to embody this electorate, by taking up its programme. The result is that many voters prefer the original to the copy and Sarkozy becomes weaker in his own camp. The divisions, indeed the fractures, within the traditional right open up space for his competitors, Alain Juppe, Bruno Lemaire and Francois Fillon. The aftermath of the-

regional elections is shaping up to be a period of turbulence, whose outcome remains undecided.

For a good many years now there has been a virtual space in France for a recomposed "centre", which however does not manage to take shape due to the weight of inertia of political machines and electoral clienteles - and the constraints of the presidential election, the biggest challenge in the electoral arena. These constraints are even stronger because there is no vice president, no ticket that could embody an alliance and satisfy at least two egos, two "stables".

To bring about first of all the union of the right and centre in order to eventually forge in the future alliances with part of the left seems to be a rational project (represented by Alain Juppé?), But it runs up against the dynamics of radicalization on the right and the structural weakness of the centre.

The risk for the right, if Nicolas Sarkozy is the presidential candidate, is the opposite: a centrist candidate (François Bayrou?) might prevent him from reaching the second round, leaving a face-off between Holland and Marine Le Pen...

So there is a double impasse, which will probably be resolved only on the occasion of an open crisis on the right, and which blocks for the moment the realization of a kind of national unity with the PS, or part of it.

Where is the Socialist Party going?

It has limited the damage, but the decline is obvious.

The PS got better results than in the recent European and departmental elections, but in the first round of the regional elections, it nevertheless came in behind the National Front and the right, with less than 25 per cent of the vote. The total of what can be called the left came to only about 35 per cent. The decision not to present lists in the second round in some areas has serious consequences: it means deserting, even on the parlia-

mentary terrain, the fight against the right and the National Front.

This operation may seem like a smart tactical move, allowing Hollande to present himself as a unifying candidate in 2017, during the presidential election, counting on a division of the right-wing forces. In the meantime, however, the PS has withdrawn from the political struggle in two key regions.

This choice reflects a continued deterioration of the Socialist Party since 2012. It went from 280,000 members (official figure) in 2006 to 130,000 in December 2014. Only 70,000 "activists" voted for the last congress. However, the party is not experiencing a process of "Pasokisation". It has more than 20 per cent of the vote, it is not suddenly collapsing. The crisis is far from reaching the Greek level in France. The weakening of social democracy is nevertheless considerable.

Even more important, the PS is undergoing a profound change in its nature. There is what could be called an acceleration of the bourgeois transformation of social democracy. It is a process that has been unfolding for a long time and which is resulting in an unprecedented degree of integration of social-democratic cadres at the highest levels of the state, in global institutions (IMF, WTO...) and in the globalized economy. The socialist parties have become "less and less working-class and more and more bourgeois." The brutality of neoliberal policies is undermining their social and political bases.

In different ways, the socialist parties are being transformed into bourgeois parties. Are they therefore become just like other bourgeois parties? Not quite; the functioning of alternation in government requires the socialist parties to mark out their difference with other bourgeois parties. They remain linked, by their historical origin, to the workers' movement, but of that there are no longer any more than traces that are fading in the memory of activists. This nevertheless creates contradictions and oppositions within these parties. They can maintain a certain relationship with the "people of the left", although it is increasingly distended. This qualita-

tive change, if it was completed, would transform these parties into US-style democratic parties.

We are, perhaps, on the eve of events that would crystallize a qualitative leap in the process (for one of the authors of this article, this transformation has already, in its essentials, been accomplished in the French case).

The result of the regional elections is sufficient for Hollande and Valls to persist on their chosen path: to pursue neoliberal policies, then move to the construction of a new party that would resemble US-style democrats. Manuel Valls in particular, but also more and more sectors of the PS, are posing the question of a renovation-refounding of the PS or of a new political formation that would it possible to break the remaining links with the history of social democracy.

The new international situation, the duration of the neoliberal economic depression, the integration into the policies of the European Union, the march towards an authoritarian regime: all of this is pushing towards an internal evolution of the Socialist Party, towards changes that are progressively draining the life from it... It nevertheless remains the case that for Valls, Macron and others, the PS is still not sufficiently on the right: it is necessary to accelerate the pace. Will there be resistance? On what scale? In what forms?... The British surprise indicates that even where we were not expecting it, there are unpredictable reactions. This does not call into question the domination of "Blairism" in the Labour Party, particularly in its parliamentary representation, but it indicates that changes in the political landscape are also having repercussions in formations like Labour.

Much will depend on the next presidential election, but in any case the question of a refounding-new formation will be posed in relation to the choice of the option of a policy of national unity.

Radical left: the failure. How to rebuild

For the radical left, these elections were a profound failure: the NPA was unable to present candidates.

Lutte Ouvrière got a little over 1 per cent. The Left Front got under 5 per cent, less than half the result of Mélenchon in the 2012 presidential election. This is the end of a political cycle.

Since 1995, there have been three important politico electoral experiences – and we insist on the electoral form of these experiences. In 1995 with Laguiller and Lutte Ouvrière; in 2002 and 2007 with the LCR - then the NPA - and Olivier Besancenot; and in 2010-2012, with the Left Front and Jean Luc Mélenchon, who received in 2012 more than 4.5 million votes. These three experiences have shown the potential for political reorganization on the left of the left, but also its limitations and its failure. This also explains the space left for the National Front. In any case, there has not been, beyond the political and historical differences between each experience, the emergence of political parties like Syriza, Podemos or the Portuguese Left Bloc.

The deterioration of the relationship of forces to the detriment of struggles and social movements over recent years has affected all the organizations of the radical left. The Left Front, which with its specific features has dominated in recent years the political space to the left of the left, has been paralyzed by its internal contradictions. The hesitations between the affirmation of the need for political opposition, often made by Mélenchon, and the alliances of the PCF with the PS or those of Mélenchon's Left Party with the Greens have blurred its message and its policies. The recent decision to make lists for the second round of the regional elections with the Socialist Party certainly does not contribute to independence from a ruling party that embodies neoliberal austerity and the state of emergency!

Independence with regard to the PS and the government remains a key issue. Many people on the left recognize this. We must rebuild. We need something new. It cannot come only from the existing organizations. We must go beyond them. This new force should not however become a satellite of

the PS! It cannot emerge if the radical left appears to be linked to the governmental left.

In a situation of retreat, like the one we are living through, there are nevertheless struggles of resistance - economic, anti-racist, ecological, feminist, local and sectoral struggles - and those against the state of emergency.

These movements are not enough to relaunch a broad recomposition on the left of the left. To reach this objective, there will have to be new social and political founding events of historic dimensions, but concrete integration into these "real movements" is the condition *sine qua non* for being able to move forward today.

The political recomposition to which we aspire is prepared by participating in daily struggles, class struggles and struggles for emancipation in all their forms.

Thus, the considerable mobilization on the occasion of the COP 21, which was maintained despite the state of emergency, shows that a young generation is posing the problems of changing the system through climate issues and their implications (energy, transport, trade, justice, people's rights...). It will continue. We have to be more closely linked to it, on a more daily basis, we have to engage in dialogue with its main organizers. Similarly we must take part in local experiences, in activist networks and in the building of social or political fronts that

bring together activists from different origins, activists who have emerged from these struggles, who are able to begin formulating an alternative to austerity policies, to capitalist productivism. Without forgetting international solidarity, welcoming refugees and migrants, support for victims of humanitarian disasters and for all our comrades who face particularly dangerous situations.

The fight for rights provides a foundation that enables to resist today while preparing the future: workers' rights and demands, women's rights, rights of the oppressed, ecological and social rights, citizens' rights. The struggle against the state of emergency and the constitutional reform represents a key axis. In fact, on its success depends to a great extent the defence of a democratic space, a space of freedom, helping us better to continue all of our actions of resistance. The stakes are high. It is possible to win on this terrain: it is not certain that François Hollande will obtain the necessary 60 per cent majority for the adoption of constitutional amendments in Congress (Parliament and the Senate meeting together) or through a referendum.

To defeat the government on this issue would give a boost to the struggles against austerity, against the FN, for solidarity-based alternatives, feminist and ecosocialist.

*This article was originally written for **Viento Sur**.*

USA

Crises, Craziness and "Security"

AGAINST THE CURRENT ·

Harassment and sometimes physical attacks on Muslims in the United States can't be understood separately from the hatred that produced the murderous attack at the Colorado Planned Parenthood office, or the racist attempted murder of activists in Minneapolis occupying a police precinct station in response to yet another cop shooting of a young Black "suspect."

Jamar Clark was one of 1209 people killed so far by police in the United States in 2015, according to statistics compiled by the British paper *The Guardian* as of early December. (We won't detail here how this reflects a continuation of racist and nativist themes in U.S. history — for further discussion, see Malik Miah's overview [here](#))

Donald Trump and what he represents must be seen as a symbol and symptom of a sick society and political system. Practically all the Republican candidates wanted to play with the fire of anti-Muslim bigotry, but without getting burned. It was Jeb Bush who first suggested admitting only those Syrian refugees who could prove they're Christian.

Other presidential candidates and governors already called for slamming the borders shut to refugees, or closing "suspicious mosques" — Ben Carson, Ted Cruz, Chris Christie, Texas governor Greg Abbott and Indiana's Mike Pence among other sleazy characters. Some 31 governors sued to block refugees from entering their states.

When Trump previously called for "registering" Muslims in the United States, the Republican leadership could have denounced him as unfit to be president. They didn't. Now, by calling for excluding Muslims from U.S. shores, Trump has focused the world's attention on the actual meaning of the

Republicans' message to their voting base, and thereby blown it up in the GOP's face — performing a kind of public service, in his own perverse and sick fashion.

Globally, Trump's ravings can be damaging for Washington's imperial projects — given perceptions around the world that he might be the next U.S. president, although the real-life chance of that happening is essentially zero.

Even attempting Trump's proposed ban, of course, would shatter U.S. international relations, not only with Middle Eastern "strategic partners" but even more widely. (Imagine the United States telling Nigeria that its Christian citizens can visit, study or work here but not its Muslims, or informing India that Hindus and Sikhs may be welcome but Indian Muslims need not apply...) That's one reason why the "responsible" Republican establishment now has to find a way to sideline him.

Distorted Debate and Denial

Before the Paris and San Bernardino massacres; before the video of the Chicago police murder of Laquan McDonald and the city's year-long coverup; before "the Godzilla El Niño" and before the Paris Climate Summit looked more like the "Bomb Syria Summit;" before all this, the new year might have seemed the moment to ponder a surreal and somewhat comical electoral spectacle. But events have intervened to confront the other-worldly craziness of the U.S. election with the real-world thing.

The most critical issues facing the country and human life on the planet have generally not been discussed — and when they are, the "solutions" proposed are the wrong ones. Will the carbon-reduction goals of the Paris "COP21" summit — as modest as they are in relation to the scale of the crisis —

crash on the political reefs of U.S. Congressional rejection and Big Oil money? Only in the United States, after all, are climate change science and warnings of unfolding disaster widely regarded as a fraud and a plot to destroy "our way of life."

Unfortunately climate change, while inexorable under the regime of capitalist production and carbon-dependent energy, doesn't conform to the political cycle. Taking the Florida example, with rising sea levels Miami will end up underwater but not during the political careers of Marco Rubio and Jeb Bush...

On war and "security," Republicans (and some Democrats) accuse the Obama administration of "weakness" in the face of the "Islamic State" threat. In reality, Western powers' bombing of Syria and Libya, and rightwing rhetoric of "war with radical Islam," both drive more embittered Muslim young people, especially in Europe, toward the ISIS recruiters.

In particular cases such as the San Bernardino murderers Syed Farooq and Tashfeen Malik, we don't know what underlying pathology might have caused them to plot a killing spree and leave behind their six-month old baby — just as we often can't say why some particular white youth turns to neo-Nazi ideology. What we can say is that, as a social phenomenon, the brutal narratives of ISIS and imperialism clearly reinforce and "confirm" each other.

While the San Bernardino murders are distinctive in their apparent pseudo-"Islamic" motivation, they're also the latest of more than 350 "mass shootings" (defined by four or more victims) in the United States this year! Only in America — and this statistic doesn't even count killings or violent assaults from domestic abuse, for example.

The individual American's risk of death or mayhem from that kind of violence is vastly greater than the danger of being a victim of a terrorist attack. But the anti-Muslim backlash that Trump and other rightwingers whip up draws from the deep reservoir of fear among (mostly) white people for their own and their families' future.

The electoral debate has mostly been around a false and distorted set of arguments about "security" that millions of people feel slipping away. For example, how many tens of thousands of U.S. troops should go back into Iraq and Syria to keep us "safe" — or should the United States rely on massive air power and some unnamed regional "partners" to put the "boots on the ground?" Posed that way, of course it's a question with no answer, just a road to endless wars.

The escalating U.S., European and Russian bombing campaigns over Syria — working at cross-purposes, and all creating large-scale civilian carnage — are likely to make the desperate refugee flight from Syria even worse. As the statement of the French New Anticapitalist Party put it immediately after the Paris massacre by the "Islamic State," "The cruelty of imperialist wars results in the cruelty of terrorism".

Yes, the Paris massacre is a spillover from the set of catastrophes that imperialism brought about — in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya — both through direct military invasion and through the rise of religious-totalitarian fanaticism that imperial powers and regional client regimes enabled, cultivated, encouraged and ultimately found they could not control.

Yassamine Mather puts it well: "What we are seeing is the inevitable consequence of decades of supporting Islamists in the Middle East to defeat secular and leftwing forces — decades of the 'special relationship' with those who finance and support jihadism." She cites in particular "those countries that openly finance and arm IS — notably Turkey, Saudi Arabia and its allies in the Persian Gulf." (Weekly Worker, November 19, 2015)

The Obama administration can't seem to pressure its NATO partner Turkey to seal the border against ISIS's recruits and oil shipments, or Saudi Arabia to block money transfers that fund ISIS operations. Meanwhile, Washington actively supports the operation by Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the Gulf States that is destroying the entire country of Yemen,

whose population has essentially no escape route. Try to find a Republican or Democratic candidate of any stripe calling attention to this catastrophe!

Real and False Security

Can the United States build a "big beautiful wall" (as Trump calls it) to keep out Mexicans, Central Americans and mythical Middle Easterners trying to infiltrate by way of the southern border? Will the country be safer by resuming waterboarding (Trump: "you bet your ass I would") or keeping the Guantanamo prison camp open forever, as the Republican congressional majority demands?

To turn the argument rightside up requires looking at the real threats, and their causes, that face people's lives. There's no threat that Syrian refugees fleeing the destruction of their homeland will bring terrorist fighters into the United States. There's a real danger that the bigoted rhetoric of opportunistic politicians will lead to escalating attacks on Muslim communities and mosques.

Underlying the hysteria of the U.S. election are the insecurities that people live with every day, and the reality that these are not experienced at all evenly. It may produce some feelings of unity when governments and politicians proclaim that "terrorism threatens us all," but it's an illusion that somehow "we're all in this together."

The terror that African-American families face includes kids getting shot by police, persistent massive structural unemployment, home foreclosures and evictions, the destruction of public education, and the resulting endemic violence that kills young people by the thousands, swells for-profit prisons and cripples whole communities.

Latino communities fear the terror of immigration raids that rip families apart. Muslims, and sometimes others mistaken for them, are subjected to street attacks and harassment that many analysts describe as worse than immediately following 9/11 in 2001. Those are not fears that afflict most white Americans.

Yet what about the insecurities that do face tens of millions of working-class people — both white and people of color? Yes, they exist and are very real indeed. Millions still go without health care, and if Republicans in state houses and Congress get their way, many millions more would lose what they've gained under Obamacare and expanded Medicare programs.

Job insecurity is rampant with the near-collapse of unions and the global corporate takeover that's only accelerated under the terms of the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP). Stress and overwork are killers in themselves as people struggle to make ends meet in a low-wage economy with a growing "precarious" job sector.

The electorate is bombarded with drivel about "simplifying the tax code" — Ben Carson's flat-tax "tithe" and Ted Cruz's idea to abolish the IRS standing out for their silliness — all based on the rich and super-rich paying less, while massively increasing military spending and balancing the budget through fantasy accounting. None of them deal with the real state of the economy, crumbling infrastructure or ballooning education costs, let alone with the desperate urgency of converting from fossil fuel dependence.

Where's the Alternative?

The most serious issues facing our society and the world aren't being raised in this two-year presidential campaign of the capitalist parties, except when Bernie Sanders speaks out on issues like the Fight for \$15, the TPP and the disaster facing the African-American community. For the most part, however, the issues that matter most are being posed in the streets, by insurgent movements.

These are the mostly African American and mostly young folks who clogged Chicago's Michigan Avenue shopping district on Black Friday, proclaiming that there's no business as usual after the city stonewalled the murder of Laquan McDonald and the police destruction of evidence during mayor Rahm Emanuel's reelection campaign — and

now spearheading the movement demanding his resignation.

They are the activists at COP21 who said that neither terrorism nor a "state of emergency" would keep the climate catastrophe protests off the Paris streets. The Black students and anti-racist allies confronting recalcitrant administrations at the

University of Missouri, Princeton, Yale and Ithaca College. Fast-food and Walmart workers saying loud and clear that they will win \$15 an hour.

Those are the movements that will transform society — and yes, in the course of doing so, change the electoral equation too.

Against the Current

USA

Big Three Contracts: Who Won?

DIANNE FEELEY ·

After confidently strutting during last summer's bargaining convention, the UAW leadership never attempted to organize workers for a contract campaign. Having suspended their right to strike at the time of the 2008-09 financial crisis, GM and Chrysler/Fiat (FCA) workers were able to rejoin Ford workers this time around in being able to utilize their strike weapon. But if the convention was drowned in "It's Our Turn" and "Bridge the Gap" slogans, membership preparation didn't go beyond taking formal strike votes. My local printed a "No two tier" T-shirt for us to wear at the Detroit Labor Day Parade but elsewhere union activists designed, distributed, and wore "No two tiers" shirts all on their own.

While labor costs differ for the Big Three, the Center for Automotive Research pegs them in the range of 4-8%. Costs went down with the introduction of second-tier workers, who were hired at half rate, with less comprehensive health care coverage and a measly 401(k) instead of a defined pension. It was somewhat surprising, then, that despite Chrysler being the smallest of the Big Three, and where fully 45% of the work force is second tier, UAW President Dennis Williams chose it as the negotiating target. Traditionally the first corporation chosen is the strongest, with the contract setting the pattern for the others. This time around Williams chose the weakest.

Rejecting the Marchionne "Solution"

CEO Sergio Marchionne, whose salary and benefits totaled \$72 million last year, had been vocal in seeing two-tier wages as a problem—"almost

offensive." His solution: Eliminate the top tier! Unveiling a five-year product plan in the spring of 2014, he commented:

"I always have been of the view that the two-tier wage structures are unsustainable in the long term....The real problem here is we need to freeze the tier ones and make them a dying class. I don't mean this literally.

"We have to replace the tier two-wage structure with something that reflects the sharing of the economics of running this enterprise. I do see in some particular cases the tier twos should be able to make more than a tier one, but only in the event that the company is successful. I object violently to the notion of entitlement in the wage structure. That is something that is incredibly unwise."

Sergio Marchionne (left) and UAW President Dennis Williams, during a ceremony that opened contract negotiations.

When the tentative agreement was approved by a majority of the UAW bargaining committee, Chrysler workers were outraged to learn that the proposal was to follow Marchionne's lead, gradually increasing the second-tier wage, currently between \$15.78-19.28 an hour, to a high of \$25. This still left a wage gap between the second-tier and those hired before 2007. As the veteran workers retired, so would their wage scale. The contract was "a bridge to nowhere."

An additional slap in the face was the disappearance of the 25% maximum on the number of lower-tier workers that was to take effect at the expiration of the 2011 agreement. Many senior second-tier workers had held onto their jobs in anticipation of moving to the higher wage with the new contract. When UAW Chrysler Vice President Norwood Jewell said that commitment was never guaran-

teed, workers pointed to wording in the union's own contract summary. The lie was infuriating.

Over the last couple of decades the strategy employed to get UAW contracts passed has been to offer particularly large signing bonuses. The Chrysler agreement offered a \$3,000 bonus to veteran workers and \$2,000 to the second tier. With that carrot, autoworkers were supposed to overlook the continued stress of the work schedule. Workers are told that it's unrealistic to expect to win back in one contract what was lost in the economic crisis. The Cost-of-Living-Adjustment that autoworkers first won in the aftermath of World War II is no longer possible. One just has to get used to "the new normal."

First-tier workers, stuck at \$28 an hour for the last decade, were slated to receive two 3% wage increases and two 4% lump-sum bonuses. Having already lost \$4 an hour since COLA was suspended in 2009, these workers would find real wages further deteriorated four years down the road.

Chrysler has adopted an onerous Alternative Work Schedule at most of its plants. This condemns the work force to odd schedules and cheats them out of overtime pay first won at Chrysler in 1937!

A draconian absentee policy and continued skilled trades consolidation remained in place. The agreement also proposed shifting health care to an unexplained health care co-op.

Chrysler promised a \$5.3 million investment, but this would result in few additional jobs. The corporation also announced it would like to move all small car production to Mexico; only SUVs and trucks would be manufactured in the United States.

Leaflets and petitions circulated in the plants, autoworkers proudly wore "No 2 tier" T-shirts on the shop floor, conference calls were organized, comments flooded Facebook and Twitter. After a UAW informational meeting at the Jefferson North plant, some members boldly marched on nearby Solidarity House, the UAW's headquarters.

With FCA earning a 7.7% profit in the second quarter of 2016, workers overwhelmingly rejected the deal, with all but three locals voting it down. It was clear that the overwhelming "no" vote could be summed up in the demand "Equal Pay for Equal Work."

The Second Deal

UAW officials were forced to reopen negotiations and let Marchionne know his plan was not acceptable. The second tentative agreement bumped up the signing bonus by \$1,000 and dropped the change in health care. But the substantive difference was opening a path from second tier (now termed "in progression" workers) to the wages veteran workers make. Although the agreement required eight years to reach the top, many would get there by the end of the four-year contract. The majority now felt that the principle of equal pay for equal work had been re-established, despite worrying exceptions.

Buried deep in the contract are provisions that set separate wage scales for FCA's parts workers at Mopar and axle plants. Current Mopar workers can reach parity with other FCA workers, but new hires will be put in a separate scale, their top wage dependent on their division (assembly, powertrain, stamping, etc.) Current and future axle workers who reach the highest wage of \$19.86 are eligible for an annual raise of 3% during the contract's last three years.

Temporary work is no longer limited to covering absences at the end of the week. Already hired "permanent" temporary workers can earn \$17-22 while newly hired temps will earn from \$15.78-19.28. Thirty-five years ago when I worked at Ford, temporaries were used over the summer to cover the vacation period. With the introduction of the lean production system, the Big Three and the union agreed to have temps fill in on weekends. But where it used to be that surviving on the job for 90 days meant permanent employment, now the Big Three have "permanent" temporary workers, who lack job security.

The revised agreement didn't address issues such as COLA or the hated Alternative Work Schedule. Nonetheless workers felt they had defeated Marchionne's plan to lower the wage scale.

Given that the company was the smallest of the Big Three, FCA workers concluded they had gone about as far as they were going to be able to go this time around and voted for the contract.

On to General Motors

Next up was GM. Going into the negotiations the corporation stated it intended to maintain its 10% profitability rate; no UAW official challenged the remark. The tentative agreement offered a moratorium on outsourcing and \$1.9 billion in new investments in addition to the \$6.4 billion already announced, promising 3,300 jobs at 12 different sites. Of course, there's always a loophole for management to renege on such promises.

The agreement mirrored the eight-year pattern for moving second-tier workers, representing 20% of GM's 52,700 unionized work force, to the highest wage. Additionally their health care coverage was raised to match first-tier benefits. At GM even temps are entitled to health care coverage after 90 days—and earn a whopping 24 hours of unpaid (yes, the contract specifies unpaid!) annual vacation time.

While COLA was off the table, veteran workers were to receive annual wage increases similar to the Chrysler agreement. The signing bonus of \$8,000 was available to both—and even temps working more than 90 days would receive \$2,000. As at Chrysler, additional sweeteners were various bonuses and profit-sharing payouts. Throwing money at workers is cheaper than reinstating COLA, where the increase is imbedded in the wage and compounds over time.

Along with these temporary tiers, the agreement outlines an "exception" to the UAW-GM agreement in four GM parts plants because of "unique operations and competitive environments."

If second-tier wages are being phased out, at the same time more tiers have been created. Workers in different GM plants will have different rates of pay, and temp pay rates depend on one's hiring date.

By the end of the voting process 58.3% of production workers voted "yes," but 59.5% of skilled trades workers voted it down. Tradespeople, who vote separately because they have unique issues, opposed GM's continued drive to reclassify and reduce the trades, forcing them to perform multiple jobs without proper training, outsourcing the work or sometimes forcing them to take production jobs. Many felt GM was skimping on the apprenticeship program.

In 2013, when Chrysler skilled trades voted the contract down, the UAW leadership, after a hasty consultation with local officials, declared the contract ratified. This time the leadership held up ratifying the agreement and had local meetings to identify their objections. Two weeks later Dennis Williams announced the contract ratified, stating it had been modified to protect certain core job classifications and seniority rights. However, the modified agreement was not sent back to the trades for a final vote.

Ford Workers Vote

While the UAW consulted with GM skilled trades workers, the UAW/Ford tentative agreement had been released to Ford's 53,000 union members. Unlike GM and Chrysler, the corporation did not go through bankruptcy. Early in 2009 it asked its workers to make sacrifices to get through a difficult period. Ford workers agreed to suspend COLA, several bonuses and a minute of break for every hour of work. But when Ford later asked for a second modification, including suspension of the right to strike, workers voted "no."

Since 2009 Ford posted \$48.36 billion in profits, \$6.8 billion in 2014. Ford's profit margin, at 11.1%, is the highest of the Big Three. Nonetheless, the UAW/Ford agreement differed little from the GM

one—just slightly more bonus money and the promise of a \$9 billion investment.

Under the previous contract, whenever the second-tier workforce exceeded a 28% cap, the most senior of them immediately graduated to first-tier wages. Earlier in the year 808 second-tier workers had been reclassified and another 338 will move as well, but given that the new contract adopts the eight-year pattern, 15,137 will be placed in that lengthy process.

Parts plants were marked off as "exceptions" with lower wage scales, as were the temps. As Scott Houldieson, Vice President of UAW Local 551, wrote, "This is part of the plan to keep us segregated. A segregated workforce doesn't stand together in the face of intimidation. A segregated workforce won't work together to fight wage suppression."

The "no" votes at Ford ran at 53% until the very last day. Throughout the process Jimmy Settles, UAW Ford Vice President made it clear that if the agreement was turned down, he could not negotiate a better deal. (In 2011 he announced that if the agreement was turned down, the UAW would call a strike and Ford would call in scabs.) A former first vice president of Local 600 and then director of the region, Settles also predicted that the outcome of the election would be determined by the votes at the Ford Rouge complex. Having been dogged all week by various UAW officials roaming through the plants, telling them how great the agreement was, workers at Dearborn Truck, Dearborn Engine, and Dearborn Diversified voted in large enough numbers to meet Settles' predictions. The national agreement was approved by 51%-49%.

What's Next?

Over the course of the long ratification process, workers experienced a sense of power as they forced the UAW to go back to the table at both Chrysler and GM—and got a better deal for it. Standing together and insisting that second-tier workers have a path to the traditional wage produced a victory, particularly in the face of Sergio

Marchionne's alternative. But this round of bargaining saw the smallest and least profitable corporation setting the basic pattern for the Big Three contracts. It also established a multi-tier wage system and kept COLA and working conditions off the table.

The media presented the passage of these agreements as a big victory for the country's 145,000 unionized autoworkers. Their conclusion seemed based on the size of the big bonuses. "Contracts show split between vets, newbies," a peculiar roundup article by Alisa Priddle and Brent Snaveley in the November 29th Detroit Free Press, attributes the rocky road to ratification to higher expectations by the newer workers—but by themselves they clearly didn't have the numbers to vote the agreement down. In quoting Jimmy Settles at a press conference just two days before balloting ended, the reporters seem to agree with his analysis: "We hired a lot of people in a very short period of time. And for many of them, this is their first job. And they don't understand the process."

The arrogance of this statement by a UAW official is breathtaking! First of all, the UAW does not "hire" at Ford, management does. The truth is that both first- and second-tier workers sought an end to the terrible inequity they experienced on the job every day, and felt that the industry could well afford it. Unity was key. The reporters did note the difference between what UAW officials wanted in this contract—to bridge the gap—and what autoworkers were demanding, to eliminate the gap.

While pointing out that according to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics wages in the auto sector have declined 21% in the 2003-2013 period, the reporters latched on to an analysis that workers win progressively more contract after contract. They quoted labor professor Arthur Wheaton, who saw in autoworker demands "a symptom of a misinformed and untrusting membership...I think it was that they didn't understand the history of the bargaining—that it is a building block, you do it step by step."

Send that labor prof to work in an auto plant! The history of wages, benefits, and working conditions is not a continuous step forward, but the result of class forces in what is today a globalized industry. In a crisis, workers are blackmailed into making concessions to keep their jobs. Then the corporation uses them to claw back to recovery, rewarding shareholders and top management and stiffing the workers. As Gary Walkowicz, bargaining committeeperson at Dearborn Truck Plant, wrote in a leaflet he distributed, "It does not repay us for all the concessions we have given up. It does not even bring us back to the standard of living we were at before the concessions started."

The post-World War II period of building upon one contract after another is long gone. Autoworkers never recovered from the concessions agreed to in the 1979-81 period. Today contracts veer from a round of concessions in one fell swoop to a partial recovery. In this neoliberal world, companies want workers to keep wages low and reward them with bonuses when the company is particularly flush. They do not want workers to feel "entitled" to wages and benefits. As a result, workers feel less confident. If they win, as the Chrysler workers did, a way out of two-tier, then they feel that's all they can manage to do this time around. They are not supposed to notice that there is something wrong when a four-year contract outlines an eight-year process.

The strategy of pressing their advantage seems reckless. And the fact that UAW officials at both the national and local level counsel caution makes it difficult to have any confidence that the bargaining team is capable of striking a better bargain, even in the most opportune moment. It's hard to imagine how a fight against these corporations can be waged by a leadership that feels workers should be happy to have a job. But rebuilding a militant cul-

ture isn't easy, even after the kinds of discussions that took place this time. Will militants run in the next round of elections and begin to offer an alternative as they take office? A space has opened up, but will it be enough?

Interestingly, one legacy from the struggles of the oppositional New Directions caucus led by Jerry Tucker against concessions in the 1980s and early '90s was the right to read the actual contract language, not just the summary the bargaining committee drew up. In both 2011 and 2015 these were available on the UAW website.

While both the union and corporation tried to present the multi-tier wages for temps and parts workers as "exceptions," this looks like a cancer that will spread, as does the use of temps.

How can the lower-wage scale in the Big Three parts plants be an inspiration to the unorganized workers who make up 85% of the auto supplier work force? Or to the unorganized workers at Toyota, Honda, Volkswagen? Or to autoworkers in states like Michigan and Indiana, where right-to-work laws can misdirect workers' frustration over conditions on the job?

There are still deeper problems: Given what we know about the role fossil fuel plays in causing climate change, the annual production of 16-18 million U.S.-made vehicles is not sustainable. These lines need to be rapidly phased out and replaced with an industry manufacturing buses, light rail, and some electric vehicles. Clearly that's not going to happen as long as capital drives the industry and without worker and community control guiding the conversion.

There's a lot for autoworkers to be thinking about and organizing around!

December 16, 2015

CATALONIA

Referendum and constituent process

JOSEP MARÍA ANTENTAS ·

Forgotten by the pro-independence process which considers it a past stage and ignored by those who reject the elementary democratic exercise of the right to decide, the referendum however crept with almost the same force into the pre-election debate in Catalonia through the candidacy of En Comú Podem, the undoubted lever of a campaign that could culminate in the final breakdown of the Catalan party system as we have known it until now and with a shock similar to that already experienced in the city of Barcelona on May 24.

The referendum fell by the wayside after the decision of the Mas government, with the support of the pro-independence organizations, not to openly confront the state following the challenge of November 9, looking for a way out in the form of the alternative consultation eventually organized, and pushing toward the conversion of the parliamentary elections into a plebiscite.

The result of September 27, with a clear victory of the pro-independence forces in terms of a pro-independence parliamentary majority, opened a scenario in which there is a parliamentary bloc implementing a roadmap to independence but devoid of the uncontested legitimacy that a referendum majority would have had.

The denial of the referendum has become the quintessence of the undemocratic approach of the PP, PSOE and Ciudadanos towards the independence process in Catalonia. The demand is inappropriate. There is nothing to talk about. Discussion finished. End of story. The political No, accompanied by judicial coercion, has only one basic strategic perspective: to win time, wait until the Catalan pro-in-

dependence movement deflates after a war of attrition in the demoralization that festers and, as a last resort, try to disable the more conservative part of the pro-independence social base with some kind of limited and controlled reform of Catalan self-government.

However, despite its absence, the referendum, or rather the non-referendum, largely determines the stakes of the present confrontation. The denial of the referendum prevented the state from trying to defeat the independence process democratically, thus undermining its own legitimacy and institutional machinery.

And the absence of a binding consultation prevents the pro-independence movement from preparing for the final battle, as it is still immersed in an increasingly complex process, with each new step intensifying the clash with the state but without precipitating a final outcome. The referendum today seems as implausible, due to the correlation of forces in the Congress of Deputies, as it is necessary. Hence the need to place it, as En Comú Podem does, at the center of state politics both before and after the nationwide elections, also recalling that the democratic solution to the demands arising from Catalonia is a fundamental part of an overall democratic solution to the crisis of regime and a firewall against any operation of self-reform from above.

A scenario that must be kept in mind to be situated correctly in the discussions following the general election which will mark the end of the first part of a political crisis that will remain open after December 20.

The need to hold a binding consultation, however, operates in dialectical tension with the opening of a Catalan constituent process not subordinate to

state logics, as a form of real and effective practical exercise of the sovereignty of the people and whose legitimacy derives from both the popular mobilization that started on September 11 of 2012 and the result of September 27 as well as March 15, 2011 which raised the constituent need from another perspective from that of independence, although with the democratic impulse as the common element.

We should not counterpose the referendum to the Catalan constitutional process. There will be no mandatory consultation in Catalonia without the existence of a movement that advances with its own agenda of rupture, taking its sovereign path, but without strategically disconnecting from state policy. And, on the other hand, the independence process will not result in a democratically legitimized outcome accepted by all (within and outside of Catalonia) without a binding consultation. Referendum and constituent process supplement and need each other. The one has little credibility without the other. The first appears on the agenda for December 20. The second was the decisive question on September 27.

A referendum proposal disconnected from a Catalan constituent process not subordinated to state dynamics appears as a mere form of shifting the goalposts and postponing the exercise of sovereignty by the Catalan people until a parliamentary majority is obtained in the Congress of Deputies. This moves the axis of the decision exclusively to the state level and would have crippling effects in Catalonia.

In reality it is necessary to advance on two fronts at the same time, initiating a constituent dynamic in Catalonia and fighting for a change in the balance of forces at state level in which December 20 should be a major first step and for which the Catalan mobilization and the state alliances woven from Catalonia for December 20 are decisive.

Conversely, a proposal for a Catalan constitutional process that does not contemplate the need for a referendum, which is not tied to the construction of a new majority in the state, misses a central piece in the democratic legitimacy of the process and in the formation of a broad Catalan political majority.

This has been the double weak point of the route followed by the declaration of initiation of the independence process adopted last November 9 in the Catalan parliament, lacking a strategy also addressed to the advocates of the right to decide and culminating in a legitimate consultation.

The management of the dialectic between referendum and Catalan constituent process holds the key to a strategy of rupture whose rhythms and scales do not overlap mechanically in a harmonious way, but which can be positively framed. How? By opening with a triple confluent step: advancing in a sovereign manner from Catalonia, articulating between the peripheries to acquire a decisive centrality as they already do in *En comú Podem* and the Galician *En Marea*, and contributing to a new plural majority of rupture in the state assembly, either this December 20... or in the second round of a game that the dominant classes are far from having won in advance.

Greece: an alternative

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

Taking feedback into account I have slightly amended my proposal. I had presented this proposal on 29 March 2014 in Athens during a working meeting with DEA activists [1] and participants from other countries (France, USA, Switzerland, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, Germany ...). I also presented a summary of this proposal at a public conference on 30 March 2014 where Panagiotis Lafazanis, presently the leader of the new Popular Unity party launched in Greece on 21 August 2015, also spoke.

This proposal has not been published so far. In fact, I thought that the responses to my repeated requests for comments and improvements were insufficient to make it public. I was also aware of my limited knowledge of the Greek reality and of the need for a collective proposal essentially developed by the Greeks involved in their national reality. Despite these reservations, following the capitulation of July 2015, I have decided to make public the proposal written two years ago.

The present paper includes large chunks of the proposals I drafted in July 2015. [see]]

In this draft, I proposed an exit from the Eurozone at an appropriate time, which I could not specify. In fact, as a witness to the Greek people's level of consciousness I am convinced that a number of priority measures could and should have been taken without having to leave the Eurozone. To talk the majority of the population into accepting the exit, they need to be told why this option has become a necessity (evidently this is what has been happening since July 2015). Finally, an exit from the Eurozone entails other measures, so that the exit eventually favours the interests of the majority of

the population. Otherwise the exit becomes a right-wing measure, which has to be avoided.

In a country such as Greece, a popular government should:

1. Repeal the anti-popular measures imposed in the memoranda signed with the Troika after May 2010. This particularly refers to the reinstatement of dismissed workers following the imposition of these memoranda.

2. Suspend debt payment, organize an audit and radically reduce the debt and its repayment by an act of repudiation (which will necessarily be unilateral), adopt discriminatory measures to protect the people's savings invested in debt.

Adopt a specific measure on the bilateral debt owed to Germany. It amounts to €15 billion contracted in the May 2010 memorandum: the repudiation of this debt should partially compensate Germany's historic debt to Greece (World War II).

3. Socialize the banking and insurance sectors. Their own choices have now led most banks to a situation of insolvency and not just a temporary liquidity crisis. The decision of the European Central Bank and the Bank of Greece to protect the interests of large private shareholders only makes the situation worse.

We must return to basics. The banks should be regarded as a public service, precisely because they are significant entities and their poor management can have a disastrous impact on the economy. The banking business is too serious to be entrusted to private bankers. Since it handles public money, enjoys the State's guarantees and provides a basic service to society, the bank must be treated as a public service.

The government needs to retrieve its ability to control and manage economic and financial activities.

It must also have the means to make investments and finance public expenditure by drastically curtailing the loans from private institutions. For this, it must regain authority over the banks to socialize them, by transferring them to the public sector under citizens' control, without compensating the major private shareholders. In some cases, despite the lack of compensation, the expropriation of private banks can be quite expensive for the State, due to their accumulated debts and the reserve of toxic assets. The cost in question must be recovered as much as possible from the global assets of large shareholders. In fact, private companies that are shareholders of the banks are the ones that caused this dismal state of the banking sector. All along they have been making substantial profits while holding a portion of their assets in other sectors of the economy. Now it's time to seize some of their global assets.

Public banks with public service status (under citizens' control) can coexist with cooperative banks of moderate size (the cooperative nature of these banks should be strictly controlled with the provision to penalize by withdrawing the business permit).

The present paper includes large chunks of the proposals I drafted in July 2015 [2]

The Greek State is by far the main shareholder of the four major Greek banks (representing more than 80% of the Greek banking sector) and it should therefore take full control of the banks in order to protect citizens' savings and boost domestic loans to support consumption. First, the State should assume its majority stake in the banks and turn them into public-sector companies. Then, the State should organize the orderly liquidation of these banks whilst ensuring the protection of small shareholders and savers. The State should recover the cost of cleansing the banks from major private shareholders who have caused the crisis and then abused public support. A 'bad bank' should be created to isolate and hold toxic assets with a view to their liquidation. Those responsible for the banking crisis should be sued and made to pay once and for

all. The financial sector must be thoroughly cleaned up and made to serve the people and the real economy.

Private insurance companies should also be socialized. Although the situation of the insurance sector is less publicized, it is also bearing the full brunt of the current crisis. Large insurance groups conducted risky operations just as private banks did, since they move in the same circles. The major chunk of their assets consists of sovereign debt securities and derivatives. In search of maximum immediate profit, they speculated dangerously on premiums paid by policyholders, on their savings invested in life insurance or voluntary contributions for a supplementary pension. Expropriating the insurance sector will prevent a disaster and protect depositors and policyholders. This expropriation should function in tandem with the consolidation of capitalized retirement schemes.

4. Regain control over the Central Bank. Yannis Stournaras, the current CEO (appointed by Antonis Samaras' government) invests all his energy in preventing the changes that the people are calling for. He is a Trojan Horse, serving the interests of large private banks and the neoliberal European authorities. The Central Bank of Greece should be made to serve the interests of the Greek population.

5. Create an electronic currency (denominated in euros) for internal use in the country. The public authorities could raise pensions and salaries in the public services and grant humanitarian aid to people by opening credit accounts for them in electronic currency that could be used for several kinds of payment: electricity and water bills, payment for transport and taxes, purchases of food and basic goods, etc. Contrary to a baseless prejudice, even private businesses would do well to voluntarily accept the electronic method of payment as it would allow them both to sell their goods and settle payments to the government (payment of taxes and for the various public services they use). The creation of this additional electronic currency would reduce the country's needs in hard euros. Transactions in this complementary electronic currency could be

made by mobile phone, as is the case today in Ecuador.

6. Dissolve the privatization agency and replace it with a national asset management agency (with an immediate halt to privatizations) which will be responsible for protecting public assets while generating revenue.

7. Impose a strict control on capital movements and retail prices.

8. Adopt a tax reform with:

a) Higher taxation rates on the highest income bracket.

b) An increase of the tax on immovable property (with exemption for the principal residence below a threshold to be defined according to the number of people living in that residence).

c) Abolition of the tax privileges enjoyed by ship-owners, the Orthodox Church and other capitalist sectors.

d) Radical reduction or abolition of VAT on essential goods and services; imposition of hefty taxes on the wealth of the richest.

e) Strict control of the massive tax evasion which deprives the community of considerable means and employment. Substantial public resources should be allocated to the financial services to effectively fight against the fraudulent activities of major corporations and the wealthiest households. The results should be made public and the perpetrators severely punished.

9. Adopt a policy for internal public borrowing from the Central Bank through the monetization of debt. Additional public domestic borrowing measures may be adopted by issuing public debt securities within national borders.

In fact, the State must be able to borrow to improve the living conditions of the population, for example by carrying out public utility works. Some of this work can be financed by the current budget through assertive policy choices, but government

borrowing could also enable other more ambitious projects — for example the massive development of public transport to replace private cars; developing the use of renewable energy; creating or reopening local railway services throughout the urban and semi-urban sectors of the country; renovating, rehabilitating or constructing public buildings and social housing while reducing energy consumption and providing quality amenities.

A transparent policy of public borrowing must be defined urgently. Public borrowing should aim at guaranteeing an improvement in living conditions, discarding the logic of environmental destruction. It must contribute to a redistribution of wealth and to reducing inequalities. That is why we propose that financial institutions, large private corporations and wealthy households be legally bound to purchase — commensurate with their wealth and income — non-indexed government bonds at 0% interest. The rest of the population can voluntarily acquire government bonds at an interest rate above inflation that will ensure a genuine and positive return (e.g. 3%). So if annual inflation is 3%, the interest rate actually paid by the State for the corresponding year will be 6%. Such a policy of positive discrimination (similar to those adopted against racial oppression in the US, the caste system in India, or gender inequality) will result in tax justice and less inequality in wealth distribution.

10. Contract a public loan from alternative sources (that is to say, excluding the Troika and the foreign financial markets) without accepting any conditionalities.

11. Apply the following golden rule: the amount allocated to the repayment of public debt cannot exceed 5% of government revenues. Rule out the socialization of private debt. Make it obligatory to organize a permanent audit of public debt with citizen participation. Withdraw statutory limitations to crimes related to illegitimate debt; treat illegitimate debt as invalid; adopt a second golden rule which stipulates that public expenditure guaranteeing fundamental human rights is irreducible and takes precedence over debt repayment.

12. It is also important for Greece to launch a process of structural democratic changes with active citizen participation. To achieve this constituent process, Greece must convene the election of a Constituent Assembly through popular vote to draft a new democratically chosen Constitution. Once the Constituent Assembly – which should operate on the basis of grievances and proposals received from the people – has adopted the draft, it will be submitted to popular vote.

13. Establish a register of assets.

14. Reduce working hours and restore pre-2010 salaries. Then increase wages and low pensions to a level yet to be fixed.

15. Increase the legal minimum wage; establish an index for wages and social benefits commensurate with the cost of living.

16. Withdraw the parliamentary immunity enjoyed by elected officials involved in the crisis and bring them to justice.

17. Ban organizations which promote racism and / or racial hatred.

18. Implement a comprehensive programme to stimulate the economy:

Support local agricultural production: create a public service for training farmers in peasant agriculture and agro-ecology, prioritize the access of local products to the market, reschedule CAP subsidies so that they go to small farms, improve the supply line for local seeds, support new agricultural cooperatives, relocate agriculture and support facilities for food sovereignty;

- Support small and medium enterprises;
- Support small businesses;
- Support traditional fishery;
- Create jobs in the public services sector giving priority to health, public education and the environment;
- Restore companies that had been privatized to public status and support workers' takeover of

companies;

- Develop renewable energies to meet local needs, support heating insulation projects for buildings, develop public transport, reject large and unnecessary projects and turn away from extractivism;
- Start ambitious projects for environmental conservation and consolidate the corresponding national laws: natural parks, biodiversity of terrestrial and marine wildlife;
- Support small scale tourism (against the big tourist resorts);
- Organize public, local and ecological administration of water and waste.

19. Exit the Eurozone by applying a redistributive monetary reform, by reducing the liquid assets of the wealthiest households.

Here's an example (of course, the rates indicated may be modified after a thorough examination of how liquid household savings are distributed and the adoption of stringent criteria):

€1 would be exchanged against one new drachma (n.D) up to € 200,000

€1 = 0.7 n. D. between € 200,000 and 250,000

€1 = 0.6 n. D. between € 250,000 and 350,000

€1 = 0.5 n. D. between € 350,000 and 500,000

€1 = 0.4 n. D. between € 500,000 and 600,000

€1 = 0.2 n. D. above € 600,000

€1 = 0.1 n D. over € 1 million

If a household owns € 200,000 in cash, it gets 200,000 n.D in exchange

For € 250,000, it gets 200,000 + 35,000 = 235,000 n.D

For € 350,000, it gets 200,000 + 35,000 + 60,000 = 295,000 n.D

For € 500,000, it gets 200,000 + 35,000 + 60,000 + 75,000 = 370,000 n.D

For € 600,000, it gets 200,000 + 35,000 + 60,000 + 75,000 + 40,000 = 410,000 n.D

For € 1 million, it gets 410,000 + 80,000 = 490,000 n.D

For € 2 million, it gets 410,000 + 80,000 + 100,000 = 590,000 n.D

20. Withdraw Greece from NATO , discontinue the foreign bases on Greek territory and reduce military expenditure. Start negotiations with neighbouring countries so that a concerted process of demilitarization can be launched. It is essential to cancel the military cooperation agreement with Israel.

Conclusion

The change after the capitulation of July 2015 has been radical and there will be numerous disastrous consequences. If we look at the causes of the current turn of events, there is of course the stubbornness of the creditors, but there is also the strategy chosen by the Syriza leadership and the government of Alexis Tsipras [3]: the refusal to clearly and explicitly question the legitimacy and legality of the debt, the continued repayment of debt, the failure to recognize the importance of a citizens' audit (even though Tsipras officially supported the audit), the refusal to ruffle the feathers of the big shareholders in the Greek banks that are responsible for the banking crisis, the refusal to defend the country against the creditors' aggressive inflexibility, the refusal to have an alternative plan ready, which could have included the exit from the euro, and to provide public explanations of the reasons why that might be necessary, the illusion that negotiations could prevail on the creditors to make enough concessions to allow SYRIZA and Greece to

escape from austerity, the refusal to start a constituent process in order to democratically change the Greek constitution, the failure to understand the pivotal role of popular demonstrations that should have received encouragement, and so on.

The most urgent choice was not whether or not to remain in the Eurozone, but rather whether to negotiate while in a weak position or to give priority to the following five steps based on the strength of popular mobilization:

1. Suspend debt repayments while continuing to audit the debt, which means getting into direct conflict with the Troika;
2. Resolve the banking crisis, which means confronting the major private shareholders who caused the crisis;
3. Create a complementary parallel currency;
4. Increase measures to address the humanitarian crisis, in addition to the significant ones already taken by the government since February 2015;
5. Stop privatizations and create new resources for the public treasuries by adopting strong measures at the expense of the privileged sectors, starting with the richest 1%, the large corporations and the major tax evaders.

Translated by Suchandra De Sarkar in collaboration with Christine Pagnouille

RUSSIA, SYRIA AND LATIN AMERICA

New colonialisms and the crisis of left values

RAUL ZIBECHI ·

Times of confusion in which ethics are shipwrecked, basic points of reference disappear and something is installed like "anything goes," which permits supporting any cause that goes against the bigger enemy, beyond all consideration of principles and values. Shortcuts lead to dead ends, like equating Putin with Lenin, to use a somewhat fashionable example.

The Russian intervention in Syria is a neocolonial act, which places Russia on the same side of history as the United States, France and England. Good, emancipating colonialisms don't exist. As much as Russian intervention is justified with the argument of stopping the Islamic State and the imperial offensive in the region, it is nothing more than an action symmetric to one using identical methods and similar arguments that is condemned.

The question that I consider central is: Why are voices from the Latin American left raised in support of Putin? It's evident that many have hung their hopes for a better world, on the intervention of the big powers like China and Russia, with the hope of stopping or overthrowing the still hegemonic powers. It's understandable in view of the exploits that Washington commits in our region. But it's a strategic error and an ethical deviation.

I would like to illuminate this especially critical juncture, appealing to a historic document: the letter to Maurice Thorez (secretary general of the French Communist Party), written in October 1956 by Aimé Césaire. The text was born in one of the corners of history, a little after the XX Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, where the crimes of Stalinism were denounced; the same month as the uprising of the Hungarian people against the pro-Russian bureaucratic regime

(which resulted in thousands of deaths) and of the colonial attack Egypt for the nationalization of the Suez Canal.

Césaire renounced the party after a shameful congress in which the leadership was incapable of the least self-criticism before the revelation of crimes that, in fact, it was supporting. He was born in Martinique, like Frantz Fanon, where he was a secondary school teacher. He was a poet and the founder of the blackness movement in the 1930s. In 1950 he wrote *Discourse on colonialism*, with a big impact in black communities. His letter to Thorez was, in the words of Immanuel Wallerstein, "the document that best explained and expressed the distancing between the global communist movement and the different national liberation movements" (in *Discurso sobre el colonialismo*, Akal, p. 8).

I find three questions in his letter that illuminate the crisis of left values through which we travel.

The first is the lack of will to break with Stalinism. Césaire turns against the ethical relativism that seeks to exorcise the crimes of Stalinism with "some mechanical phrase." It's like that cracking of the whip that is repeated over and over, saying that Stalin "committed errors." Murdering millions is not an error, even though it supposedly kills in the name of a just cause.

The largest part of the lefts do not make a serious and self-critical balance of the Stalinism that, as has been written in these pages, goes way beyond the figure of Stalin. What gave life to Stalinism is a model of society centered on the State and on the power of a bureaucracy that comes from a State bourgeoisie, which controls the means of production. It continues betting on a socialism that re-

peats that old and expired model of centralization of the means of production.

The second is that the struggles of the oppressed cannot be treated, Césaire says, "as part of a more important whole," because a "singularity of our problems exists that cannot be reduced to any other problem." The struggle against racism, he says, is "of a very different nature than the struggle of the French worker against French capitalism," and cannot be considered "a fragment of this struggle."

On this point, the anti-colonial and anti-patriarchal struggles touch the same fibers. "These forces would be faded into organizations that are not their own, made for them, made by them and adapted to objectives that only they can determine." Even today there are those who don't comprehend that women need their own spaces, like all oppressed peoples.

It's about, affirms Césaire, "not confusing alliance and subordination," something very frequent when parties of the left seek to "assimilate" the demands of the different groups below to a single cause, through the sacrosanct unity that does nothing

more than homogenize differences, thereby installing new oppressions.

The third question that Césaire's letter illuminates, highly topical, is related with universalism; in other words, with the construction of non-Eurocentric universals, in which the totality is not imposed on the diversities. "There are two ways of getting lost: by walled segregation in the particular or by dissolution into the 'universal.'"

We are still far from constructing "a universal depository of all the particulars," which supposes the "deepening and coexistence of all the particulars," as Césaire wrote six decades ago.

Those who bet on powers symmetric with the existing, excluding and hegemonic ones, but of the left; those who oppose the bad bombs of the Yankees with the good bombs of the Russians, follow the path traced by Stalinism of making a clean sweep with the past and with differences, instead of working for something different, for "a world where many worlds fit."

16 October 2015

Clay's beach

MIDDLE EAST

A Brief History of ISIS

ADAM HANIEH ·

War and imperialism, on one side, and the growing reach of jihadist terrorism, on the other, are said to be locked together in a mutually reinforcing embrace of violence and destruction. "Imperialist cruelty and Islamist cruelty feed each other," the French Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) argued shortly after the Paris attacks. In order to break this nihilistic death grip, we need to oppose foreign intervention, put an end to imperialist violence, and halt the ongoing plunder of wealth from countries in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere.

The basic logic of this argument is undoubtedly sound. But in terms of explanatory value, this kind of analysis does not go far enough. It suffers from too much generality and abstractness — telling us little about the specificity of this particular moment, or the nature of ISIS as a movement. By attributing a kind of automaticity or natural mirror between ISIS and imperialism, we can miss the all-important context and history that has shaped the remarkably rapid rise of the organization.

Why does the response to Western aggression and the calamitous situations in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere across the region take this particular ideological and political form? What explains the support that ISIS finds on the ground in both the Arab world and Europe? In short: why now? And why like this?

The real genesis of the Islamic State's rise needs to be seen in the trajectory of the Arab uprisings that erupted throughout 2011 and 2012. These uprisings represented enormous hope, a hope that must continue to be defended. They were met with repression and reversal, unable to move forward in any

fundamental sense. It was into this breach that Islamist groups stepped, their rise closely calibrated to the pushback against the revolts and the popular democratic aspirations that they embodied.

There was no inevitability to this. Rather, the difficulties the uprisings faced created a vacuum that was necessarily filled by something else.

ISIS's worldview is an ideological expression of this new reality. To be clear, ISIS's rise cannot be explained as simply an outcome of ideology or religion, as many Western commentators appear to believe. There are very real social and political roots that explain the organization's growth.

But taking the ideological expression seriously helps us understand how various intersecting factors — the destructive spread of sectarianism, the devastating repression in Syria and Iraq, and the interests of different regional and international powers in the Middle East — have acted to incubate the rise of ISIS.

It is a dialectic of retreat: the growth of ISIS has reinforced, and has simultaneously fed off, an inability to achieve the aspirations of 2011 as the region has become mired in multiple, deepening crises. While ISIS's ideological framing of these crises is obviously false, it is nonetheless one that appears for some to resonate with lived experience, a comprehension of the world that makes sense of the apparent chaos and destruction. The mutually reinforcing aspects of this process are what make the current situation so dangerous.

The Ghosts of 2011

The upheavals that began with the protests in Tunisia and Egypt in 2010 and 2011, and subsequently reverberated through the entire region, were the most significant revolts the Middle East

had seen in over five decades. It is important to remember the initial promise embodied in these movements at a time when too many are quick to dismiss them as doomed from the outset — or worse, some kind of plot stirred by external conspirators.

These protests drew millions into mass political action for the first time in generations, seriously shaking established state structures and the grip of repressive, Western-allied regimes. Most significantly, that these movements were regional in scope pointed to the commonalities and shared experiences of people throughout the Middle East. Their impact on political consciousness and forms of organization continue to be felt across the world.

From the beginning of these uprisings it was clear that the issues at stake went far beyond the simplistic caricature of "democracy versus dictatorship" that many commentators assumed. The underlying reasons drawing people into the streets were deeply connected to forms of capitalism in the region: decades of neoliberal economic restructuring, the impact of global crises, and the ways in which Arab states were governed by autocratic police and military regimes long backed by Western powers.

These factors need to be seen in their totality, not as separate or divisible causes. Protesters did not necessarily explicitly articulate this totality as the reason for their anger, but this underlying reality meant that the profound issues facing the Arab world would never be solved through the simple removal of individual autocrats.

It was to prevent any such challenge to political and economic structures that elites, supported by Western powers and their regional allies, quickly stepped in and attempted to quash the possibility of change. This took place through a variety of means, with a range of political actors coming to shape the counterrevolutionary processes differently in each country.

At the level of economic policy, there was little alteration, with Western donors and international financial institutions insisting on the continuity of

neoliberal reform packages in places such as Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and Jordan. Coupled with this economic continuity, indeed a prerequisite for it, was the rolling out of new laws and emergency orders that banned protests, strikes, and political movements.

Simultaneously, political and military intervention in the region rapidly expanded. The fracturing of Libya following direct Western military intervention, and the Saudi-led crushing of the Bahrain uprising were two key moments of this process. Egypt's military coup in July 2013 also marked a critical point in the reconstitution of old state structures, and confirmed the pernicious role of the Gulf States in pushing back Egypt's revolutionary process.

Perhaps most significantly, the social and physical devastation wrought by the Assad regime in Syria, including hundreds of thousands of deaths and the millions of people displaced across and within borders, further reinforced a region-wide sense of despair that came to replace the initial optimism of 2011.

ISIS and its earlier incarnations were basically irrelevant to the first phases of these uprisings, the massive demonstrations, strikes, and creative protest movements that rocked all Arab countries during 2011. Indeed, the only comment ISIS (at that time known as the Islamic State of Iraq) could muster following the overthrow of Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak was a statement warning against secularism, democracy, and nationalism, urging Egyptians not to "replace that which is better with that which is worse."

Yet as the initial aspirations for real change appeared to be increasingly thwarted, ISIS and other jihadist groups emerged as a symptom of this reversal, an expression of the apparent retreat in the revolutionary process and the growing sense of chaos. In order to better understand why this was the case, it is necessary to take a brief detour through ISIS's ideology and worldview.

Authenticity, Brutality, Utopia

Islamic fundamentalism is often defined as the desire to bring back the ways of a magnificent past, supposedly modeled (in the Sunni account) on the first few generations of Islamic rulers that came after the death of the Prophet Mohammed. The Islamic State professes this goal, and in terms of social practice and religious law this is how it purports to rule.

But to reduce ISIS to a simple seventh-century irredentism would be a serious mistake. The organization takes seriously the project of state building, devoting much effort toward the establishment of various financial, legal, and administrative structures across the territories it now controls. Although the borders of these areas are in constant flux and there are differing assessments of what is meant by "control," ISIS has an extensive territorial reach, by some estimates ruling over 10 million people.

As part of this very modernist project, the organization has placed a high priority on developing a sophisticated media and propaganda network, setting it qualitatively apart from other examples of Islamic rule such as Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, where television-adorned trees and the "execution" of computers remain lasting images of the 1990s and early 2000s.

One researcher has estimated that the ISIS media unit generates just under forty unique pieces of media each day, including videos, photo essays, articles, and audio programs in many different languages. This level of programming rivals any TV network, and stands in contrast to the older al-Qaeda model that relied on grainy VHS tapes smuggled from the mountains of Afghanistan to Al Jazeera, where they were held hostage to the vagaries of hostile news producers and intelligence agencies.

The decentralized network through which ISIS propaganda is disseminated is also unique, using an army of Twitter accounts and anonymous websites such as justpaste.it and archive.org to host their

media. Abdel Bari Atwan, an Arab journalist whose account of the rise of ISIS draws upon well-placed insiders, claims that the organization controls over one hundred thousand Twitter accounts and sends a daily barrage of fifty thousand tweets. This and other forms of social media are the conduits through which ISIS both recruits and disseminates its messages.

ISIS's tech-savvy side has been widely acknowledged, most recently in Obama's facile description of them as "a bunch of killers with good social media." But the Islamic State's effective use of technical skills, or simply a response to conditions of secrecy and constant surveillance. Rather, the high priority ISIS places on social media and technology points to the organization's obsessive concern with performativity and self-representation.

Indeed, it is difficult to think of any other political or religious entity in the region that takes so seriously the question of "branding" and projecting a certain self-image to the outside world.

Within this ideological messaging, three key tropes stand out. The first of these is a self-evident feature of any fundamentalist movement: religious authenticity, or the need to continually claim and demonstrate fidelity to religious text. In this context, what constitutes "authenticity" is something that must continually be asserted, performed, and defended in front of rival perspectives.

There are many examples of ISIS's preoccupation with this question. Several commentators, for example, have noted the group's apparently strange emphasis on the small and rather insignificant town of Dabiq, located in northern Syria. Dabiq possesses no military utility or natural resources. Nonetheless, ISIS's online magazine is named after the spot, and the group reported a large influx of recruits when it announced the battle to take the town.

The reason? Dabiq holds a particular position in Islamic eschatology, as the site of a future battle with infidel armies that will herald the beginning of the apocalypse. By taking hold of this small Syrian

town, ISIS could project itself as faithfully following a path that had been foretold centuries ago. In a similar vein, the group's announcement of the town of Raqqa as its Western headquarters resonated strongly among Arab Muslims. The town had been the home of Harun al-Rashid, the fifth caliph of the Abbasid dynasty, which many view as a golden age of Islam.

The second core feature of ISIS propaganda is the well-known "brutality" meme: the live decapitations, executions, and other shocking content that have splashed the group across television and computer screens throughout the world. The deliberately horrifying material has guaranteed wall-to-wall media coverage and instant fame.

Compare this with al-Qaeda, which took decades and the September 11 attacks to become a household name. Brutality, however, is much more than just a headline-grabber. It is also intentionally used to generate fear.

This strategy has been incredibly successful — as ISIS approached the town of Mosul in June 2014, the Iraqi army simply stripped, dropped their weapons, and ran, allowing the jihadists to capture untold arms and military transport vehicles, as well as a reported \$400 million from the Iraqi Central Bank (although this latter story has been disputed).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the application of excessive violence is a conscious element of what ISIS describes as its strategy of "polarization" — one aimed at exploding the bloody sectarian wars that underpin the expansion of ISIS across the region.

Nonetheless, in contrast to the stereotype propagated by Western media, the main content of ISIS propaganda is actually much more mundane than the violence for which the group is best known. This is the third of the group's ideological tropes: utopic themes aimed at showing the supposed pleasures of civilian life in the "caliphate," among them bountiful economic activity, beautiful scenery, and stability of life.

One exhaustive study that documented all media produced by the organization from mid-July to mid-August 2015 found that more than half of the material was focused on these themes of utopia. Similarly, the aforementioned magazine, *Dabiq*, is heavily infused with these subjects. This is the most misunderstood element of how the group projects itself in the Arab world, and arguably the most important. It is an orientation that seems particularly directed toward Arab audiences.

A glance through ISIS-related Twitter accounts in Arabic shows constant chatter aimed at emphasizing the seemingly inane, boring, everydayness of life in the Islamic State: water pipes getting fixed, markets bustling with colorful fruit and vegetables, fresh bread, and new dental clinics.

This observation points to the undeniable fact that ISIS consciously choreographs itself as an island of stability and peace amid a region of chaos, war, and upheaval. This is important to understanding the pull that ISIS presents to some layers of the population. In a moment of deep crisis, the promise of some level of security is part of what makes ISIS attractive (or, at the very least, a less-worse option).

Recognizing this utopic promise is an important clue to understanding how the organization has managed to expand over the past year. This is not to suggest that ISIS rule is not brutal or repressive, particularly for those at the receiving end of its sectarian violence, but rather that it is precisely in the hollowness of its utopic promise that some measure of hope can be found.

Managing "Savage Chaos"

This triptych of ISIS propaganda — religious authenticity, brutality, and utopia — is itself a reflection of a wider eschatology: a periodization of history and future based on the imminence of end times. It is a major difference between ISIS and other jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda.

Unlike al-Qaeda, the Islamic State tends to emphasize much more the sequential unfolding of historical phases associated with prophetic moments

(the example of Dabiq is one illustration of this). This is why the question of authenticity figures so heavily in the group's propaganda. Less obviously, however, this eschatology also provides an explanation for both the brutality and utopia tropes discussed above.

The clearest reflection of this can be found in a popular reference point for jihadist strategy: the book *Administration of Savagery: The Most Critical Stage through which the Islamic Nation Will Pass (AoS)*, first published on the Internet in Arabic in 2004, under the nom de guerre Abu Bakr Naji. The book should not be thought of (as it has been in some journalistic accounts) as a step-by-step playbook or strategy manual for jihadist groups; it is rather a text whose very popularity in these circles reveals something about the worldview that informs jihadist thinking.

Succinctly, the key goal of AoS is to explain the steps that they need to take in order to end the domination of "great powers" (principally the United States) over the region and establish a state in accordance with Islamic principles. AoS delineates two distinct historical phases that must be passed through before an Islamic state can be established.

The first, the phase of "vexation and exhaustion," is the stage that the author believed the Arab world was passing through at the time of writing (early 2000s). During this stage, the task was to harass and destabilize the enemy through "vexation operations," including actions such as bombing tourist resorts and economically significant areas (particularly those associated with petroleum).

These actions would force Arab governments to disperse their security forces across wide areas, an expensive undertaking that would inevitably leave new targets exposed. Moreover, the apparent ability of groups to undertake these actions with impunity would act as a kind of propaganda by deed and help attract new recruits.

The ultimate goal of these operations is to generate a situation of tumult and breakdown of state struc-

tures, which the author described as the phase of "savage chaos." This period corresponds to a profound increase in individual and social insecurity, a lack of basic social provisions, and a rise in all forms of social violence. It is conceived as a natural outcome of the withdrawal and collapse of state structures; moreover, its arrival is viewed as positive for the jihadist group. By stepping into the subsequent chaos, the responsibility of jihadists would be to take charge of the situation and "manage or administer savagery."

Concretely, this means the supply of services such as "food and medical treatment, preservation of security and justice among the people who live in the regions of savagery, securing the borders by means of groups that deter anyone who tries to assault the regions of savagery, as well as setting up defensive fortifications."

This side to the "management of savagery" clearly mirrors how ISIS views its current role in the Arab world (particularly in Iraq and Syria), and helps us understand why the utopic theme is so prominent in its propaganda.

Moreover, within the AoS schema, the role of violence is also elemental. Echoing the ways in which ISIS employs brutality, AoS recommends that violence be deliberately excessive and highly performative. "Massacring the enemy and making him frightened" would serve "to make [enemies] think one thousand times before attacking." This would include so-called "paying the price" actions, aimed at deterring enemies from attacking due to the fear of subsequent reprisals.

Likewise, all actions should aim to create societal "polarization" through the use of disproportionate violence. As the author of AoS notes:

"Dragging the masses into the battle requires more actions which will inflame opposition and which will make the people enter into the battle, willing or unwilling, such that each individual will go to the side which he supports. We must make this battle very violent, such that death is a heart-

beat away so that the two groups will realize that entering this battle will frequently lead to death."

There is an irresistible dénouement to this formula: the worse the situation gets the better it is. The author recognizes (and applauds) this self-fulfilling logic, noting that even if the jihadist group was to fail in the immediate administration of savagery, then the results would actually still be positive: failure, it is said, "does not mean end of the matter; rather, this failure will lead to an increase in savagery."

There is established, in short, an inevitable teleology that thrives in profoundly negative situations, where the very existence of mutually reinforcing and ever-worsening cycles of violence become themselves the evidence for the correctness of the schema.

Sectarianism and Post-Invasion Iraq

The link between ISIS's worldview and the disastrous rise in sectarianism throughout the region is clear. Although the author of AoS and the leaders of earlier jihadist groups were careful to avoid religious sanction for intra-Muslim violence, and condemned any deliberate targeting of other Muslims, this was to change with the emergence of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) during the mid-2000s.

Led by the Jordanian Abu Musab Zarqawi, AQI came to understand the bombing of religious ceremonies and institutions as one of the most stunningly effective tools of polarization. In Iraq, Zarqawi consciously sought to ignite a civil war between Shi'a and Sunni through a methodical series of devastating attacks on Shi'a communities.

Such activities, coupled with the gruesome beheading videos that earned him the appellation "Sheikh of the Slaughterers," provoked increasing anger among the older al-Qaeda leadership of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. Indeed, the latter penned a famous letter to Zarqawi in 2005 [1] upbraiding the Jordanian, in which he described the "the scenes of slaughtering the hostages" and Zarqawi's attacks on Shi'a in Iraq as tactics that

would alienate al-Qaeda from their necessary support base.

Nonetheless, despite Zawahiri's protestations, a range of factors that had little to do with Zarqawi provided a fertile environment for sectarianism. First, the notorious de-Ba'athification policy implemented by US occupation forces following the invasion of Iraq in 2003 led to a profound marginalization of the country's Sunni population. Under this policy, any person who had been a member of Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party was summarily dismissed from their job, denied public-sector employment, and barred from accessing their pensions.

As many analysts pointed out at the time, this was a recipe for disaster. Ba'ath party membership had been an expectation for virtually any state job, so the policy led to the mass dismissal of thousands of teachers, doctors, police, and low-ranking civil servants. By eviscerating the state in this way, the United States virtually guaranteed a collapse of basic social services — a catastrophic prospect for a society emerging from over two decades of sanctions and war.

Sunni marginalization was not simply felt in the economic sphere. American forces frequently led attacks against Sunni-populated towns and villages, and tens of thousands of prisoners were locked away in US-run prisons where isolation, torture, and the "Taylorized bureaucracy of detention" [2] were routinely used to bolster the occupation.

The most notorious of these prisons was the Abu Ghraib detention facility, which exploded into Western consciousness in 2003 following the release of photographs showing US military personnel torturing prisoners. In the wake of this scandal, many detainees were transferred out of Abu Ghraib to another prison, Camp Bucca. It was here that one detainee, later known as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, came to establish a strong relationship with a coterie of former Ba'athist military officers who had spent time in Abu Ghraib.

Today, of course, al-Baghdadi is the leader of ISIS, and those same Ba'athist officers now serve as his closest deputies and advisors. In this manner, the experience of Sunni detainees at the hands of the US military not only further entrenched the country's emerging sectarian divisions, but also, in a concrete sense, actually forged the Islamic State itself.

Sectarian rifts continued to deepen from 2006 onwards, as the US, in tacit agreement with Iran, came to institutionalize a Shi'a-dominated state backed by a range of Shi'a militias. This situation only worsened following the formal departure of US troops from Iraq in 2011. Coupled with unparalleled levels of socioeconomic insecurity, Sunni marginalization produced a real social base whose attraction to ISIS goes beyond religious or ideological factors.

A large proportion of the mid-ranking cadres of ISIS are former Ba'athist functionaries drawn to the organization partly through economic incentives. Financial rewards are also appealing at the rank-and-file level. Pay for an ISIS fighter, for example, is estimated to be around \$300 to 400 per month, more than double that provided by the Iraqi army. The truck drivers and smugglers who today ship ISIS-produced oil from Syria to Iraq [3] are motivated primarily by the chance to make a living. For all its religious pretensions, the ISIS state-building project has a very material grounding.

Many commentators writing about Iraq often chalk this outcome up to the stupidity and hubris of the Bush administration, and the succession of obvious policy errors made following the occupation. Such an approach assumes that the United States actually sought a stable and united Iraq.

Yet a non-sectarian, unified Iraq led by a government with strong popular support would have been a disaster for US interests in the Middle East. Without this possibility ever seriously in the cards, it is not hard to see that from the outset, the fragmentation of Iraq along sectarian lines was the

most likely outcome of US occupation (particularly since this also coincided with Iranian interests). Divide and rule has long been a preferred method of colonial domination.

These are the actual material and political roots of the region's current sectarian turn. Despite what ISIS, Saudi Arabia, or Iran might claim, sectarianism is not the result of ever-present doctrinal or ethnic schisms, existing since time immemorial and persisting unchanged into the contemporary era.

It has always been, as the Lebanese communist Mahdi Amel argued decades ago, a modern technique of political power, a means through which ruling classes attempt to establish their legitimacy and social base, while fragmenting the potential for any kind of popular opposition. Post-invasion Iraq and the subsequent rise of ISIS provide a tragic confirmation of this thesis.

Saudi Arabia, Syria, and the Islamic State

The utility of religion in shoring up earthly powers has, of course, a lengthy pedigree in the region. It is now widely acknowledged that the organizational roots of Islamic fundamentalist movements (including the progenitors of ISIS) have their origins in an alliance between the US and the Gulf States, particularly Saudi Arabia, through the 1960s and 1970s [4].

Faced with growing left-wing and nationalist political movements in the region, the sponsorship of Islamism was seen as an effective and disarming counterweight. By the 1980s, this policy was applied most systematically through US and Saudi support for Arab Islamist fighters in Afghanistan. It was here that preparations for armed jihad received their first practical boost.

This longstanding instrumentalization of Islamic fundamentalism has led some observers to argue that ISIS is a tool of the Gulf States. At first glance these claims would appear to make sense. Ideologically, there are close commonalities between the Saudi regime and the Islamic State. Both share a particularly restrictive interpretation of

Islamic punishments (*hudud*). Indeed, the signature beheadings and amputations seen in ISIS-controlled areas are found nowhere else in the region except for Saudi Arabia. When ISIS was looking for textbooks to use in the schools they govern, the only appropriate versions were felt to be those taken from Saudi Arabia.

There is also undoubtedly sympathy for ISIS among large portions of the Saudi population, including those who contribute financially, or volunteer to fight. Yet — while weapons supplied by Saudi Arabia (and Qatar) to Syrian groups have likely ended up in the hands of ISIS through defections or capture — there is little convincing evidence that ISIS is directly funded, or armed, by Saudi Arabia or any other Gulf state.

At a rhetorical level, the relationship between the two is one of profound antipathy and hatred. ISIS considers the Saudi monarchy to be one of its most despised enemies, and the overthrow of the al-Saud ruling family is one of the group's principal aims. The Saudi monarchy will countenance no other claimant to global Islamic leadership, and fears the threat ISIS presents to its own rule.

On the other hand, the growing strength of ISIS does have a clear link to the repression directed by the Assad government against the Syrian uprising. A few months into the uprising, Assad released hundreds of prisoners (among them well-trained jihadists), many of whom became leaders and fighters in Islamic fundamentalist groups. Former high-ranking Syrian intelligence agents have claimed that this was a deliberate attempt by the regime to stoke sectarian discord and paint the uprising in an Islamist light [5].

The Assad government has a long record of attempting to manipulate such groups [6], including a prisoner release in the early 2000s and the facilitation of thousands of jihadist volunteers across the border to join up with Zarqawi network in Iraq. Indeed, by February 2010, Syrian intelligence officials were attempting to market their infiltration and manipulation of jihadist groups as a basis for

deepening security cooperation with the US in the region [7].

It is hardly surprising that when Syrian protesters were faced with the barrel bombs, tanks, and indiscriminate aerial attacks of Assad's military, it was to the well-trained, battle-hardened jihadist groups that some began to turn. These groups included Jabhat al Nusra (JaN), an organization established after the Islamic State in Iraq dispatched fighters to Syria in late 2011 and which made its public debut in January 2012.

During 2013, as the violence and displacement worsened, JaN suffered a bitter split with its parent group over strategic direction: whether to focus on confronting the Syrian military and deemphasizing sectarian divisions, or to prioritize territorial control, based on Islamic law and the pursuit of a strategy of polarization against all other groups. Islamic State in Iraq chose the latter path, announcing the expulsion of recalcitrant JaN cadres on April 9, 2013 and the formation of the newly configured ISIS.

Reflecting these strategic priorities — and contrary to popular belief — ISIS has largely avoided direct confrontation with the Assad government [8]. Instead, taking advantage of its control over smuggling routes and the border crossings that straddle Iraq and Syria (allowing it strategic depth and the safety of retreat denied to any other armed organization), ISIS has primarily sought territorial expansion.

In this endeavor, the military counsel of former Ba'athist generals from the days of Camp Bucca has been key to its success — the emphasis being on dominating access and supply routes that connect strategic nodes rather than an obsession with fixed points per se, securing oil fields, and controlling core infrastructure (particularly water and electricity generation).

This strategy has not only made the organization fabulously rich (holding at least nine lucrative oil fields in Syria and Iraq estimated to be worth over \$1.5 million per day in oil sales). It has also made

the rest of Syrian territory (whether government- or opposition-controlled) heavily dependent on ISIS for their energy and power needs.

Coupled with vast amounts of money amassed from kidnapping, extortion, the sale of antiquities, smuggling, and taxes, ISIS is unlike almost all actual states in the Middle East — independently wealthy, financially self-sufficient, and operating within borders that deliberately transgress the boundaries established by colonial powers in the early twentieth century.

More Intervention?

In these circumstances, calls to ratchet up Western military intervention in the region will only provide further sustenance for the organization. Precisely because war and occupation have laid such a fertile ground for Islamic State to grow, it is patently obvious that this kind of response will only worsen the situation. Indeed, in line with its strategy of polarization, the recent ISIS attacks have been explicitly aimed toward this outcome, and to drawing more Western intervention into the region as a means to deepen the sense of crisis and chaos.

Opposition to foreign intervention is not simply a demand that needs to be directed against the US or European states. Despite official claims of targeting ISIS, the Russian aerial bombardment of Syria that began on September 30 has largely avoided ISIS-controlled areas, focusing instead on areas where non-ISIS opposition groups are located.

These Russian attacks — supported on the ground by Hezbollah, Iranian troops, Iraqi Shi'a militias, and the Syrian army — have primarily sought to bolster the position of Assad in the lead up to what appears to be an emerging deal between the major regional and international players in Syria. In this context, the presence of ISIS actually serves to reinforce Assad's claim to be "resisting terrorism," a function that is clearly illustrated by the numerous Western states that have now swung over to supporting his government as a supposed necessary evil.

Of course, the Russian military orientation may change in the wake of the Sinai, Beirut, and Paris attacks, but the fact is that the longstanding unspoken *détente* [9] between Islamic State and the Assad government has until now served the interests of both sides.

In these circumstances there are few easy answers for the Left. Yes, we need alternative, radical visions grounded in democratic demands, social and economic justice, and a rejection of sectarianism. But this also requires a sober assessment of the balance of forces and some kind of accounting of what went wrong over the last few years.

We need to be wary of analyses that attribute some kind of automatic reflexivity to the rise of ISIS and the machinations of war and imperialism. There was nothing inevitable about this outcome. It was in the reversals of the 2011 uprisings — and their failure to fundamentally challenge autocratic rulers — that ISIS found an ecosystem in which it could prosper and grow.

Politics abhors a vacuum, and with the setbacks for popular and democratic mobilizations over the last three years, the Islamic State was one of those forces that came to reap the fruits of retreat. In parasitic fashion, the organization has latched onto the explosion of sectarian violence deliberately cultivated by rulers across all countries in the region, finding a host first in Iraq and later in Syria. In both these states, the group encountered (and helped bring into being) a reality that macabrely fit its "administration of savagery" schema.

Yet despite the apparent bleakness of the situation, there are grounds for hope. Local forces are confronting the Islamic State in extraordinarily difficult circumstances — most importantly, Kurdish movements (simultaneously facing the Turkish government's repression [10]), as well as the non-ISIS opposition forces in Syria.

At the same time, courageous social and political movements in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and elsewhere continue to defy the logic of sectarianism

and demonstrate that the struggle for a progressive alternative remains alive.

ISIS may project a utopic promise of stability and prosperity, but this is far from the reality on the ground. We can be absolutely certain that it will experience its own internal revolts, as similarly declarative examples of Islamic "states" have faced in the past.

Moreover, if we understand the rise of ISIS through the prism of retreat, we can take some confidence in knowing that the organization does not offer any effective answer to the region's current predica-

ment. It does not represent any kind of anti-imperialist response, or plausible route to a Middle East free of domination or repression, whether foreign or local.

Despite all the setbacks of the last few years, the potential growth of a genuinely left alternative has not been extinguished and, most importantly, has never been more necessary.

Thanks to Laleh Khalili and Rafeef Ziadah for their comments.

Jacobin

Celebrate the electoral breakthrough but prepare to continue fighting for a rupture

ANTICAPITALISTAS ·

The PP came first in terms of votes but suffered a sharp decrease of seats. It is clear that there is a social majority that wants them out, that does not want the party of Barcenas and the Gürtel scandal to continue to govern. They have paid for corruption and rule in favour of the rich and against the working classes. This is good news: behind the political change, the new distribution of parliamentary power, there is a strong social opposition.

The PSOE is not sinking and this is not good news. Although lower in votes and seats, its resilience also marks the limits of the process of change: without mobilization, is difficult to further erode the PSOE. The challenge ahead is that the need to oust the PP does not lead to legitimizing the PSOE, a "left" that applies neoliberal policies, which has always ruled in favour of the elites.

The Ciudadanos phenomenon has proved less than expected. Its fourth position is a reminder that people prefer the original to the copy and that the centre, in a context of political polarization, has serious difficulties in developing itself. Its programme, a product of the FAES [1] and the neoliberal laboratories, has not been able to become the alternative to bipartisanship.

Our electoral reference point, Podemos and the organisations it is part of (En Marea, En Comú Podem, Compromis-Podem), came in third position, with an important breakthrough in votes, channelling the dynamic built up by 15M and the previous cycle of struggles, social discontent with the austerity policies and with the parties of the tra-

ditional left. It is important to notice that in Catalonia the overwhelming majority of the electorate voted in favour of the right to self-determination

We have reason to celebrate the result, but it is important that from this moment we prepare for tomorrow, beyond the possible dance of covenants and alliances. The Troika will want more cuts whoever governs, evictions are going to follow and capital's power bases still remain intact: this is the struggle ahead and for that we must strengthen below (with other comrades, such as the people of IU-Popular Unity), in all fields. The polls close, the class struggle continues.

The institutional instability that has resulted from these elections opens new possibilities. Also for the people who hold that political change should not end in a new transition, but rather a democratic revolution that facilitates the free decision of the peoples and the participation of the citizenry in all decisions, which requires work to initiate new constituent processes. A democratic revolution which calls into question the current distribution of wealth, economic relations and property, which ensures democratic public ownership and control of the sources of energy and finance. A democratic revolution that aspires to build a society free of oppression and exploitation.

Celebrate the electoral progress but prepare to continue fighting for rupture. We continue the struggle.

December 21, 2015

Anticapitalistas,

GREECE

Greece: Why Capitulate? Another Way Is Possible

ÉRIC TOUSSAINT ·

The question of Greece's debt is absolutely central. Beginning in May 2010, when the first Memorandum Of Understanding was imposed on Greece and the Troika – an association between the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission – was formed, the question of the debt has been absolutely essential, and remains so for the years ahead of us. [1]

The Citizen Audit Commission of 2011

In December 2010, the MP Sofia Sakorafa said in a speech before the Greek Parliament that a Committee needed to be created to audit Greece's debt, inspired by the one Ecuador had formed in 2007-2008. Ms. Sakorafa mentioned my participation in that experiment in Ecuador and said that I could be called in to help. [2] But it was clear that that Parliament, which was dominated by PASOK and New Democracy, had no interest in elucidating the debt, and her proposal was rejected. Along with a coalition of social movements in Greece and the support of MP Sofia Sakorafa, it was decided to create an initiative for a citizen audit of the debt. [3] It took several months to launch it. We set up a series of measures to launch the audit initiative. Among the actions taken was the making of a documentary, *Debtocracy*, by the filmmaker Aris Chatzistefanou, which was to play a very important role in promoting the proposal for an audit. When the documentary was presented to the public starting in March 2011 it was downloaded by over 1.5 million people in Greece in 6 weeks. 1.5 million out of a population of 10 million – obviously it had a very powerful impact. Needless to say it wasn't shown on the private or public TV channels, yet its impact was extraordinary. [4] The Greek popula-

tion, who had participated in a large number of strikes, in the wake of the movement of the Indignadxs in Spain occupied public squares in many cities, starting with Athens and Thessaloniki; but the movement spread to medium-sized cities during June and July 2011. The members of the citizen audit committee received an extraordinary reception in the public squares when they presented the preliminary results challenging the debt payments demanded of Greece and explaining how Greece had accumulated such a debt, and why that debt can be considered illegitimate.

The position of SYRIZA's leadership regarding the citizen audit committee of 2011

Among the official political forces of the Left, there was very little enthusiasm in support of the initiative. Among the left wing of SYRIZA, people like Lafazanis, [5] who later became a minister in the Tsipras government starting in January 2015, or another minister in the Tsipras government, Nadia Valavani, [6] are people who became involved from the very start – that is, in 2011 – and supported the committee, but the majority of SYRIZA showed no real enthusiasm. For example, the Finance Minister of the 2015 Tsipras government, Yannis Varoufakis, when we contacted him in 2011, before he became minister, explained that he couldn't support this initiative for a citizen audit, saying that if what we wanted to do with the audit was to suspend repayment of the debt it would be tantamount to sending Greece back to the Stone Age. He said that in an open letter, [7] which throws light on some things that were to happen in 2015 and the type of position taken by someone like Varoufakis.

SYRIZA's program in the legislative elections of May-June 2012

The citizen audit initiative finally found its echo in SYRIZA despite the early difficulties, and SYRIZA included one of the demands of this initiative for a citizen audit in its five-point program [8] for the elections in May and June of 2012. The five points were:

- Repeal the measures imposed by the Troika requiring austerity;
- Suspend repayment of the debt until a return to growth in Greece, which meant applying completely different policies and linking the suspension of repayment of the debt to the conducting of an audit;
- Socialize the banks;
- Lift parliamentary immunity; and finally,
- Major tax measures to require payment from those who had profited from the crisis and who were sheltered from paying taxes.

With such a radical program, SYRIZA made a large electoral breakthrough. SYRIZA went from a result of 4% in the elections in 2009 to 27% of the vote in June 2012, thus becoming the second-ranking party after New Democracy, which was only ahead of SYRIZA by 2%. From that point on, SYRIZA had become a force that was capable of taking power in the coming months or in a few years.

Late 2012: SYRIZA's leadership moderates its positions

What's really striking is that whereas SYRIZA, with its radical positions, found extremely broad support among the Greek population, in particular for the proposal to suspend repayment of the debt, the reaction of SYRIZA's leadership, and in particular Alexis Tsipras, was instead to moderate those proposals, following the idea – which to me is a false one – that if SYRIZA came to power it would be very difficult to put those commitments into practice, whereas those five points were absolutely essential parts of the solution to the crisis. You can't advocate abandoning austerity policies unless you find a radical solution to the issue of the debt. It's impossible to revoke those measures if you don't

also radically reduce the debt. So repealing the austerity measures dictated by the Troika had to be combined with suspension of repayment of the debt and a radical reduction of that debt, and a response also needed to be found to the issue of the banks and taxation. But in October 2012, when I had been invited to give a talk at the first SYRIZA youth festival, [9] I found myself in a discussion, one-on-one, with Alexis Tsipras and during that discussion I realized, regarding the proposal to suspend repayment of the debt and conduct an audit, that he was backing down on those proposals and turning more towards negotiation to obtain a reduction of the debt from the creditors, without making use of suspension of payment. And I told him how astonished I was and he answered that the five-point program was being maintained, but I realized that that was not Tsipras's practical perspective.

October 2013: Alexis Tsipras calls for a European conference on public debt

A year later, I again met with Alexis Tsipras. He invited me to a discussion where he asked me to collaborate in preparing a major European conference on public debt because the orientation he had adopted at that point was to advance the idea of a European conference to reduce Greece's debt similar to what had taken place in 1953 when the victors of the Second World War granted West Germany a very substantial reduction of its debt. I had a discussion with Alexis Tsipras at that time and I told him I felt it was quite legitimate for him to appeal to European public opinion and to the European institutions and tell them there had to be a European conference on the debt and a reduction of Greece's debt, but I told him I felt there was no chance for that proposal to actually succeed. It absolutely had to be combined with other initiatives and include the idea of an audit with suspension of repayment of the debt. At that point the discussion ended with him asking me to participate in a core group to prepare for a European conference to be held in Athens in March 2014. But in the meantime that proposal had not been supported in that form

by the Party of the European Left, who finally called for a conference in Brussels in the Spring of 2014 to which I was invited with Alexis Tsipras and other leaders of SYRIZA and of the European Left. And at that conference, I repeated clearly that a "Plan B" was needed. That initial proposal for a European conference was not sufficient. [10] I was part of a panel where that was discussed with Euclid Tsakalotos, who is now Finance Minister, having replaced Varoufakis. And I realized at that point, in the Spring of 2014, that Euclid Tsakalotos was absolutely not favorable to developing a Plan B that included the debt, the banks, and taxation and that their plan was to negotiate with the Europeans, the European institutions, at any cost to obtain a reduction of the austerity effort, which would later be part of what is called the Thessaloniki Programme, and the perspective of a negotiated reduction of the debt.

SYRIZA becomes the leading party in Greece with the May 2014 European elections

SYRIZA won the elections and became Greece's leading party. For those of us who were struggling on the issue of the debt it was a double victory, because out of the six MPs, five were favorable to a strong policy regarding the debt and the audit. I'm thinking of Manolis Glezos, Giorgos Katrougalos, who later became a cabinet minister, Sofia Sakorafa, who was one of the initiators, along with myself, of the citizen audit in 2011, but also Kouvenas and an MP from PASOK. So there were five MPs who were really in favor of a citizen audit. We had three different meetings at the European Parliament, also including MPs from Podemos and Izquierda Unida, to promote the idea of unilateral action and suspension of repayment, but at the same time I realized that Tsipras's official line, supported by people like Giorgos Katrougalos was to move toward negotiation instead [11] and that what was fundamental was the European conference on restructuring the debt based on the German model.

The January 2015 victory

In January 2015, early elections were called for 25 January. On 2 January, I was contacted by an envoy from Alexis Tsipras who asked me if I could advise the government on debt matters. I immediately accepted and made a series of proposals in the continuity of what had been done since 2011. [12] But a few days before the elections, whereas I had made a series of proposals at their request, contact was lost. I went to Athens after the Greek government was formed on 25 January following SYRIZA's victory in the elections. In Athens I met Giorgos Katrougalos, who had become Minister for Administrative Reform and who had fully supported the audit and who, when he was a European Parliament member, gave some support to the proposals I was making. He put me in touch with the new Speaker of the Parliament, Zoe Konstantopoulou, and she and I understood each other immediately. After ten minutes of discussion, whereas I was proposing that we start an audit committee from the Greek Parliament, she immediately took up the idea and after an hour's discussion she made the results of our discussion public, saying that she was calling on me to collaborate in launching a committee to audit Greece's debt. [13]

The fatal agreement of 20 February 2015 with the institutional creditors

Following three weeks of negotiations, an initial agreement was reached on 20 February between the creditors, the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the Greek government, which for me marks a development that was already very troubling. [14] It was an agreement under which the Greek government committed to adhering to a calendar of payments and amounts to be paid to each creditor. It states that the Greek government would make a series of proposals to the Eurogroup, which replaced the Troika, concerning "reforms." But obviously for the Eurogroup, that meant reforms that would continue the program that was under way, postponed until the end of June 2015, and therefore it meant austerity measures negotiated with the creditors.

A different policy was desirable and was possible

As for myself, I feel that the Greek government ought to have adopted another policy. Since it had been clear from 20 February that the creditors weren't prepared to allow SYRIZA to carry out its program – that is, call austerity into question to obtain a reduction of the debt –, as a way of putting pressure on the creditors, Tsipras should have said: "I will apply the European Regulation adopted on 21 May 2013 which calls for conducting an audit in order 'to assess the reasons that led to the building up of excessive levels of debt as well as to track any possible irregularity.'" [15] That's the exact language of the European Regulation... He should have said, "as a government, I will apply that, and while the audit is being conducted, I will need to suspend repayment of the debt." If you suspend repayment of the debt, you change the balance of power between you and the creditors. Faced with a refusal to make payments, they are the ones who will have to ask for negotiations. Whereas up to then, it was the government that was seeking negotiations when in fact the creditors did not really want to negotiate, or else wanted to negotiate to impose measures that had been rejected by the Greek population. So what should have been done was to suspend repayment, conduct the audit, and take strong measures regarding the banks to solve that problem, because tens of billions had been injected time and time again into the Greek banks, which increased Greece's public debt without solving the problem of the banks. And strong tax measures also should have been taken to increase tax revenues so as to be able to conduct an anti-austerity policy. I feel that if the Greek government had not signed that destructive agreement on 20 February, it would have been able to launch a process that would have been very positive for Greece. What's also interesting is that the Speaker of the Greek Parliament told Alexis Tsipras, along with other ministers, like Lafazanis, who was one of the most important ministers, "There is no way we'll submit the 20 February agreement to the Greek Parliament for approval. A number of Greek

MPs will not be able to approve that agreement as members of SYRIZA because it goes against the mandate we asked the people to give us on 25 January." And in fact that agreement of 20 February remains an agreement signed by the government, but without the support of the Parliament – and that's a very important point.

The Truth Committee on the Greek Public Debt is launched by the Speaker of the Greek Parliament

On 4 April 2015 the work of the Truth Committee on Public Debt began, instituted by the Speaker of the Greek Parliament and of which I served as Coordinator. The Committee's work was launched in a public session that lasted an entire day and which was participated in by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, the President of the Republic, the majority of the ministers, a number of members of Parliament, and a large number of citizen groups. Greek social movements attended [16] because the audit was designed to be an audit in which citizens participate. We started our work, which required enormous efforts over a period of two and a half months. To do our work, we called in witnesses – for example we called in the Greek negotiator at the IMF for the period 2010-2011; we brought in a former adviser to Barroso, the president of the European Commission, for the period 2010-2011-2012; obviously we studied all the debts whose repayment is being demanded by Greece's current creditors, the conditions under which they were contracted etc., and we defined the criteria that would be used to identify debts that are illegitimate, illegal, unsustainable, or odious. [17] Based on those criteria and on a rigorous analysis of the debts whose repayment was being demanded, we produced a preliminary report which we presented on 17 and 18 June. [18] It concludes that the debts claimed by the public creditors, the Troika, are in our estimation illegitimate, illegal, unsustainable, or odious. When I say "in our estimation," of course I mean according to scientific criteria and based on concepts in international law and internal law.

The Greek government chooses not to make use of the audit

And although Alexis Tsipras had supported the work of the Committee, in reality, during the negotiations with the creditors he did not explicitly make use of the work done by the Committee. Alexis Tsipras and Yannis Varoufakis continued with their plan, which was to see to it that the austerity program was ended at the end of June by negotiating a new program with the creditors – but under conditions that were largely determined by the creditors. And without putting pressure on them, in other words by not using suspension of payment. And that has led to the impasse we're all familiar with – that is, the creditors made absolutely no concessions to the Greek government, and they portrayed the Greek government to international public opinion as being incapable of making serious proposals. And that revealed a profound hiatus between the highly important audit initiative and a situation in which, while continuing the negotiations, the Greek government was using all the funds it had available to pay the creditors. Seven billion euros were used by the Greek government to repay the IMF, the ECB, and the private creditors. Whereas expenditures for solving problems related to the humanitarian crisis – healthcare problems, the problems of retired persons, the 300,000 families who no longer had electricity – expenditures for solving humanitarian problems amounted to 200 million euros. Only 200 million euros, when 7 billion were used to repay the creditors! You can see how big the gulf is. And I as coordinator of the Committee, along with all its members, we were in a state of total frustration and profound concern. After all, while we were demonstrating that the debt was illegitimate, why were they continuing to repay that debt? Should we begin saying publicly, "Wait a minute, there's a problem here!"? I went to see the Minister in charge of retirements, Dimitris Stratoulis, who had announced that he rejected any new measures to further reduce retirements, to publicly give him my support. [19] I said: "Yes, we have to resist the

creditors' demands." To us, it was fundamental to show that there's a link between our work and the concerns of the Greek population. And it was clear to me what an extraordinary response we were getting from the Greek population. Personally, as coordinator of the Debt Truth Committee, my picture and my statements were appearing in the media, and when I moved around the streets of Athens, or took the Metro or the tram, Greek people would regularly stop me and thank me for the work I was doing and the help I was providing to their country. Whereas the dominant media, who have 80% of the viewership, were denigrating the Committee's work, the Greek population could see through the policy of discrediting us that had been launched by the media, and they supported us. They were showing that they had high expectations for the work we were doing.

From the referendum on 5 July to the agreement of 13 July 2015

A few days after the public presentation of our work, Greece was in a state of de facto suspension of payment where the IMF was concerned. Even if it wasn't an official suspension, Greece was late with the payment. That was a critical point in the negotiations. The creditors decided to increase their demands on Alexis Tsipras. That's what led him to call the referendum on 5 July 2015. And there was maximum pressure being brought to bear by the creditors – like the statement Juncker made telling the Greek people that they had to vote in favor of the creditors' proposals and not vote "No" in the referendum. Still 62% of the Greek population voted "No" to the creditors' proposals. That created a new situation in which the Tsipras government could have, based on its mandate from 25 January and on its new, even stronger mandate – the 62% "No" vote to the creditors' demands – could have moved in a new direction. They could have said: "We've made all the concessions we could possibly make, we've repaid 7 billion euros, and you, the creditors, you've made absolutely no concessions. So we are now in a position where we have to take

measures to defend ourselves. We're suspending repayment. We will solve the problem of the banks by putting them in a position of failure, while protecting the depositors' funds, and we are taking very strong tax measures to make the rich and those who are responsible for the crisis pay their share. And we are undertaking a Plan B because Plan A did not work." But instead of doing that, the Tsipras government, despite the clear mandate they were given on 5 July, went to meet with the leaders of the three parties – To Potami, PASOK, and New Democracy – who had called for a "Yes" vote and who had been handed a terrible defeat and offered them an agreement. That agreement, which was extremely negative, was submitted to the Parliament on 11 July. [20] It was a proposal coming from a kind of "Sacred Union" [21] between Tsipras and the Right, who had been defeated in the referendum. And Tsipras went to Brussels on 12 July with that proposal. The creditors, who wanted a total capitulation from Tsipras, said: "What you're offering is not sufficient. We're toughening our positions." And after 17 hours of negotiation, on 13 July, Tsipras signed an agreement that was absolutely malignant. Not only did it include new measures that would once again make retired people suffer, and also measures that would affect the entire population with an increase in the VAT tax rate on a whole series of consumer products, but it also extended the famous privatization program which would accelerate and reach 50 billion euros, that called for the sale at auction of everything that hadn't been privatized yet. It was an extremely negative agreement that was signed by Tsipras on 13 July [22], published 16 July 2015] and submitted to the Greek Parliament during the night of 15 to 16 July. [23] In my view it was a clear case of capitulation.

The lessons of the capitulation of 13 July 2015

We need to learn the lessons of the capitulation of 13 July 2015 [24] : If you don't take unilateral self-defense measures against the creditors, and in particular suspend repayment of the debt, it's impossi-

ble to get real concessions from them. The political and social forces in Europe need to understand that negotiation within the current European framework, following the rules dictated by the European Commission, the ECB or the IMF cannot work. You must disobey the creditors. Only by resisting the creditors can you force them to make concessions. Of course you have to go beyond the issue of the debt. It needs to be repeated that today, key alternative measures exist: along with suspension of the debt, austerity policies must be ended and laws must be adopted to protect the people who have been affected by those austerity policies. There also has to be a solution for the banks. The banking sector must be socialized. These private banks need to become part of the public sector and meet public-service criteria and serve the interests of the population. There has to be a totally different tax policy. The richest one percent, the big corporations, must actually pay taxes and the taxes that weigh on the majority of the population have to be lowered: the VAT rate has to be lowered, and the poorest people have to be exonerated from certain taxes. That's absolutely clear. So what will make it possible to set up an alternative is a combination of a policy that includes the debt, and the banks, and taxation, and that will create jobs and put an end to austerity. That alternative is absolutely possible. The population is ready to support it. Otherwise, why would 62% of the Greek people, even though they were threatened with chaos if they voted "No," why, in spite of the constant threats, the blackmail, the closing of Greece's banks, why did they vote against the creditors' proposals? The conclusion to be drawn is that a movement that wants to take on governmental responsibilities must be prepared to live up to the support it has from the people. If you propose to the population that they reject the conditions dictated by the creditors, if you propose to pursue an alternative program, then you have to be prepared to take the measures necessary for carrying out that program. We need to have social and political forces that are concretely prepared to stand up to the creditors and disobey the creditors. That's the fundamental lesson to be learned. The

lesson is that moderation will never lead to a solution. You have to draw on the support of the population and take measures that are very strong, but are feasible.

A parallel currency as part of "Plan B"

Alongside strong measures like unilateral suspension of debt repayment and socialization of the banks, other very concrete measures such as the creation of a parallel currency can have extremely positive effects. For a country like Greece that's facing a lack of euros because it's being strangled by the ECB, it's entirely possible to create a parallel currency electronically. That's what Ecuador, for example, has been doing for two years. The central bank of the country could open credit via mobile telephone, say for 100 euros, that would allow the people who receive the credit – like retired people, who would receive part of their pension that way, or public-service employees, or persons who receive government aid – to use it to pay their electricity bill, for example, or their water bill, for public transportation, and so on. But they could also use that credit to make payments in supermarkets – because you have to understand that even though the private supermarkets wouldn't be enthusiastic about the creation of a parallel currency, they'd end up accepting it because if they don't let people use the parallel currency, potential customers would go to stores that do accept it. Then the country's authorities would be able to grant wage increases, increases in pensions, without depending directly on the official currency.

The perspective of exiting the Euro Zone

Regarding the question of the euro, for a country like Greece or Portugal – to take two examples –, exiting the euro then becomes something that's justified. To regain control of the economy and conduct policies that correspond to the country's interests, you have to be ready to return to a national currency. But in my view, it's only valid if it goes hand in hand with socialization of the banks, with tax reform that benefits the poorest individuals, and with a radical solution to the debt. [25] Otherwise you'll be taking the "right-hand exit" from the Euro Zone. And that's exactly why a part of the extreme Right supports an exit from the Euro Zone in the name of isolationism and national sovereignty. And that absolutely has to be avoided. It has to be a progressivist exit, favorable to the people of the Euro Zone. To recover control over your own currency, to conduct a monetary policy that is favorable to the local market, in particular to local producers, so that local producers meet the needs of the local market. So the problem is not to sell as many products as possible outside the country – you do sell outside the country, of course –, but to rely on the local productive forces and local producers to meet the needs of the local economy, and by doing that, reduce imports and therefore reduce the need for hard currency in a country that returns to its own currency.

16 December 2015

Text version of the video of the same name with explanatory notes and references.^o

CLIMATE CHANGE

COP21: in spite of the show, the glass is 80% empty

DANIEL TANURO ·

"Well below 2°C": how?

The agreement sets the objective of "holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change."

In addition, the preamble to the agreement affirms its willingness to achieve these objectives while respecting the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, human rights, the right to health, the right to development, the rights of indigenous peoples, the rights of persons with disabilities and children, gender equality (by promoting the "empowerment" of women) as well as intergenerational solidarity, stressing the importance of a "just transition" for the world of work and taking into account the respective capabilities of countries.

One can of course only agree with these positions, but the text adopted by the 195 countries represented at the COP gives no guarantee that they will be effectively followed. In addition, and more importantly, it remains completely vague with respect to the deadlines for the climate goals to be achieved: it simply says that the "Parties aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, recognizing that peaking will take longer for developing country Parties, and to undertake rapid reductions thereafter in accordance with best available science, so as to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century." However, the peak year, the annual rate of overall reductions of emissions after

this peak and the precise time between 2050 and 2100 where the overall balance of emissions/removals is achieved condition the stabilization of warming at such or such a level.

"Reconciling the irreconcilable?"

Taking the floor before the plenary of participants, on December 12, 2015, French President François Hollande welcomed the fact that the conference had "reconciled what seemed irreconcilable" by adopting a document "both ambitious and realistic." "The decisive agreement for the planet is now", he concluded. Speaking before him as president of this COP, his foreign minister, Laurent Fabius, welcomed a result representing "the best possible balance."

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change dates from 1992. It has led to a very insufficient sequel: the Kyoto Protocol. For some years the climate challenge has contributed more and more to undermining the legitimacy of capitalism and the credibility of its political managers. In the wake of the COP in Paris it is already clear that we are going to be faced with a very broad counter-offensive aimed at spreading the idea that the system, contrary to what has been said, is able to stem the disaster that it has created, and that the governments in its service are up to the challenge facing them.

Those who do not believe in the possibility of a green capitalism, who do not believe in particular in the possibility of saving the climate without calling into question the fundamental tendency of the system to growth, therefore have an interest in examining the Paris agreement from this angle: does the COP21 "reconcile the irreconcilable"? This article focuses primarily on this. We will return later on other aspects of the Agreement, such as adapta-

tion, support for the countries of the South, and so on.

So, has Paris given the lie to those terrible grumpy pessimists and eco-socialists? The answer to this question is -at least - 80% "no". Why 80%? Because, on the basis of the expertise of the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), we can say that only a fifth of the path to stay under 2°C of warming has been taken (and this only on paper!). In other words, it is not a case of the glass half full and half empty: the glass of COP21 is four-fifths empty, at least. Fundamentally, the climate catastrophe continues, the evidence that things deemed irreconcilable can be reconciled has not been presented. We will explain.

Between the Agreement and the INDCs

There are two elements in the negotiation: the agreement adopted in Paris and its preamble, on the one hand, and the projected "Climate Plans" that each country participating in the Conference has adopted and transmitted to the Secretariat of the UNFCCC in view of the COP, on the other hand. In the jargon of the negotiators, these projected climate plans are designated by the acronym INDC (for "intended nationally determined contributions"). The text adopted in Paris poses the objective of a warming lowered to 2°C, as close as possible to 1.5°C. But the INDCs - which relate to 2025 or 2030 - are far from achieving this objective: according to the estimates which have been made, their cumulative effect would be to lead us toward a catastrophic warming of approximately 3°C.

This contradiction between the declarations of intent of the Agreement and the reality of the climate plans of the countries which are signatories to the agreement is not a secret. The preamble to the agreement adopted in Paris, "(emphasizes) with a serious concern the urgent need to tackle the significant gap between the aggregate effect of the promises of mitigation of the Parties in terms of annual global emissions of greenhouse gases by 2020

(on the one hand), and the cumulated emission trajectories consistent with the objective of maintaining the increase of the average temperature of the globe at well below 2°C and to continue the effort to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C (on the other hand). "

This gap between the cumulative effect of the INDCs and the objective of 1.5 to 2°C adopted in Paris has been studied by the ad hoc working group established at the COP in Durban to decide on ways and means to enhance the level of ambition of the climate policy (Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action). On October 30, 2015, in the framework of the preparation of COP21, this working group submitted a detailed report to the Secretariat of the UNFCCC.

In this text, the sum of the INDC emissions at the deadlines in 2025 and 2030 is compared to the "business as usual" emissions, on the one hand, and, on the other to (variants of) the reduction trajectory for global emissions which should be followed, according to the IPCC, for having a 66% probability of keeping warming under 2°C "at least cost" (these trajectories constitute what the last IPCC report called the "least cost 2°C scenarios").

The method of the authors of the study is simple: they take the "business as usual" emissions as the reference scenario (0% of the 2° objective) and the "least cost 2°C scenario" as the goal to achieve (100% of the 2° objective); this done, they express the sum of the emission reductions projected by the INDCs as a percentage of the 2° objective. Here is their conclusion: "in this comparison, the INDCs are estimated to reduce the difference between "business as usual" emissions and the 2°C the scenarios by 27% in 2025 and 22% in 2030". That is why we have said above that "the glass of COP21 is 80% empty".

It is moreover not excluded that this figure of 80% is lower in reality. The INDCs should be subjected to a more detailed review, to check whether states have not inflated their figures in order to give an image of being good pupils. Cheating of this kind

has already occurred several times in relation to the climate (we think for example of the way in which the member states of the EU have overestimated the emissions of their polluting industries, so that the latter receive free of charge a maximum of emission rights resold with profit). The fact that a good number of INDCs rely heavily on removals of CO₂ by forests, or on reductions relating to emissions, and relatively little on net reductions, encourages mistrust. But let us leave this aspect to the specialists and rather see how the Paris Agreement intends to bridge the gap between the INDCs and the objective of a warming maintained between 1.5 to 2°C.

Bridging the gap

In advance, I must confess that one point of the IPCC reports remains for me unexplained: whereas the diagnosis of the severity of climate change is increasingly worrying and the phenomenon is growing much more quickly than projected using the models, how is it that the peak of global greenhouse gas emissions to meet in order for there to be a 66% chance of remaining under the limit of 2°C has been deferred so significantly between the fourth and the fifth report? According to the fourth report, in order not to exceed the 2°C increase, it was necessary that global emissions peak no later than 2015; however, according to the fifth report, it would still be possible to remain under 2°C by starting to reduce global emissions only in 2020, in 2025, and even in 2030 – although at the price of increasingly significant difficulties. I suppose that the authors of the reports do not simply intend to maintain the flame of hope, and that there is a scientific explanation for this elision. But I don't know.

In any case, let us assume that the peak of emissions compatible with 2°C or 1.5°C can indeed only occur in 2025 or in 2030, and go back to our question: how does the Paris agreement envisage bridging the gap between the INDCs and the objective of a warming "well below 2°C"? The answer is in the text adopted: by revising the INDCs every five

years, with the aim of increasing the ambition. This revision will be based solely on the goodwill of the parties: the agreement is not legally binding and provides no penalty, so while the house burns down, a commitment as light as this is presented as a historic breakthrough.

One of the important issues here is that of timing: the Paris Agreement will enter into force in 2020, and the first revision will take place only in 2023. Remember that it took eight years to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, which concerned only a small number of parties and only implemented derisory emission reductions. To think that in ten years, whereas geopolitical tensions are growing, 195 countries will quickly agree on 80% of the path they must still take to save the climate, is in reality to play Russian roulette with the fate of hundreds of millions of human beings and with the ecosystems. COP21 does not invalidate the eco-socialist analysis, on the contrary it confirms it: the capitalist system, when it comes up against the ecological limits, can only postpone the essence of the problem facing it, making it increasingly complex and dangerous.

Fossil fuels

In relation to the dangers, those who insist on believing that a miracle happened on December 12 at Le Bourget should still ask two more questions:

– How is it that the words or expressions "fossil fuels", "industry", "coal", "oil", "natural gas", "car (industry)", and others equally crucial to the topic which occupies us, do not appear at all in the Paris text? That the word "energy" is only used twice in the same sentence about Africa (plus in the name of the International Energy Agency)?

– Conversely, how is it that the words or expressions "energy transition", "energy sobriety", "recycling", "re-use", "common goods", "localization" are never used? That the expression "renewable energy" is used only once, and only about the "developing" countries ("Africa in particular")? That "biodiversity" is used only once? That the concept of "climate justice" appears only once, as "important for some" - precisely in this same grab-bag paragraph

which mentions biodiversity and the importance ("for some" also!) of Mother Earth?

These gaps are not the fruit of chance but the mark of a specific project, a strategy of capitalist response to the climate challenge. The climate negationists seem to be losing the ear of the dominant class, and so much the better. For all that, it would be wrong to consider with relief that the Paris Agreement is a "strong signal", "would turn the page on fossil fuels" or would mark the turning point toward a "just transition", as some people have said. Those responsible for the disaster - the fossil fuel and credit sectors, broadly speaking - still hold tight to the rudder.

A turning point but which?

Is Paris a turning point? Probably. There is probably awareness, at the highest level, of the major, incalculable risk that global warming represents for society, its cohesion and its economy if it is not confronted (the Encyclical of Pope Francis is a manifestation of this phenomenon). It is likely that some capitalist decision-makers do want more than using this COP as a smokescreen to hide the disaster that their political mismanagement has produced since the Earth Summit in 1992, that they will attempt to try to bridge the gap between the INDCs and what is needed to contain warming below 2°C. But it is very unlikely (and this is an euphemism) that they will succeed: their awareness has come very late, fossil fuel capital has its foot on the brake and the multi-polar world is torn by ferocious inter-imperialist rivalries, without clear leadership.

In addition, the objective is not everything, there is also the manner. The "least cost 2°C scenario" that inspires the strategists is the use not only of "soft energies" but also nuclear power, the combustion of

fossil fuels with capture-sequestration of carbon, giant hydro-electricity and the combustion of biomass with "carbon recovery". The fifth report of the IPCC is clear: without this, remaining below 2°C is really "not profitable", costs explode, and profits are threatened! Sacrilege!

In the hit parade of these sorcerer's apprentice technologies, the combustion of biomass with carbon recovery ranks high (Bio-energy with carbon capture and sequestration, or BECCS). Its supporters argue that burning this biomass, by storing the CO₂ from this combustion and cultivating a new biomass to burn which will absorb CO₂ from the air, will not only reduce emissions but also reduce the stock of CO₂ accumulated in the atmosphere. The reasoning is faultless, but the tremendous consumption of biomass that this project involves can only destroy both the ecosystems and the human communities which live there. Compensation, biomass destruction and carbon storage are the heart of the Paris agreement. The text announces a broad "mechanism for sustainable development". On reading it, we understand that it will simply amplify to the maximum the "clean development mechanism" of the Kyoto Protocol, through which the European car companies, in particular, "offset" their emissions by investing in the South in "forest" projects on the backs of the indigenous peoples.

This is the "realistic ambition" described by Hollande. This is the true face of what some persist in hailing as the march toward a "green capitalism". Let us deal with reality. What is being put in place in the name of "sustainable development" is anti-ecological, anti-social, will not save the climate and will require ever more repression to break resistance and silence dissent. Decreed under the pretext of combating terrorism, the French state of emergency is in any account very revealing of certain hidden tendencies of this COP.

What Happened to the Arab Spring?

NADA MATTA ·

Five years into the uprisings, however, counterrevolutionary forces composed of the old regimes and Islamic fundamentalist forces have regained the political initiative, and are now violently vying for control. Egypt is under a worse dictatorship than before its uprising, and civil wars have broken out in Syria, Libya, and Yemen. Hundreds of thousands have died, and many millions have been displaced.

How to take stock of this conjuncture? What are its main features and possibilities? Nada Matta for Jacobin sought the answers to these questions with Gilbert Achcar, one of the world's leading analysts of the Arab region.

When the Arab uprising started, you pointed out from the beginning that it will be a long process of struggle that would include periods of success and retreats. Five years into the revolts, what is your general evaluation?

To clarify the terms of the discussion, the dominant view in the beginning, especially in Western media, was that the Arab region was entering a period of democratic transitions, which would take weeks or months in each country and remain relatively peaceful, ushering into a new regional era of electoral democracy.

According to this view, the transition had been basically achieved in Tunisia with the fall of Ben Ali, and in Egypt with the fall of Mubarak. It was believed that the same pattern would spread to most countries of the region through a domino effect, similar to what happened in Eastern Europe in 1989-91. This vision was encapsulated in the label "Arab Spring" which spread very quickly.

It was predicated on the view that this "Spring" was the result of a cultural and political mutation born by a new generation connected to global culture, thanks to the new information and communication technologies. According to this view, the uprisings were essentially, if not exclusively, a struggle for political freedom and democracy.

This vision was not completely off the mark, of course. These dimensions were definitely a salient feature of the uprising. However, the key point that I emphasized from the beginning was that the deep roots of the regional upheaval are social and economic, before being political. What happened was a social explosion in the first place, even if it took on a political character like any large-scale social explosion.

Its social background could be told from the fact that it first occurred in the two countries that had witnessed the most outstanding accumulation of social struggles, class struggle, during the preceding years: Tunisia and Egypt. The uprising's slogans themselves were not only political, they were not merely about democracy and freedom, but also and very much so about social demands.

From this angle, the regional uprising could be analyzed through Marxist lenses as a classic case of social revolution resulting from the protracted blockage of development that has characterized the Arab-speaking region for three decades, with record low rates of growth producing record high rates of unemployment, especially among the youth.

I was particularly prepared to see things from that angle as I had been teaching a course on "Problems of Development in the Middle East and North Africa" for several years before the uprising. It was clear to me that the developmental blockage of the

region would sooner or later lead to a major social explosion.

That's why I described early on what started in Tunisia on December 17, 2010 and then spread to the rest of the region as the beginning of a long-term revolutionary process. By this, I am referring to historical processes of revolution which unfold not over weeks and months, but over years and decades. The uprisings were opening a long-term period of regional instability that would necessarily go through ups and downs, revolutionary upsurges and counterrevolutionary setbacks, and would also involve a lot of violence.

At the beginning, I sounded pessimistic because I was telling people to cool down from the euphoria that gripped them, stressing that this was far from being the end of the story, that what is at stake is extremely complex and difficult, that it would take a long time, and that it would not remain peaceful. I also emphasized from the very beginning that the Tunisian and Egyptian scenarios of relatively peaceful overthrow of the rulers could not be repeated in countries like Libya and Syria, or the monarchies for that matter: I said this before the uprising started in any of these countries.

Nowadays, I may sound optimistic in asserting that the revolutionary process is far from over and inviting people to cheer up away from the dominant gloom that is gripping them. The situation looks disastrous and catastrophic in several countries: above all, of course, in Syria where a huge tragedy is going on, but also in Yemen, Libya, and Egypt. This is, however, not the end. There will be no stability in the region, in the long term, unless radical social and political change occurs.

To be sure, there is no inevitability for such change to occur. My attitude is not one of optimism, but one of apprehending the dynamics of the crisis in historical perspective, and stressing that there is still hope. The only safe prediction one can make is that, short of the emergence of the subjective political conditions for social and political change, i.e. organized political forces bearing the banner of

progressive change, the region is doomed to see more disasters such as those we have seen unfold over the last two years in particular.

Could you describe the economic and social causes that stand behind the uprisings? What is this protracted development blockage that led to the uprising?

This is analyzed in detail in the first two chapters of my book, *The People Want*. To put it a nutshell, if you look at the rates of economic growth in the Arab-speaking region compared to all other parts of Africa and Asia, you cannot fail to note that they have been quite low. The rates of GDP growth, especially GDP per capita growth, have been very low.

This means that the economies have been unable to create jobs matching the demographic growth, thus producing massive unemployment, especially young and female unemployment. The Arab-speaking region has held the highest rates of unemployment in the world over recent decades.

This protracted economic blockage has produced explosive social consequences: not only massive unemployment, but also a host of social issues including huge local and regional inequalities. The coexistence of extremely ostentatious wealth and extreme poverty creates huge frustration. This problem worsened considerably since the oil boom of the 1970s. As I keep saying, the real question in 2011 was not so much why the explosion did occur, but why it did take so long to occur given the over-accumulation of explosive potential.

Now, the reason for this economic blockage is to be found in the workings of neoliberalism in the Arab context. Like most countries of the world, the Arab states started embracing the neoliberal paradigm in the 1970s. This led to a gradual retrenchment of the state from the economy. According to the neoliberal creed, the declining role of public investment was to be compensated by the private sector to which many incentives were offered.

This model of private-led growth did work in some countries with appropriate conditions, such as

Chile or Turkey or India, albeit with a high social cost. In the Arab region, however, it could simply not work — due to the character of the state.

The vast majority of Arab states combine two features: they are rentier states, i.e. countries in which rents (from natural resources or strategic functions) constitute a sizeable part of the state income, and states that are all located on a scale going from "patrimonial" to "neopatrimonial," the major peculiarity being the existence of a core of plainly patrimonial states, i.e. states which are "owned" by the ruling group for all intents and purposes, unlike the "modern state" where the ruling personnel are only civil servants. These features led to what I called "dominant political determination of the orientation of economic activity."

If you add to that the general political conditions of high instability and conflict in the region, you understand that there was no way that the private sector would become the engine of some economic miracle as the neoliberals wanted to believe. Private investment remained quite limited, speculative in large part, and oriented toward quick profit. The decline and stagnation of public investment were not compensated for by the private sector. The neoliberal model failed miserably in the Arab region.

All this points to the fact that the upheaval was the result of a structural crisis, not of an episodic or cyclical one. And it was not a process of democratization coming on top of a long period of development, as happened in some "emergent" countries, but the result of a protracted blockage. The logical conclusion therefore is that the region's countries need a radical change of their sociopolitical structure in order to overcome the blockage.

Removing the tip of the iceberg, such as removing Ben Ali or Mubarak and their entourage, could not end the turmoil. Hence my emphasis from the beginning on the long term, and on the notion of "revolutionary process" as distinct from "revolution" tout court believed to have ended with the downfall of the autocrat.

How did economic hardship and developmental challenges translate into large-scale movements for change such as the uprisings? Is it the level of hardship, such as unemployment, that made the difference? A counter-argument would be that economic hardship and developmental challenges existed in the Arab world and other countries for long periods, but did not lead to revolts.

It's not really a counter-argument because we're describing a blockage that worsened over three decades. This leads to cumulative effects. One of them is the increase in the mass of unemployed. The unemployment rate has not been steady over this period. It has increased and acquired a very high level after a number of years. At some point the cumulative social effect of an economic blockage tends to provoke an explosion in hermetically closed regimes. That's on the one hand.

On the other hand, there are also a number of political factors that intervened in determining the explosion. I borrowed from Althusser the concept of overdetermination applied to historical events. The explosion was overdetermined in the sense that, in addition to the structural social and economic factors, a number of political factors intervened.

One of them, for instance, is the destabilizing effect of imperialist wars in the region, and especially the occupation of Iraq. These diverse factors concurred to produce the big upheaval.

But not all of them have the same weight: the social and economic factors are the most important, but the combination of all was particularly explosive.

Which social groups played a role in organizing these uprisings? Did the organizers come from a specific class background and why? Were there differences across Arab countries?

There were differences, of course, but there are some common features in that regard. Let me start with the latter. The media portrayed the movement as led by internet-savvy young people who formed

networks through social media. The uprisings were even called "Facebook revolutions."

Again, this is not entirely wrong, but it is just one part of the truth. Among the organizers of the uprisings, there were indeed young people connected through social media networks. They played a key role in organizing demonstrations and rallies from one end of the Arab-speaking world to the other, from Morocco to Syria.

There were, however, other forces to which the media paid much less attention. They emerge necessarily if you ask: why did the uprising achieve a first victory in Tunisia, and why was Egypt the next country, why did these two countries show the way? If you investigate the matter properly, you cannot fail to notice that one common feature of the two countries is the importance of the workers' movement.

Tunisia has the only powerful organized workers' movement in the region with a certain degree of autonomy towards the government, allowing for real class-struggle membership at rank-and-file and intermediary-organizer levels.

The UGTT (the French acronym of the Tunisian General Labor Union) is a remarkable organization that played a key role in the social and political history of Tunisia. Among its intermediary organizers, there are a lot of people who belong to the Left. The UGTT was the real organizer of the uprising in Tunisia once it started unfolding. Without it, the movement would never have achieved the victory that it won in such a short period of less than one month.

Under the pressure of some of its branches, such as the school teachers' union, the UGTT got involved in organizing the movement, and provided it with a strong impetus. Its local branches played a key role early on in the regions where the uprising started spreading, and they then pushed the UGTT leadership to join the fray.

The UGTT started organizing roaming general strikes, in one region after the other. The day that

Ben Ali fled Tunisia, January 14, 2011, is actually the day when the general strike reached the capital. So, the UGTT was, in fact, the real organizer of the uprising in Tunisia.

In Egypt, there is alas no equivalent of the UGTT: the organized workers' movement is under government control, except for a few independent unions that were still new and small when the uprising began. The movement was led instead by a cartel of political forces.

Facebook activists played a role, to be sure, but to reduce the Egyptian uprising to Wael Ghonim, the head of marketing of Google's regional branch who created a famous Facebook page and who wasn't even based in Egypt, but in Dubai, and portray him as the key figure of the uprising, as the world media did for a while, is quite ridiculous indeed.

It is not only a virtual network that called for the mass protest on January 25, but a cartel of seventeen real political forces. Real political networks active on the ground were involved. In preparing the ground for the uprising, and that's a decisive point, the workers' movement was crucial. The explosion in Egypt came on top of five years of an impressively high tide in workers' struggle, the most important in the country's history.

This tide peaked in 2007–08 but it remained at a high level until 2011. During the uprising itself, in early February, the working class entered into action: hundreds of thousands of workers went on strike as soon as the government called for a resumption of work. This wave of strikes was instrumental in precipitating Mubarak's downfall.

These are the real forces that played a key role in Egypt and Tunisia. In Bahrain as well workers played a key role, and this was completely overlooked. There, like in Tunisia, you had an independent organized workers' movement, albeit less powerful than the Tunisian one, which played a crucial role in the initial phase of the uprising in organizing a general strike.

The Bahraini workers' movement was harshly repressed, however, not only politically, but also by mass dismissals of workers. Even in Yemen, the uprising was preceded by a wave of workers' strikes.

In countries like Syria or Libya, on the other hand, due to extremely dictatorial governments, there was no preexisting autonomous organized groups, whether political or even social. Most of the political opposition had gone into exile after suffering terrible repression at home — and there were a number of killings of dissidents even abroad. Whatever anti-regime people remained in Syria were under very tight surveillance and could not engage in any large activity.

That's why in such countries, internet networks played a crucial role. In Syria, during its initial phase which lasted a few months, the uprising was organized by coordination committees (*tansiqiyyat*) mostly composed of young people using internet networks.

Thus, depending on the social and the political conditions of each country, different social and political factors were involved in the organization of the uprising.

Let's take a closer look at Egypt and Tunisia, and we'll then come back to Syria. While one can reject the explanation of the uprising as the result of splits among dominant elites in Arab countries, there were in Egypt growing tensions between new emerging neoliberal elites and what it is usually referred to as the old pro-Mubarak guard and military elites. How do you evaluate these tensions? Do you think they had an impact on the revolts and do you think they are indicative of a general trend in the Arab world as a result of the growing political role of private capital?

Such features have been overblown with a lot of wishful thinking based on the mantra in political science according to which the middle class is the crucial agent of democratic change. Therefore, at the beginning, we heard a lot the idea that the up-

rising was led by a Westernized middle class. In fact, the neoliberal bourgeoisie in its vast majority was very afraid of the dynamics of the uprising.

If in countries like Tunisia or Egypt, some of them ended up taking their distance from the ruler, it is only because the ruler had become a liability. But they did so fundamentally in order to preserve the state. And if some members of the neoliberal capitalist class, like Naguib Sawiris in Egypt for instance, projected themselves opportunistically as liberals, the bulk of the economic elite did not support the uprising.

However, in both Tunisia and Egypt, the army and a large chunk of the state apparatus ended up being convinced that they had to get rid of the president in order to prevent the uprising from carrying on and radicalizing. People forget that February 11, 2011 in Egypt was as much a military coup as the July 3, 2013 was. Both coups were executed by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), led by Mohammed Tantawi the first time and by now-President Sisi the second. And both coups hijacked a gigantic mass mobilization.

Some people argue that there was discomfort among the military elites in Egypt with Mubarak's son, Gamal, and the growing power of economic elites around him. Would you say that this had any effect on the uprising?

There were certainly tensions in Egypt between the army, on one hand, and Gamal Mubarak and his cronies, on the other. They were actually competitors, because the army in Egypt is also an economic institution. It is actually and by far the most important single group of economic interests in the country.

The armed forces are involved in all sorts of economic activities unrelated to military affairs. They act as a major holding, competing with some private entrepreneurs and subcontracting to others — while claiming a right of preemption on all contracts.

The tensions between the military and Gamal Mubarak were exacerbated when Hosni Mubarak expressed his intention to hand power to his son. The military, of course, were fully against this. All the more since it would have gone against the long-established tradition of the Egyptian republic of being ruled by military men. After Nasser, both Sadat and Mubarak were like him issued from the military.

But all these tensions were not central to the uprising in any manner. They were the background for the changes that occurred at the top, but the uprising came from the bottom of society and was definitely not the result of a struggle within the elite.

More recently, the labor movement has been a major player in the negotiations over the future of Tunisia. One can also argue that in Egypt the increase in labor struggles in 2012 partly explain the coup in 2013. Sisi did not only want to crush the Muslim Brotherhood. He also wanted to end the on-going radicalization and increasing levels of social unrest that peaked in early 2013 against Morsi (the president at the time). How and why did labor in Egypt and Tunisia play different roles?

First of all, as I mentioned earlier, there is unfortunately no equivalent in Egypt of the Tunisian UGTT, because since Nasser's time and until 2011 the workers' movement had been brought under full state control. Although we saw the emergence of a burgeoning independent workers' movement very few years before the uprising in Egypt, it never achieved anything remotely comparable to the Tunisian movement.

True, the working class played a major role in both countries, but in one country it is the organized working class whereas in the other the class as a whole was and remains unorganized: what you have are mostly wildcat strikes organized at local levels. Most prominent were the 24,000 textile workers of El-Mahalla El-Kubra in Egypt who have been the vanguard of class struggle in Egypt before

the uprising and until now. At every crucial moment they have been on the front line.

But the absence of a class-independent country-wide organized workers' movement in Egypt has huge implications. The existence of the UGTT is the major factor that allowed the events to take a different route in Tunisia — in addition to the absence of a tradition of military rule: Tunisia was a police state under Ben Ali but not a military dictatorship.

So these two factors combined — the relative exteriority of the army to politics and the importance of the organized workers' movement — explain why the workers' movement could play such a central role in the Tunisian events.

However, it is not a revolutionary workers' movement. The Left has become hegemonic within it since 2011, but its vast majority is not radical. The UGTT leads the basic economic struggle but it doesn't aim at changing the class nature of power.

That's why it seeks compromises with the bosses and with the state, and played the role of conciliator between the two counterrevolutionary factions in the country — the old regime and the Islamic movement — instead of fighting against them both for radical social change. The fact that it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize along with the bosses' union is quite telling in that regard.

From the Western mainstream Orientalist perspective, however, the Tunisian "democratic exception" is understood as "cultural." Were those who uphold this view not ashamed of saying it, they would have attributed the "democratic exception" to Ben Ali himself!

However, the true and only Tunisian exception is the UGTT, this powerful independent organized workers' movement. This fact confirms that the most crucial factor for democracy is not "the middle class" as bourgeois political science puts it, but the workers' movement.

And the most accurate criterion for political democracy is actually the respect of labor rights and the existence of an independent workers'

movement. You can find several countries with a thriving "middle class" under dictatorship, but you'll find nowhere an autonomous workers movement under conditions of dictatorship.

The counterrevolution nearly won in all Arab countries, except Tunisia we could say. Although the Tunisians have not achieved their quest for democracy and social justice, at least there's still a potential for challenging the centers of power.

Tunisia is no exception to the regional counterrevolutionary trend, I'm afraid. It is also experiencing a phase of counterrevolution, albeit a much milder one. Tunisia is witnessing a massive comeback of the old regime men.

The current Tunisian president himself — aside from being the oldest head of state on earth after Zimbabwe's Mugabe and the Queen of England, with the paradox of being supposedly the outcome of a "youth revolution" — is very much a member of the old regime. The new dominant party in Tunisia is to a large extent — not exclusively but to a very large extent — a refurbished version of the old regime's ruling party.

But unlike in Egypt, this is all taking place in a smoother and more peaceful way. Crucially here stands the fact that Tunisia is now ruled by a coalition between this renewed version of the old regime and El-Nahda, the Tunisian equivalent of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, although it did not have the same strength.

It's a different scenario in which both wings of the counterrevolution are in coalition instead of fighting each other, and that's indeed the scenario that the United States wishes to see extended to the whole region: a coalition of refurbished old regimes and the so-called moderate opposition represented by the Muslim Brotherhood's branches at the regional level.

Let's move to Syria. Why did so many in the global left get confused over Syria? The Syrian regime is extremely oppressive and

sectarian, and yet the Syrian revolution has not received the support that others had.

I think that it is primarily based on misconceptions in reaction to the US government. Those who don't know the history of the region think that because the Syrian regime is allied to Iran and to the Lebanese Hezbollah, it is anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist.

The Syrian regime's propaganda represented it in this manner as well. In late January 2011, in a famous interview that Bashar El-Assad gave to the Wall Street Journal before the beginning of the uprising in Syria, he explained that his country is immune to the regional wind — as he wanted to believe — because his regime is "very closely linked to the beliefs of the people." He added that "people do not only live on interests; they also live on beliefs, especially in very ideological areas." By that he meant that by letting the "very ideological" Syrian people believe that he is anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist, he had achieved popular satisfaction with his regime.

Thus, when Hosni Mubarak got removed by the Egyptian military, the Syrian state television displayed the news under the heading: "The Fall of the Camp David Regime." They wanted to believe, or rather make believe, that the Egyptian uprising was a result of the 1978 peace deal with Israel, whereas the purportedly nationalist Syrian regime was immune to popular revolt. That was pure wishful thinking, of course, as the events proved a few weeks later.

Now, the fact that anyone on the Left would fall prey to such propaganda and believe it, is very much deplorable. If the Syrian regime did not conclude a peace treaty with Israel, the truth is that it was not for lack of want on the Syrian side, but for lack of want on the Israeli side. There have been actually several rounds of negotiations between the two states. Before 2011, the Turkish then-Prime Minister Erdogan was mediating between his then-good friend Bashar El-Assad and Israel.

What made a peace deal between Israel and Syria more difficult to conclude than between Egypt and Israel is rooted in geography. Israel gave the Sinai back to Egypt because militarily it is a bulwark in itself, especially since one condition of the deal was that it would remain demilitarized. During the time it would take the Egyptian army to cross the desert stretching between the Suez Canal and the Israeli border, it could be destroyed several times by Israel's air force.

In contrast, the Golan Heights are a strategic position directly overlooking Israel's pre-1967 territory. This is why Israel officially annexed the Golan in 1981. Aside from East Jerusalem, it is the only part of the Arab territories occupied in 1967 that has been officially annexed by the Israeli state.

The Assad regime entered Lebanon in 1976 with an Israeli and US green light in order to crush the PLO and the Lebanese left, and save the Lebanese far right from an impending defeat. After the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the Assad regime continued what Israel had started by expelling the Palestinian fighters from the southern half of the country up to and including Beirut.

The next year, through its proxies, the Assad regime expelled the PLO fighters and Arafat himself from Northern Lebanon. Damascus supported its Lebanese allies of the Shia sectarian movement, Amal, in their war against the Palestinian camps in the rest of the 1980s. And in 1990, Hafez El-Assad joined the US-led coalition in the onslaught on Iraq, involving Syrian troops in the battle. People forget or ignore all this.

There is strictly nothing anti-imperialist about the Assad regime. It is a purely opportunistic mafia-like regime pursuing its own interest. At the same time, it is one of the most despotic regimes in the region, practicing extremely brutal repression.

In the early 1980s a major crackdown on the Left occurred: close to one thousand members of the underground Communist Action Party were thrown in jail and were submitted to terrible torture. Hundreds of them remained in jail for periods

ranging from ten to twenty years, although they were never involved in any violence and never advocated violence.

The Syrian regime has been implementing thorough neoliberal changes over the last fifteen years with very visible results. Syria has seen the development of a most corrupt crony capitalist class, and the ruling clan has shifted from holding military and political power into becoming the key holder of economic power. Bashar El-Assad's cousin is by far the wealthiest man in Syria. And several of his other relatives have become very wealthy.

On the other end of the social spectrum, Syria has witnessed surging unemployment, de-industrialization, and impoverishment of the countryside. All this led to huge social tensions, which exploded in 2011. In that regard, Syria followed the same pattern as the rest of the region.

How do those who went out against Bashar El-Assad in 2011 differ, if at all, from their Tunisian and Egyptian counterparts?

In order to justify their support for the Assad regime, some people argue that the Syrian uprising, unlike other Arab countries, was led by reactionary Islamic forces. This again is completely untrue. First of all, in both Tunisia and Egypt, those who managed to take best advantage of the uprising were Islamic fundamentalist forces. Both the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and El-Nahda in Tunisia won the first elections in their countries.

So, if the argument is that the Syrian uprising has come under the domination of Islamic forces, then those who resort to such argument should have supported the old regime in both Tunisia and Egypt in order to be consistent.

Actually, part of the Left in Tunisia and Egypt now supports the old regime for a similar argument. In Egypt, most of the Left supported the coup led by Sisi, even though some of them may have regretted it later on. The basic fact is that there have been popular uprisings across the region.

If Islamic fundamentalist forces managed to become dominant among the organized forces in those uprisings, with no exception, it is surely due, on the one hand, to the practical and/or political weakness of the Left, but, on the other hand, it is also and above all a product of decades of rule by the despotic regimes. No one should miss that. The Syrian regime was not a shield against Islamic fundamentalism, nor were Mubarak or Ben Ali, and nor are Assad and Sisi today.

Ever since Bashar El-Assad came to power succeeding his father in dynastic fashion, he encouraged Salafism in Syria. People who are familiar with Syria could notice the proliferation of niqabs (face veils) in Syrian streets. This was encouraged by the young Assad, believing that it would buy his regime social peace, and that this reactionary Salafist Islamic ideology would keep people away from political involvement. It eventually blew back in his face.

The story is similar at the entire regional level. The United States itself favored Islamic fundamentalism against Arab nationalism and the Left since the 1950s, until it ended blowing back in its face. In order to defeat Nasserism, Sadat released the Muslim Brotherhood from jail and let them organize. They were tolerated as a mass party under Mubarak, albeit under tight surveillance. By crushing the Left with the help of Islamic fundamentalist forces, the United States and the local regimes produced the conditions for the rise of opposition from among these forces.

Add to this that when the Syrian uprising started, the Assad regime did everything it could to prevent its democratic, secular, non-sectarian potential from developing. This was indeed the major threat in the regime's eyes. It crushed the movement most brutally, imprisoning tens of thousands of mostly young people who had been the uprising's organizing force and spearhead.

At the very same time, as has been documented in many articles and books, the regime released from its jails the jihadists that it had been detaining after

having used them in Iraq. This release of those jihadists was a purely Machiavellian trick by the regime, in order to accomplish the self-fulfilling prophecy that it propagated from day one in claiming that the uprising was but a jihadist conspiracy. The regime did everything to create the conditions for Islamic fundamentalism to grow in Syria so as to alter the character of the uprising.

At the same time, it relied increasingly for its defense on Iran's regional proxies from Lebanon and Iraq, which are certainly no less Islamic fundamentalist than the majority of Syrian Islamic anti-Assad forces. Those who claim that the Syrian regime is "secular" completely overlook this obvious fact which flies in the face of their assertion.

Al-Qaeda emerged as the Al-Nusra Front in Syria in early 2012, with a heavy involvement of the Iraqi branch, the so-called Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), in which former members of Iraq's Baath Party, the brother enemy of Syria's ruling Baath Party, play a crucial role.

When they decided to merge Al-Nusra with the ISI under the name of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (al-Sham, i.e. Greater Syria), known as ISIS or ISIL (L for Levant), the Iraqis provoked a split with part of the Syrians who carried on as Al-Nusra, as well as with the global Al-Qaeda. For Assad and his cronies, this was a very favorable development. ISIS clashed much more with the opposition to their regime than with their troops.

The truth is that ISIS is the Assad regime's "preferred enemy," because they are so repulsive for the West that they are the regime's best argument in trying to seduce Western powers into changing their attitude toward it. You can see now very clearly how the Syrian regime is trying its best, with Russia's help, to seduce the West into supporting it in the name of the fight against ISIS.

An increasing number of members of Western power elites — especially among the most reactionary à la Donald Trump, Marine Le Pen and the like — are advocating precisely this. They call for an alliance with Assad and Putin.

If we look at Syria today, critics argue that all forces on the ground in Syria are counterrevolutionary. Is this correct? Aren't the fighters on the ground in their vast majority Syrians who are fighting the dictatorship?

They are indeed. But one of the complexities of the situation in the region is that you don't have a classical binary of revolution and counterrevolution. You have a triangle of forces. On the one hand, a revolutionary pole consisting of a bloc of social and political forces representing the aspirations of the workers, young people, and women who rose up against the old regime, aspiring to a different progressive society.

On the other side, however, you find not one but two counterrevolutionary camps. One is the old regimes' camp, the classical counterrevolution. And then for the historical reasons that I already mentioned, there are reactionary forces of a religious character, which were initially fostered by the old regimes as a counterweight to the Left but developed and turned against these regimes. Both are counterrevolutionary forces in the sense that their fundamental interests and programs clash directly with the aspirations of the revolutionary pole that struggles for social, economic, and democratic change.

When they came to power in 2011, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and El-Nahda in Tunisia embodied another version of the counterrevolution, one that Washington believed would work better than the old regime. They continued the old regime's social and economic policies.

The only change they tried to implement was about Islamizing the institutions — or rather further Islamization of the institutions in Egypt, where you had already quite a deal of it under Sadat and Mubarak. Tensions arose between them and the old regime when they tried to assert their control over the state apparatuses. That's the background of the 2013 coup in Egypt.

So you have all over the region two rival counterrevolutionary camps and one revolutionary pole.

The latter's practical and/or political weakness allowed the situation to develop into a clash between the two counterrevolutionary camps, while it got marginalized.

Syria is the most extreme case in point. There was a huge progressive potential in the uprising in 2011, as much if not more than in other countries because of the larger diffusion of progressive and left ideas among the Syrian population — quite more than in Egypt, but less than in Tunisia. This potential did not materialize in an organized form, however. Virtual internet networks are great at organizing demonstrations and rallies, but they are no substitute to a real organizational network.

Add to this the very active involvement of the regional counterrevolutionary stronghold represented by the Gulf oil monarchies, which did their best to strengthen the Islamic fundamentalist component of the Syrian opposition at the expense of anything else. Because, a real democratic uprising is the major threat to them like it is for Assad. In a sense, they concurred with the Assad regime in promoting the Islamic fundamentalist component of the opposition at the detriment of the secular democratic.

The end result in Syria is indeed that the situation is dominated by a clash between two counterrevolutionary forces: on one side, the regime and its allies and, on the other side, an armed opposition in which the dominant forces uphold political perspectives that are deeply contradictory with the initial progressive aspirations of the uprising as expressed in 2011. True, there are also armed opposition forces which are less reactionary, albeit hardly progressive.

More important than that is the fact that a major part of those who joined the Islamic fundamentalist armed groups did not do so for ideological reasons, but because that's where they could get salaries on a backdrop of rapidly deteriorating living conditions due to the war. This is a key factor even in ISIS's development, one that allowed it to recruit so many thousands of fighters.

This said, the potential that exploded in 2011 has not been crushed but was rather marginalized politically. Many of those who represented this potential have left the country into exile because they are radically opposed to the regime and threatened by it, on the one hand, and they see the proliferation of reactionary forces who are equally dangerous for them, on the other.

Most of those who survived and did not end up in jail have left the country. These thousands of activists who embodied the democratic, progressive potential of the 2011 uprising and are now in exile are a reason to keep hope in the future.

For the moment, however, the best one can hope for is the cessation of this terrible dynamics of "clash of barbarisms," as I called it in the aftermath of 9/11, with the barbaric Assad regime on one end and the barbaric ISIS on the other end, the latter being originally a product of the chief barbarism of the US occupation of Iraq. The civil war, the destruction of Syria, and the massacre of its people by the regime should come to an end under conditions that allow the refugees to get back to their hometowns from exile or displacement within the country. This is the most urgent now.

At this moment, there are no prospects whatsoever for a progressive outcome. Anyone who believes otherwise is dreaming. In the absence of such prospects, the best that can happen is the end of the continuous deterioration brought by the war. For the war to end, you need some kind of compromise between the regime and the opposition. And for this to happen, Assad must go, because there can't be any workable compromise, any ending of the conflict, with Assad in place.

In supporting him, Russia and Iran are blocking the possibility for compromise. Since 2012, the Obama administration has been saying, "We are not advocating regime change in Syria but we believe Assad should step down for a compromise between the regime and the opposition to see the light."

Obama advocated what he called "the Yemeni solution." In Yemen, the president accepted to step down and hand power to the vice-president, and the regime was not changed. Instead, you had a coalition government of the opposition and the regime, the president's clan excepted. It did not last long as we know, but that was regarded by Obama in 2012 and is still seen by him as the model to follow in Syria.

Iran and Russia, however, fear that if the Assad clan goes, this could disrupt the whole regime which has become quite shaky, and they would stand to lose Syria as one of their key allied states in the region. They are therefore preventing the progress toward a negotiated compromise. Such a compromise, to be sure, would be far from ideal.

But unless the war stops, there will be no revival of the progressive democratic potential of the Syrian uprising as it emerged in 2011. The potential still exists: if the war stops and the social economic issues come to the fore again, people will see the vanity of both camps who have no solutions for the country's problems.

Some say that if Assad were to leave power, ISIS and Al-Nusra would take over. You are saying that ousting Assad will quicken the struggle for liberalization.

Indeed. The main reason that allows Al-Nusra and ISIS to develop is the continued existence of the Assad regime. It is the Assad regime's barbarism in repressing the uprising that created the ground for Al-Qaeda and ISIS to develop in Syria in the first place.

There were no ready masses waiting to join such crazy groups. People ended up finding in them an appropriate response to the atrocities committed by the regime as well as to the chaos that prevailed. ISIS played on that, imposing a religious totalitarian order while providing state-like social services. That is why it called itself the Islamic State.

The only possible way to get rid of ISIS and Al-Qaeda is by removing the causes that lead people to

join these groups. When the United States tried to crush Al-Qaeda by sheer force during the battle and massacre of Fallujah in Iraq, it failed miserably. It is only when it changed strategy and empowered the Arab Sunni tribes through funds and arms that it managed to marginalize Al-Qaeda.

Al Qaeda-turned-ISIS managed later to recover control over large parts of Iraq in the summer of 2014, because the Iran-backed sectarian government of Nouri Al-Maliki recreated the conditions of Iraqi Arab Sunni resentment that allowed Al-Qaeda to develop under US occupation initially. This is why most of Iraq's Arab Sunnis paradoxically dreaded the US evacuation of Iraq in 2011. By an irony of history, they had come to see US troops as a protection against the Shia sectarian government of Maliki.

In Syria, the conditions for Arab Sunni sectarian resentment must be removed in order to end the sectarian appeal of Al-Nusra, ISIS, and other fundamentalists. The first condition for doing that is the removal of the Assad clan from power, as they are resented by a major part of the Syrian society.

Let's move to geopolitics and the US. How would you describe the American response to the uprisings?

This is again something on which many people on the Left think by inertia. Many fail to grasp that the Iraq experience was a defining disaster. It is actually the most important disaster in US imperial history. From a strategic point of view, it is worse than Vietnam.

People fail to understand that, after Bush, the Obama administration was no longer in the business of regime change. The motto for Barack Obama in the face of the 2011 Arab uprising was "orderly transition," not "regime change." He wanted to preserve the regimes through limited changes at the top that would allow for a smooth transition without fundamental regime disruption.

That applies even to Libya. The US-led intervention in Libya was an attempt to co-opt the Libyan upris-

ing and steer it into a transition that was negotiated with Gaddafi's son, the Western-cherished scion of the clan. They tried this until the very last minute, but it failed miserably because the insurrection in Tripoli led to the collapse of the regime.

That's why Libya turned into one more disaster from the US imperialist perspective and a further argument against any "regime change" that includes radical dismantlement of the state, as happened previously in Iraq. That's why the US government never said that it wishes to overthrow the regime in Syria. They only said that Bashar El-Assad must step down in order to allow for a negotiated transition.

They want the man to go, that is, with the regime remaining in place. The United States faced the 2011 Arab uprising when it was actually at the nadir of its regional hegemony since 1990. In that same year of 2011, it evacuated Iraq without achieving any of the key imperialist goals of the invasion.

The intervention in Libya also happened thanks to a Russian green light. Both China and Russia abstained at the UN Security Council. They could have vetoed the intervention, but they did not. However, unlike Gaddafi, the Syrian regime is regarded by Russia as a main ally, whereas Gaddafi had shifted during his last years, becoming a dear friend of Washington, London, Paris, and Italy's Berlusconi.

When it came to Syria, Washington never seriously contemplated a direct military intervention. At one point in 2013, Obama got entangled in his own "red line" on the issue of chemical weapons, and was much relieved by the compromise with Assad that Russia offered him. Overall, the situation is far more complex than the simplistic "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" logic that informs much of the knee-jerk "anti-imperialist" left.

If both Russia and the United States agree on maintaining the Syrian regime, what is the core disagreement between them then?

The disagreement, of course, is on the issue of Assad. Until now, Russia sticks to him because they see in the Assad clan the only guarantee for their domination over Syria. Russia is no less imperialist than the United States, and is even more brutal if you consider what it did to Chechnya although it is part of the Russian Federation (the equivalent of one of the United States).

By the social standard, the Russian regime is even more right-wing neoliberal than the US regime is. There is a flat individual income tax of 13 percent in Russia vs. a cap of 40 percent for the US federal tax, not counting additional local taxes. The Russian corporate tax is 20 percent versus 35 percent US federal tax, again not counting local taxes. The wildest Republican would dream of implementing something like this in the United States.

Putin is also playing the religious card by bringing the Russian Orthodox Church to bless his intervention in Syria as a Holy War. The view of some people on the Left who live in a time warp and believe that Russia is somehow the continuation of the Soviet Union and that Vladimir Putin is the heir of Vladimir Lenin, is quite preposterous.

But what is Russia's imperialist interest in Syria?

It is that Syria is a country where Russia has air and naval bases and is reacting as Washington would react with regard to any country where it has such bases. The Assad regime is Moscow's closest strategic ally in the region.

This is also a way for Putin to tell all dictators: "You can count on me to defend you against popular uprisings much more than you can count on Washington. Contrast my support for Assad with the US abandonment of Mubarak." This is why Putin has become such a good friend with Egypt's new dictator Sisi.

So Putin wants to improve his imperialist role in the Arab world?

Moscow's actions are based on the same logic as Washington's. Russia sees Syria as a strategic asset

in the same way as the United States saw Vietnam in the past, or any regime that Washington was willing to support by direct military intervention.

Today, however, Putin is more prone on direct military intervention than Obama is. US imperialism is still affected by the legacy of the "Vietnam syndrome," which has actually been revived by the terrible failure in Iraq even though both Bush senior and Bush junior had believed they managed to get rid of it.

Putin is taking advantage of this in being more assertive than Washington over Syria by fully backing the Assad regime, whereas the United States is not supporting the Syrian opposition in any comparable way. Washington's support to the opposition is more the stuff of jokes than anything serious. Whereas Moscow and Tehran are providing the Syrian regime with full-spectrum support, including a heavy involvement of proxy fighters on the part of Iran.

The Saudi kingdom and other Gulf monarchies have been keen on destroying the uprisings. Sisi's coup in Egypt would not have been possible without full Saudi support. Will the Saudis be able to play this role for a long time? What prospects for change are there in Gulf countries, you think?

That's a major problem indeed. The Saudi Kingdom has always been a key linchpin of reaction in the region. That's the role it has played ever since it came into existence because it has consistently been the most reactionary state on earth. If you consider ISIS as a state, you can say it is the Saudis' competitor in that respect. They have a lot of common features and share a similar history, except that one was founded in the early twentieth century and the other one century later with very different means.

The Saudi Kingdom is a major reactionary stronghold in the region, but its ability to play a direct military role is more in its direct environment, in the Gulf. It played a key role in helping the Bahraini monarchy quell the uprising in Bahrain. In Yemen the Saudi kingdom is intervening on the side of the coalition government that resulted from the

Yemeni compromise of November 2011, in opposition to the deposed president Ali Abdullah Saleh now allied with the Houthis. This is basically another clash between two counterrevolutionary camps, as we have discussed.

In Syria, the Saudi regime plays a role but mostly through funding, not through direct intervention. For our terrible bad luck, the Saudis took hold of a country that turned out to have the largest oil reserves in the world. This gave them tremendous means that they have been using for decades in helping their US overlord and spreading their deeply reactionary fundamentalist ideology.

In many ways, you can't understand the strength of fundamentalism in the contemporary Islamic world if you ignore the crucial factor for its development that the Saudi Kingdom constitutes. In the long run, this ultra-reactionary stumbling block must go if the regional revolutionary process is to reach a progressive outcome.

The two poles of counterrevolution in the Arab region are supported by rival forces: the United States and Russia, the Gulf monarchies and Iran. Don't forget that Iran is also an Islamic fundamentalist regime, albeit of a different type. The Arab revolutionary process is facing all these forces.

With the amount of money they have, it seems hopeless that Saudi Arabia could change. I was wondering what you think the prospects for change in this country are?

Well, they have a lot of money, but there is a lot of poverty in the Saudi kingdom nonetheless. The paradox of such a rich state having so much poverty — among the natives, let alone the migrants — generates deep resentment against the monarchy.

The crudest expressions of opposition to the monarchy until now have been outbidding it in its own brand of Islamic ultra-fundamentalism, which is known as Wahhabism. This was the case for the Mecca insurgency in 1979, and more recently with Al-Qaeda. Everyone knows that fifteen of the nineteen attackers of 9/11 were Saudi nationals. Al-

Qaeda had and still has a large number of members holding Saudi citizenship.

Such opposition has been the only one managing to develop in the Saudi kingdom precisely because it was able to work from within the ideology of the regime, whereas it is much more difficult for a progressive opposition to develop there, let alone a feminist one or a Shia one for that matter.

A progressive potential exists in the kingdom nevertheless, and it will explode sooner or later. It will explode in the same way that it did in other regional countries. After all, the shah in Iran had a very repressive regime, which many people believed was immune to collapse.

Yet, when the revolutionary wave started in Iran the late 1970s, we saw how quickly it managed to bring down the Shah's regime. There are no eternal regimes, and certainly not the Saudi regime, which is based on terrible oppression, huge inequality, and appalling treatment of women.

Considering your familiarity with the radical left in the Arab world, are you optimistic about the prospects of Arab revolution? Is it fair to say that the success of the Arab revolution is ultimately about the success of labor mobilization?

To summarize what we have been discussing from the beginning of our conversation, I'm still hopeful, even though I wouldn't describe myself as optimistic. There's a qualitative difference here. Hope is the belief that there is still a progressive potential. Optimism is the belief that this potential will win.

I'm not betting on its winning because I know how difficult the task is, all the more in that building alternative progressive leaderships has to start almost from scratch in many countries. The task is daunting, it's huge, but it's not impossible. No one expected such an impressive progressive uprising as that of 2011.

The long-term revolutionary process in the region will be measured in decades rather than years. From a historical perspective, we are still in its ini-

tial stages. This should be a major incentive for intensive action to build progressive movements able to take the lead. The alternative is further descent into barbarism and a general collapse of the regional order into the kind of terrible chaos that we see developing already in quite a few countries.

As for labor, when I speak of progressive leaderships, it goes for me without saying that the workers' movement should be a key part of them. That's why the countries where there is a bigger potential

in that regard, such as Tunisia and Egypt, should show the way. We could then witness a snowballing effect.

Let us not forget also that the Arab region is not on another planet. It is part of the global setting, and very close to Europe. Thus, the development of the radical left in Europe can also have an important influence on the development of its equivalent in the Arab region.

*Source **Jacobin**.*

The state of play before December 20

KATERINA SERGIDOU ·

To begin with, before addressing the political issues, I would like to take advantage of the fact that you are an economist to know your opinion about the present economic situation in Spain. Is it true, as is being said, that we can expect a recovery of the Spanish economy?

In 2014, according to Eurostat, the increase in annual production reached almost 1.15 per cent, reversing the negative trend of the previous two years. According to data from the Spanish government, gross domestic product (GDP) increased by 1.4 per cent last year after three consecutive years of recession. The Bank of Spain says that in 2015 GDP will grow by 3.1 per cent compared to the previous year and announced growth of 2.7 per cent for 2016. These forecasts fit into the discourse of President Mariano Rajoy in defence of his policies. They may be exaggerated for electoral reasons. But the international institutions point in the same direction. If the forecasts of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are realized, the trend in coming years will be moderately upward. But if we do not analyze more closely the elements, they will be of no use to us in apprehending reality. The recovery is fragile, with feet of clay. [1].

Why?

In the first place because GDP is an economic indicator - highly criticized, of course, by ecological economists because it does not assess the economic effects of damage to the natural environment or the costs that result from the noxious dimensions of productive activity - which measures in monetary terms the annual production of goods and service, but in any event, does not explain the evolution and the content of the economy. It is an arbitrary indicator. To take one example: Spanish GDP increased

by 0.4 per cent overnight as soon as we began calculating the estimated economic volume of prostitution and drug trafficking, two "businesses" that are very important in this country.

But to return to your question, in the Spanish case a part of growth is due to external factors that can change rapidly, factors that neither the government nor the Spanish entrepreneurs control: the fall in the price of oil, on which Spain is highly dependent; an increase in exports due to the low rate of the euro or the dramatic increase in tourism because of the situations of political instability and war in other tourist destinations in the Mediterranean. [2] In a context of crisis in some emerging countries, as is the case with Brazil, or slowing growth in China, with the instability of the Eurozone, which is not out of the debt crisis, and the weak recovery in European demand - Europe being the main destination for sales of Spanish products - the fragility of the recovery is very great. Also, this recovery is very limited, if we take into account other indicators and the type of productive model currently in use.

What are you referring to?

The level of production reached in 2014 was 5 per cent lower than in 2007. The productive economy is not turning the corner: industrial production has experienced a big drop; in 2013 it was 12 per cent below the level of 2007. Gross capital formation in 2014 was lower by 14 per cent compared to 2007. The decrease in research, development and innovation is very considerable: in 2009, investment effort reached 1.35 per cent of GDP (321.9 euros per capita) and in 2013 it approached only 1.24 per cent (279.3 euros per capita). The labour force has decreased by half a million people since 2011 due to the return of part of the immigrant population to

their countries of origin as well as the emigration of young Spanish people seeking employment.

The productive model being put forward again by the Popular Party (PP) has failed: building houses in a country that has many empty houses [3] and the promotion of pharaonic public works which indebted the treasury without being of any benefit to the population. The financial and credit bubble that burst in 2008 in Spain cannot be understood without the bubble in real estate and public works in the interests of the big Spanish multinationals of the sector and of Spanish and German banks. On the other hand, the Spanish economy has trouble getting out of the crisis: the reduction of domestic demand following the contraction in consumption and weakening investment - which reinforces the threat of deflation - has led to exorbitant growth of public debt (from 30 to 100 per cent of GDP over the four years of conservative government (2011-2015)). This prevents the necessary public and private deleveraging - it has reached 300 per cent of GDP, particularly on the part of banks and multinationals - which accentuates the dependence of the economy on exports, in a context where they are far from certain.

How has the crisis affected the life of the popular sectors and of young people?

For several years before the outbreak of the crisis, wages decreased year after year, which meant an increase in the profits of companies that found a new source of profitability in the financial markets. Banks provided an impulse for the commercial sector by means of massive and very cheap loans, to which a large part of the working class had recourse in order to purchase housing and other durable consumer goods. Since the level of employment was high (8.2 per cent unemployment in 2007), nobody was afraid of not being able to repay. We can say that the increase in inequality led the working classes, prior to 2007, to compensate for lower wages through cheap credit. The level of household debt was very high (at the end of 2008, it reached 913 billion euros; in spring 2015 it was over 742 billion), as was that of enterprises (935.2 billion euros

in spring 2015, *El País*, April 1.2015] and the banks themselves.

When the crisis broke out, the effects were devastating. I have already indicated the decrease in the labour force and the parallel rise in unemployment (it reached last month about 23 per cent for the overall population; for young people under 25 it is over 51 per cent). Taking into account the fact that an employment contract of only one hour a day in the course of a single month is considered to be a job, whereas the full number of daily working hours in the course of a year is not properly calculated, this means that the real unemployment figure is clearly higher than is indicated by the official figures. About 10 per cent of families have all their members unemployed and the number of long-term unemployed is increasing - that is to say, those out of work for over a year (according to the survey of the active population, in July 2015, 1.2 million people had been unemployed for four years or more). Precarious and part-time work is increasing, with wages below the minimum wage and with no contractual rights.

This has led to rising inequality: for the first time in this country the total revenues of capital are higher than those of labour. In addition, among workers inequality has grown, between the 5 per cent who earn the most and the 50 per cent who earn the least. We could use the metaphor of scissors to describe the increase in inequality. The Gini coefficient, which measures income inequality, is very high, 0.347 (0 represents perfect equality; 1 signifies total inequality).

According to a report just published by Caritas - an organization linked to the Catholic Church, which cannot be suspected of anti-capitalism - indicates that having a job does not mean escaping from poverty. According to the National Statistics Institute (INE), in 2013, 22.2 per cent of people in Spain are below the poverty line. I'm not going to swamp you with more figures, but they are significant. The result is dreadful, and here are some indications of it: an increase in energy poverty (people deprived of electricity - therefore often of heating: a

recent report indicates that the number of households "in a situation of energy poverty" increased from 3.6 per cent in 2007 to 9.88 per cent in 2013); the number of people without a home (according to the Bank of Spain, in the first quarter of 2013, 330,000 homeless people were recorded); the increase in child malnutrition in poor neighborhoods.

The result of the Catalan elections on September 27 reflects two domains. That of Yes and that of No to independence. Is this so? What does the result of these elections demonstrate and what is the attitude of Podemos?

There existed in Catalonia a Catalan national identity based on its cultural identity and its language, which did not find expression in a pro-independence political project. The political polarization around the issue of independence is a recent development. Four years ago, the people of Catalonia approved a reform of its Statute, adopted by a majority in both the Catalan parliament and the Spanish parliament. But the PP filed an appeal with the Constitutional Court, a very conservative body, which eventually removed, undemocratically, important aspects of the new law. This, combined with various campaigns of Spanish nationalism against Catalan feelings, led to a policy of much of the Catalan people taking its distance from the Spanish state.

The Spanish Constitution and the parties that support it - the PP and the Socialist Party (PSOE) - prevent the exercise of the right to free self-determination of nationalities. In parallel with Catalan nationalist independentism based on national identity there appeared (and grew) an independentism of a political character, which defends the political sovereignty of the Catalan people to decide their future. This independentism is rising among both the bourgeoisie and the popular sectors, including sectors of the working classes whose family origin is from other parts of the Spanish state and who came to Catalonia following the great migration that took place in the era of industrial development in the 1960s.

What the result of the elections for the Catalan Parliament shows is the rise of positions in favour of independence at the expense of Unionists - who, in turn, are very diverse, between federalists and those who propose a greater degree of "espagnolist" centralization [4]. It is also clear that only Catalan society can find the solution to the political crossroads that it is facing, and do so through the free exercise of the right to decide. The result should be binding, and consequently respected by the state and the political parties.

It is obvious that after the territorial organization following the death of the dictator Franco (in power from 1936/39 until 1975), the State of Autonomies [5], does not satisfy the Catalan people.

Podemos has taken a very bad position in this conflict. The general secretary of the party in Catalonia, Gemma Ubasart, resigned on October 10, criticizing Pablo Iglesias, who led the campaign, because of a confused approach, with a unionist discourse that includes the right to decide, but that does not accept that it is the Catalan people who will decide but "everyone" following a process on the level of the Spanish state.

The election result was very bad, less than that predicted two months before the start of the campaign, but also lower than that obtained in the previous Catalan autonomous elections by one of the components of the coalition in which Podemos participated (Catalunya si que es Pot), Iniciativa per Catalunya-Greens [the "branch" of Izquierda Unida in Catalonia]. That is to say: instead of increasing the number of votes, the coalition lost some. Podemos remained in a no man's land with a shameful "espagnolist" campaign that alienated it from the most left sectors of the popular movement. This has fostered the rise of the left-independentist and anti-capitalist CU party: Popular Unity Candidates. The internal crisis of Podemos in Catalonia, in the run-up to the general election (due on December 20) is a bad thing.

What is the relationship of the left and nationalism within the Spanish State and how

is it linked to the history of the Transition (that is, the "passage" from the Franco dictatorship to "democracy" between 1975 and 1982)? How does it respond to the complex question of class and nation?

Spain is not the United Kingdom. In that country there are nations, of which England is one, and all of them may continue to be united or not. However, the Spanish nationalist does not admit the existence of other nations than the Spanish nation, which is "above" national or regional differences that exist within the Spanish state. National sovereignty, for Spanish nationalism, resides in Spain as a whole, which is why it denies the right to decide to Catalonia, Euskal Herria (the Basque country) or Galicia.

A large part of the working classes of Madrid and Andalusia have a Spanish national identity and, in general, they have little sensitivity concerning different national identities that are held by very broad sectors of the Catalan or Basque working classes. Similarly, we can speak of a Spanish bourgeois nationalism and of bourgeois nationalism among the nations without a state.

The social democratic majority of the left abandoned the defence of the right to self-determination of nationalities in 1978, endorsing the Constitution that replaced the Franco regime. The Eurocommunists in practice forgot the demand. The Transition did not solve the national question, on the contrary. In order not to offer a specific democratic solution to the popular demands of the nationalities, it invented the state of autonomies for nationalities and regions, in such a way that although there were in fact some responsibilities of "self-government" they remained limited. The revolutionary left continued to defend that right but, for years, until the eruption of 15M (May 15, 2011, the beginning of the indignados movement), it had little strength in the territory of the state as a whole, with the exception of Euskadi. But the deplorable aspect is that collaboration between different groups of the radical left throughout the Spanish state has been very weak for years.

In 1978, it would have been possible to build a federal or confederal State if the right to self-determination had been recognized as a matter of course, including the option of independence. Today it is impossible. In 1978, it would have been possible. Admittedly, it would have been necessary for the working class to lead - or to have a controlling influence in - a constituent process. Which would have implied an orientation based on internationalist solidarity between all the components of the working classes of the Spanish state. Moreover, it would have had to have its own project of territorial organization, that is to say, to play a key role in the political process. Now, in this phase, the working class having already lost political autonomy (among other reasons as a result of the agreements of the Transition: the Moncloa Pact, signed in October 1977), the matter was resolved between the elites from the Franco regime and the majority workers' parties (PSOE and PCE).

To come back to the present: for the national question to be resolved in a democratic manner, it will be necessary to push forward constituent processes (plural) within all the components that form the present Spanish territory; processes that make it possible, starting from a real possibility of exercising independence, to establish model types of relationships between the components: separation, federation or any other imaginable kind of association. And to do it in conditions of equality and freedom. That implies a rupture with the regime of 1978.

The national question and the class question are not pure separate realities. Classes have national identities and the working class is not an exception. Internationalism consists of the creation of emancipatory projects of the subordinate classes which converge, which find common ground beyond territorial interests, capable of breaking with the bourgeois leadership of the nation, of every nation. But this requires, in turn, that the proletariat, in the broad sense, becomes "the leading force in society" - including among the oppressed nationalities - and that during this process, in a complex dialectic, the revolutionary lefts win hegemony within the left

and the working classes. To substitute the political work of unification of the national question and the social question by an abstract internationalism amounts to renouncing to put forward socialist internationalist ideas, which equates to leaving in the hands of the bourgeoisie the government of the nation and the processes of supranational and supra-state political organization. The left of the oppressed nationalities will be at the head of the democratic fight for the right to decide and for the defense of national sovereignty. The left of the dominant nation should play an active role in educating "its working class" so as to encourage respect for the right of other nationalities to decide... and active solidarity.

What are the prospects for the general election in December? Can the left express a desire for change?

Unfortunately, the parties of the 1978 regime - PP and PSOE –are recovering from the surprise that was the emergence of Podemos. As for the right, capital has encouraged the rise of a party in response, Ciudadanos, which supplements the shortcomings of a corrupt and immobilist PP which has disappointed part of its electorate. Ciudadanos is the "populism" of the right which is gaining some ground on the "populism" of the left.

The 1978 regime is certainly still facing major problems, but indignation and popular mobilization are diminishing. A desire for change exists, but it is not incarnated in a concrete and simple programme to break with the regime of 1978 and in opposition to austerity policies. What is worse, the upcoming elections will see at least three left lists in competition.

Would it have been possible to drive forward a process of popular unity for the general election? Yes, no doubt, but it would have required having primary elections to determine the lists in an open fashion, with massive participation. This would also have meant having a mass public debate on the programme for change. Neither one nor the other has been done by the leadership of Podemos.

We will try to get the best result, but I'm not optimistic. I think the possibility of a left government around Podemos, as envisaged by Iglesias, is far removed. However, Podemos will have a significant parliamentary group.

The great movement of 15M, the Mareas and the workers' movement has given rise to a new political subject. At present, the social movement is declining. Is it the same with Podemos? Do you think a political cycle has concluded? It seems that when the movement turns away from a party, something happens.

I will rephrase your last sentence. It is true that when the movement turns away from a party, something happens, but the opposite is also true: when a party turns away from the movement, nothing positive happens. The basic problem at the moment is twofold. On the one hand, popular mobilization has declined. In fact Podemos is the political expression of the Indignado movement, but when the movement is no longer active, Podemos is not able to encourage it again. On the other hand, the balance of power between classes remains very favorable to capital. 15M and the Mareas shook the popular movement out of its lethargy. Podemos has succeeded in shaking the political landscape, but the earthquake has still not affected the power of the oligarchy. Nothing is decided. It is possible that the process of change does not triumph in the next election, but it can continue in other ways, in other forms.

Nothing will be the same as it was before 15M and Podemos. It is still possible to build a broad movement of popular unity capable of producing a democratic break and initiating constitutional processes. Podemos has problems of orientation and functioning that we are trying to resolve from a left and democratic angle.

But there are other anchorages for the radical left. The recent municipal elections (on May 24 2015) meant the emergence of a new broad and unitary political actor: the candidatures for change, the

popular unity candidatures, which obtained very good results in the main cities of the Spanish state. Following the general election, there will be again a recomposition of the political instruments of the left. After the general election of 20 December a political and electoral cycle will close. But, in its turn, a new situation will open, which will demand progress in the construction of a response from the left.

Anticapitalistas is an organization that, with Podemos, has popularly elected representatives in several municipalities and autonomous regions. How is it possible to have a radical and effective policy by using the institutions? Can you give us some successful examples of this important work?

Our orientation in the institutions is to solve the problems that people face by trying to encourage their self-organization and participation in decisions. That is to say, we are not attempting to "solve" the problems starting from our work in government or opposition as an elected "vanguard" able to manage the problems very well because we have the best technicians. We try to act by promoting, at every step, popular activity in various forms. That means, on the one hand, to put institutional resources at the service of this project for change, but also to promote disobedience, given the constraints imposed on us by neoliberalism; for example, in the Spanish case, by the Ministry of Finance. This ministry tries to undermine the work of municipalities governed by the left by applying ordoliberal standards on deficits and preventing these institutions from having tax revenues at their disposal. Big tensions and battles between local authorities and central government are on the horizon.

Here are a few examples with limited and uneven success: it has been possible to stop some housing evictions; round tables with popular participation have been created to solve the housing problem; energy poverty has been combated effectively (for now); the supply of water to households has been guaranteed; some speculative real estate and town

planning operations have been stopped; there have been concrete experiences of drawing up the budget with popular participation; new cultural activities of general interest are being encouraged. Starting from the municipalities, the initiative of welcoming those exiled by nearby wars (refugees) has been taken... but all this is still very little. It is only 100 days since left municipal authorities were established in indebted cities. We'll talk about it again in four years.

In the case of the autonomous parliaments - from a position of opposition, because Podemos does not govern in any community - some progress in the fight against the corruption of PP has been made; also for the recognition of the rights of gays and lesbians, as well as proposing new laws - not yet approved - for a change in methods of production that both respects the environment and creates jobs. It should be noted that the Autonomous Community of Valencia - governed by a coalition of the PSOE and a regionalist left coalition, Compromís - has reintroduced universal access to health care. The PP government denied medical care to undocumented migrants. The Constitutional Court, appealed to by the central government of Rajoy, announced a few days ago a binding judgment forcing the government to repeal this measure.

The leaders of Podemos often refer to Latin American populism, identifying with Ernesto Laclau. They claim that we must overcome the left-right divisions and those between classes. What should be the attitude of the radical left in the twenty-first century faced with these new ideas? Provided that they are new...

To transfer "Bolivarian" policy recipes that are specific to the Andean countries of Latin America (or to Venezuela and Argentina) to a European country is not appropriate because the societies, their class composition, the structure of oligarchic power, etc., are very different. To transfer the political philosophy that has served as an intellectual alibi for the Kirchners to our reality prevents the advance and consolidation of socialist consciousness among the

masses. The ideas of Laclau were actually born as a result of a failed project, the Peronism of Peron. The political discourse of Laclau is complex and has very interesting aspects that give food for thought. But it leads to an overestimation of the role of discourse itself as an element for the transformation of reality. It attempts to create an amorphous inter-classist political subject and consequently ambiguous profiles. It allocates a secondary role to the autonomous and self-organized social movement of the subordinate classes and, of course, it does not take account of its autonomous struggle, a struggle which is subordinated to the political work of minorities who are dedicated to politics. It therefore relativizes the political programme - proposals appear or disappear as a matter of expedience when it

is a question of winning support - and leads to the absence of an emancipatory project.

Basically, for Laclau, the state is neutral in social conflicts, which is why what is important is to get into government and govern, without the need to change, transform the institution in a confrontational manner or destroy it. It is simply a question of establishing new alliances with some of the institutional elites or replacing them. That is to say, the political conclusions of Laclau's thought, beyond philosophical word games, elude the conflict of classes, hide it, mystify it and take us far from the possibility of radical social change. This can serve as a manoeuvre of distraction in social and political confrontation.

Catalonia: Referendum and constituent process

JOSEP MARÍA ANTENTAS ·

Forgotten by the pro-independence process which considers it a past stage and ignored by those who reject the elementary democratic exercise of the right to decide, the referendum however crept with almost the same force into the pre-election debate in Catalonia through the candidacy of En Comú Podem, the undoubted lever of a campaign that could culminate in the final breakdown of the Catalan party system as we have known it until now and with a shock similar to that already experienced in the city of Barcelona on May 24.

The referendum fell by the wayside after the decision of the Mas government, with the support of the pro-independence organizations, not to openly confront the state following the challenge of November 9, looking for a way out in the form of the alternative consultation eventually organized, and pushing toward the conversion of the parliamentary elections into a plebiscite.

The result of September 27, with a clear victory of the pro-independence forces in terms of a pro-independence parliamentary majority, opened a scenario in which there is a parliamentary bloc implementing a roadmap to independence but devoid of the uncontested legitimacy that a referendum majority would have had.

The denial of the referendum has become the quintessence of the undemocratic approach of the PP, PSOE and Ciudadanos towards the independence process in Catalonia. The demand is inappropriate. There is nothing to talk about. Discussion finished. End of story. The political No, accompanied by judicial coercion, has only one basic strategic perspective: to win time, wait until the Catalan pro-in-

dependence movement deflates after a war of attrition in the demoralization that festers and, as a last resort, try to disable the more conservative part of the pro-independence social base with some kind of limited and controlled reform of Catalan self-government.

However, despite its absence, the referendum, or rather the non-referendum, largely determines the stakes of the present confrontation. The denial of the referendum prevented the state from trying to defeat the independence process democratically, thus undermining its own legitimacy and institutional machinery.

And the absence of a binding consultation prevents the pro-independence movement from preparing for the final battle, as it is still immersed in an increasingly complex process, with each new step intensifying the clash with the state but without precipitating a final outcome. The referendum today seems as implausible, due to the correlation of forces in the Congress of Deputies, as it is necessary. Hence the need to place it, as En Comú Podem does, at the center of state politics both before and after the nationwide elections, also recalling that the democratic solution to the demands arising from Catalonia is a fundamental part of an overall democratic solution to the crisis of regime and a firewall against any operation of self-reform from above.

A scenario that must be kept in mind to be situated correctly in the discussions following the general election which will mark the end of the first part of a political crisis that will remain open after December 20.

The need to hold a binding consultation, however, operates in dialectical tension with the opening of a Catalan constituent process not subordinate to

state logics, as a form of real and effective practical exercise of the sovereignty of the people and whose legitimacy derives from both the popular mobilization that started on September 11 of 2012 and the result of September 27 as well as March 15, 2011 which raised the constituent need from another perspective from that of independence, although with the democratic impulse as the common element.

We should not counterpose the referendum to the Catalan constitutional process. There will be no mandatory consultation in Catalonia without the existence of a movement that advances with its own agenda of rupture, taking its sovereign path, but without strategically disconnecting from state policy. And, on the other hand, the independence process will not result in a democratically legitimized outcome accepted by all (within and outside of Catalonia) without a binding consultation. Referendum and constituent process supplement and need each other. The one has little credibility without the other. The first appears on the agenda for December 20. The second was the decisive question on September 27.

A referendum proposal disconnected from a Catalan constituent process not subordinated to state dynamics appears as a mere form of shifting the goalposts and postponing the exercise of sovereignty by the Catalan people until a parliamentary majority is obtained in the Congress of Deputies. This moves the axis of the decision exclusively to the state level and would have crippling effects in Catalonia.

In reality it is necessary to advance on two fronts at the same time, initiating a constituent dynamic in Catalonia and fighting for a change in the balance of forces at state level in which December 20 should be a major first step and for which the Catalan mobilization and the state alliances woven from Catalonia for December 20 are decisive.

Conversely, a proposal for a Catalan constitutional process that does not contemplate the need for a referendum, which is not tied to the construction of a new majority in the state, misses a central piece in the democratic legitimacy of the process and in the formation of a broad Catalan political majority.

This has been the double weak point of the route followed by the declaration of initiation of the independence process adopted last November 9 in the Catalan parliament, lacking a strategy also addressed to the advocates of the right to decide and culminating in a legitimate consultation.

The management of the dialectic between referendum and Catalan constituent process holds the key to a strategy of rupture whose rhythms and scales do not overlap mechanically in a harmonious way, but which can be positively framed. How? By opening with a triple confluent step: advancing in a sovereign manner from Catalonia, articulating between the peripheries to acquire a decisive centrality as they already do in *En comú Podem* and the Galician *En Marea*, and contributing to a new plural majority of rupture in the state assembly, either this December 20... or in the second round of a game that the dominant classes are far from having won in advance.

FRANCE

Regionals: Look out! Danger! The world of labour must take back the initiative

NPA-L'ANTICAPITALISTE (NPA-A) ·

Though abstention is down compared to last week, only slightly over half the electorate voted on Sunday 13 December. This shows once again a political system running out of steam.

In the end, the National Front did not win a region, but this is only a relative failure: the FN has won this election by topping the poll in the first round and winning more than 350 regional councillors in the second round. It even got a substantial 40% in three regions in the second round. What is more, through this campaign, the FN has marked a large section of the political class with its ideas, which also explains the relative failure of Sarkozy, unable to find a space between the neoliberal and security policy of the government on the one hand and the extreme right on the other. The PS has held on but cannot hide the rejection of its governmental policy, particularly in Île-de-France [Paris region].

High abstention rate, dangerous upsurge of the FN, deep crises in the large institutional parties ...

These regional elections are thus a new proof of a deep political crisis.

The Republicans and the PS claim to have stopped the growth of the FN but it is the 30-year anti-social policies of different governments that have led to its current score. To counter the National Front, there is no other road than the mobilization of the whole social and political left against it.

These elections have shown that there is no political representation for the exploited. For the world of labour, the most urgent task is to build the mobilizations, return to the path of struggle: for lifting the state of emergency, which has had the practical effect of silencing the social movement around COP21, Air France, against the NDDL airport, for the defence of migrants, etc. More than that, the building of an anti-capitalist political alternative, a new emancipatory project, remains more relevant than ever.

Montreuil

13 December 2015

INDIA

Against Sexual Violence and Rape, Against State Terror, Against Communalist Violence and Intolerance

SOMA MARIK ·

We have marched today, the 7th of December, as we have been marching time and again, condemning rapes and sexual violence cases. We all remember 16 December 2012, when there was the gruesome rape and murder in Delhi. We in West Bengal also remember too well the cases like Suzette Jordon's rape (Park Street, 6th February), Kamduni, Katwa (25 February). We came out in the streets so many times. On the same route as today, nearly 2000 people demonstrated on 19 March 2012, condemning the West Bengal based cases and demanding that the chief Minister must apologize for the attacks on the Park Street Rape Case victim, as she was still being called. But till now, not a single minister has expressed regrets for the foul and sexist languages in which she was attacked. The survivor of Katwa is today living in terror, because the trial court has rejected her testimony all together, has said that there is no evidence of rape, and has found every one of the accused of the rape case "not guilty". And because of this, we await the forthcoming verdict of Suzette's case, due on 10th December, with some concern.

The fact that 19 March 2012 was followed by 19 March 2015, and again by 7 December 2015, was due to the fact that in this province, and in this country, the police, the administration, the major political parties and their leaders all ignore or marginalise sexual violence. When there is a violence on working class women, that is routinely ignored. Yet oppression on grounds of gender are added to

exploitation as members of a class routinely for working class women. Unless we recognise this, we will be marginalising these women, both when we are campaigning for "women's rights", where the specific class component is unrecognised, and when "call" campaigns are mounted, without looking at the way class is fractured by gender. Yet in the unorganised sector such a large proportion of the workers are women. So unless we look at the concerns of those women, unless we can persuade trade unions to put sexual violence right at the top of their agenda, how can we focus on the sexual violence on all women?

In the same way, we need to look at certain equally important issues. Like the easy accusation against rape victims that they are sex workers, which is a way of saying, if you are a sex worker then you have no right to complain of rape.

The point is, however, we cannot take up rapes and sexual violence in a way where we detach them from other social concerns. We cannot see them as women's issues, delinked from the role of the state, from state terror, from political parties, from class violence, from caste and communal politics.

Let us remember that yesterday was 6th December, anniversary of one of the most violent days in the history of independent India, when a knife was thrust into the fabric of our democratic and secular constitution. The destruction of the Babri Masjid and the formation of aggressive Hindutva had behind them a firm politics. The central goal of Hindutva is to make people abandon all other identities, take their religious identity to a feverish communal pitch, and agree to wage desperate battles to destroy the secular and democratic promises of the constitution, however may they be limited in prac-

tice, till they do not exist at all. In order to ensure the necessary ugly, communal, violent mobilizations, rape and sexual violence has been a key instrument. The campaigns of V. D. Savarkar got living form in the 1990s and thereafter. He had called upon Hindu men to show their masculine prowess by raping women of minority communities. So we saw Surat in 1993, Gujarat 2002, Jhabua, Kandhamal, and other cases, where rapes, gang-rapes, rapes followed by murder, all happened. In the name of combating so called Love Jihad, we have seen similar patterns of violence erupting all the way to Muzaffarnagar in the name of "love jihad".

But what about those who were protesting yesterday, 6th December, on the anniversary of the Babri Masjid destruction? How clean are their hands? How clean is the Indian state as a whole? In 1984, we had the countrywide attack on Sikhs, especially the terrible violence in Delhi. Does it not show that the Congress had done the same thing?

And we need to understand that the state does not merely protect certain powerful groups. It also commits violence. In the interests of the dominant groups. Not only does the Armed Forces Special powers Act operate in Manipur. We recently observed, all over Kolkata, as with people across the country, the completion of Irom Sharmila's fifteen years of hunger strike. In Kolkata, DTDH, Maitree, WSS and others observed the day with a series of meetings. We know, due to her incredible struggle, what it is like, to be a resident of Manipur. We know what it is like, to be a woman in Manipur, who can be raped and then killed. We know how protests can be brutally silenced.

And how none of this can lead to trials, because due to the AFSPA there will be no permission to try the people presumed to have done the deeds. But as I said, Manipur does not stand alone. Recolonization is going on in Kashmir too which was never a part of British India. We are still fighting for justice over Kunan Poshpora, where on February 23, 1991, the armed forces are thought to have raped at least 32 teenaged, adult and elderly women. In 1992 alone the Indian security forces gangraped, according to a UN report, 882 women. In 2009, in Shopian, two women were raped and murdered. Villagers claim it was done by the armed forces. The CBI covered up the crime, saying the two women died of drowning.

In other words, the state does not only assist in cover ups, but itself rapes and commits sexual violence and legitimizes them as political weapon. Rape and sexual violence occur all the time in custody. The Soni Soris are brutalised because a class war is going on when state cater to needs of capital. And then the Ankit Gargs are awarded.

And if violence on women is at least occasionally identified, violence on LGBTQ communities is simply not. We saw that right here at Hazra Crossing in Kolkata, with the attack on Anurag Maitreyee and her friends. We were told by the police that they will take action within ten days, after a large number of us had staged a protest. But the ten days have become more than a month. And the DC South told us that they will not tell us what they have done. Unless we can link up all these oppressions, unless we can forge alliances and fight together, there will be no positive response.

Let us mobilise against dictatorships, imperialist aggression and Daesh. We reject the politics of "national security", racism and austerity

Over recent months, people across the Middle East have been hit by an intensification of conflict in Syria and Iraq. That escalation has been sponsored both by global imperialist powers – chiefly the USA, Russia and European countries – and regional imperialist actors including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and Iran. These conflicts are the product of two distinct forms of counter-revolution: local dictatorships and counter-revolutionary regimes on one hand, and reactionary Islamic forces like Daesh on the other. The determination of major international and regional powers to impose their political and economic hegemony over the region is also a central cause of the current tragedy.

In Syria, the first form taken by the counter-revolution is support for the Assad regime. Russia's deadly raids and the intervention of Iran, Hezbollah and sectarian Iraqi militias champion this profoundly reactionary, anti-democratic project. Assad is fuelled too by the mistrust Western powers routinely demonstrate towards democratic and revolutionary forces in Syria, including Kurdish forces.

Those fighting for a democratic and socially just future are the first targets of the Syrian regime, imperialists and their allies in the region. Syrian democratic forces are also the target of Islamic forces playing a counter-revolutionary role, supported at one time or another, directly or indirectly, by the Gulf monarchies and Turkey.

As always, women are the first victims of war. Rape, abduction and even the sale of women are

gruesome outgrowths of the conflict.

What is Daesh? It is the creation both of international and regional imperialist aggressions and of the dictatorial, sectarian nature of regimes in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria. The rise of sectarian tensions in the region is also the consequence of this deadly compound of domestic repression and external aggression.

It is in this context that we should understand the recent attacks in Ankara, Beirut, Paris, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia, and the attack on the Russian aircraft in Egypt. These attacks only strengthen the evil that spawned them – state terrorism.

The rhetoric of the "War on Terror" finds material expression in the ramping up of authoritarian state security policies, in war and in racism. Racism, particularly Islamophobia, has increased exponentially and has become state policy across Europe. Imperialist powers have used the rhetoric of counter-terrorism to justify their support for dictatorships and their restrictions on freedoms, while regional dictators have used the same language to defend their own repression.

Now it is this same overarching worldview that unites France, Russia, the US, Turkey and the Syrian regime – though each has its own particular interests – such that they coordinate, directly or indirectly, their strikes and military manœuvres in Syria.

In the name of a war "against terrorism", today the French state demands the power to terrorise. In the name of so-called "France values", freedoms are being attacked. In an authoritarian headlong rush,

François Hollande bombs Syria and Iraq while all the talk of war and noble "values" is unable to provide answers to the political and social aspirations of the French working classes. Meanwhile, undocumented migrants, refugees, Muslims, veiled women, the Roma, foreigners and others are all prone to being designated "enemies within".

Throughout the wider Middle East, state repression of political opponents and social movements is on the rise; in Egypt and elsewhere, hundreds of death sentences have been issued in recent months.

In the face of the temporary demobilization and disorientation of large sectors of the oppressed, we must step up to the challenge with constructive initiatives. In practice that means:

- Oppose draconian policies; defend the democratic rights of everyone.
- Oppose all imperialist aggression, alongside implacable opposition to dictatorships and counter-revolutionary regimes.
- Oppose the Western military campaign in Syria, which includes bombing and other direct participation of Western military forces and also includes the armed participation in the conflict of forces supported by the West.
- Fight against all forms of counter-revolution in the Middle East and the Maghreb, as elsewhere.
- Fight repressive security policies, racism and austerity – whether in Europe, Asia or Africa.
- Fight "fortress Europe"; demand the opening of borders and decent living conditions for all refugees and migrants.
- Strengthen solidarity with people fighting for their liberation and emancipation in the Middle East, the Maghreb and around the world.
- Solidarity with democratic and progressive anti-imperialist forces throughout the Arab region.
- Solidarity with the people of the Middle East and the Maghreb in their legitimate struggles for emancipation and against foreign aggression: we insist

that the emancipation of the people of the region will be the work of the people themselves.

Signatories (more signatures will be added):

Revolutionary Left Current – Syria

Socialist Forum – Lebanon

Revolutionary Socialists – Egypt

Socialist Review Center – Kurdistan

Insaf (Redress Movement) – Libya

Al Munadil-a Current – Morocco

Emancipation Démocratique – Morocco

Ligue de la Gauche Ouvrière (LGO - Workers' Left League) – Tunisia

Sosyalist Demokrasi ?çin Yeni Yol (New Course for Socialist Democracy) – Turkey

Devrimci Sosyalist ??çi Partisi (Socialist Workers' Party) – Turkey

Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire-Socialistische Arbeiderspartij (LCR-SAP, Revolutionary Communist League-Socialist Workers Party) – Belgium

Socialist Resistance – Britain

Socialist Workers Party (SWP) – Britain

Revolutionary Socialism in the 21st Century (rs21) – Britain

The Editors, Salvage – Britain

Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA, New Anticapitalist Party) – France

Solidarité Socialiste avec les Travailleurs en Iran (SSTI) – France

Solidarity Collective Iran Paris – France

Internationale Sozialistische Linke (ISL, International Socialist Left) – Germany

Revolutionär Sozialistischer Bund (RSB, Revolutionary Socialist League) – Germany

Irish Socialist Workers Party – Ireland

Sinistra Anticapitalista – Italy	Radical Socialists – India
SAP-Grenzeloos – Netherlands	Kunal Chattopadhyay, Editor, <i>Radical</i> – India
Internationale Socialisten - Netherlands	Rohit Prajapati, Environmental & Trade Union Activist, Gujarat – India
"Open Left" Platform - Russia	Farooq Tariq, general secretary Awami Workers Party (AWP) – Pakistan
International Socialists Scotland (ISS) – Scotland	Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) – Sri Lanka
Anticapitalistas – Spanish State	Democracia Socialista - Argentina
En lucha-En lluita - Spanish State	Organización Política La Caldera - Argentina
SolidaritéS – Switzerland	International Socialist Organization (ISO) – USA
Socialist Alternative – Australia	Solidarity – USA
Solidarity – Australia	News and Letters – USA
Achin Vanaik, Retd. Professor of International Relations, University of Delhi – India	Freedom Socialist Party – USA

CHINA

Grassroots environmental struggles in China

RENA LAU ·

People hate incinerators, Paraxylene (PX) plants (PX is a chemical used in manufacturing plastic bottles and polyester clothing), nuclear power plants and chemical plants. Their hatred is so strong that they are not afraid to fight the police. Unlike labour strikes in China, environmental protests always call people out to demonstrate in the streets. In China, freedom of assembly is not assured and being arrested is very common for protesters. So why are so many people still willing to take the risk and participate in these demonstrations?

Environmental damage behind economic growth

Since former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping proposed the "reform and opening up" policy in 1978, the Chinese economy has experienced rapid growth. Until 2014, the average annual GDP growth was 9.7%. This means that the Chinese economy doubled every seven years. This growth is even greater than Deng's plan, which aimed for doubling in 20 years (about 7.2% per year). Under the rapid economic development, the traditional image of China, with a beautiful natural environment of rivers and mountains, has been badly altered by pollution. The environment of China has been sacrificed for the sake of growth.

Beijing's toxic haze

Carbon dioxide emissions increase when industrial output increases. In 2007 China overtook the United States as the world's largest carbon emitter. At the same time, air pollution is serious. In 2006, 37.6% of China's 559 major cities failed to meet national air quality standards. In February this year, Chai Jing, formerly a reporter for China Central

Television (CCTV), the main state broadcaster, released a self-financed documentary called "Under the Dome". It focuses on the toxic haze in Beijing. This documentary sparked widespread concerns. Chai represents the new generation of the middle-class who care about their lives and health. However, this documentary was quickly "harmonized" by the Chinese government ("harmonized" is a word created by Chinese "netizens" to describe being censored by the government).

Water is unusable

In addition to air pollution, water pollution is another serious problem. In China, at least 320 million people cannot access clean water. According to the 2014 China Environmental Bulletin, nearly two-thirds of the ground water and one-third of the surface water is not suitable for humans to come into contact with. Water from nearly 40% of lakes and rivers is not suitable for drinking, aquaculture or swimming. Tap water in the cities is not safe either. There were at least seven leakages of chemicals or heavy metals into tap water in Chinese cities between 2010 to 2014. They affected more than 300 million people.

Millions die from polluted air

Health problems caused by pollution are also getting serious and concern everybody who lives in China. Recent research from physicists at the University of California, Berkeley, calculated that about 1.6 million people in China die every year from heart, lung and stroke problems because of incredibly polluted air, especially small particles of haze.

People in rural areas also suffer from severe health problems. There are more than 247 "cancer villages" in 27 different regions of China. Most vil-

lagers living in these "cancer villages" are too poor to move. We know that there are many petitions and complaints from these cancer villages, but the media never reports them. These villagers are the most vulnerable people who suffer from pollution, but their voices are so weak.

Food is not safe

Water, air, and even food safety cannot be guaranteed. Over the past decade, there have been a number of food safety scandals. In 2008, a number of Chinese baby formula companies were discovered adding melamine to their products. In 2010, the media revealed the "gutter oil" production chain in China (this is used oil which comes from restaurants, sewer drains and slaughterhouse waste and is illegally recycled).

Other scandals include the abuse of plasticizer (an additive that increases plasticity), and the use of banned pesticides on vegetables and fruits. "Black-hearted food" (food manufactured dishonestly from contaminated products) is everywhere. This is also the reason why new middle class people are buying baby formula and groceries overseas.

Environmental protest growing

Beyond a certain point of pollution, a country's food, water and air safety cannot be guaranteed. Undoubtedly, this situation is a hotbed for unrest. According to the state news agency, Xinhua, environmental protests in China have been growing by 29% per year since 1996, and a much more rapid increase of 120% occurred in 2012. The Chinese people have already reached a consensus that the causes of the ongoing pollution problems are the corruption of government officials and the lack of monitoring of polluting companies. So the only effective reaction is to march in the streets to fight against any sources of pollution that may be built nearby.

Not just about "Not in my back yard" (Nimby)

Nimby syndrome has often been mentioned in relation to China's environmental protests. These include the protests against PX plants in Dalian, Xiamen and Kunming, as well as the anti-incinerator demonstrations in Beijing, Yangjiang and Huizhou. All these protests put out the message "do not build in my backyard". In these cases, opposition declined when the targets were relocated to remote areas.

However, there was an exceptional example in the Panyu district of the southern city of Guangzhou. Panyu residents not only objected to the building of incinerators in Panyu. They also called for the banning of all incinerators in China and demanded more environment-friendly waste recycling methods.

With the support of local media, the residents succeeded in prevailing on the government to stop the plan. This case was successful and exceptional because media and environmental activists in Guangzhou have more freedom than in other cities.

If the Chinese government cannot deal with these serious pollution problems, people's discontent will continue to rise. In recent years, the Chinese government has revised the "environmental law" to make it stricter. It has also implemented the so-called "ten-point water plan", which is considered the strictest environmental policy in China's history. However, many Chinese laws cannot be implemented at the local level. Under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party, corruption is still common and human rights are restricted. This reduces the effectiveness of government-led reforms..

In the short term, we can only hope the protests of the people will bring some improvements. If not, the situation will continue to deteriorate.

Amandla!

FRANCE

If not us then who?

CHRISTINE POUPIN ·

The PS has collapsed to the point of outright disappearance in the second round in many regions. We can say it had it coming and that it's only electoral justice, justly deserved punishment for betraying so many hopes, ignoring so many promises. The PS does not represent in any way the most popular classes. So be it! But who does now represent them? Or more exactly what collective, organized force(s) make it possible to both express anger at social injustice, build solidarity to resist exploitation and oppressions, to keep alive the hope of a better future, the consciousness of the collective power of the oppressed and exploited and trust in

this power to change the world? The answer is simple and dramatic: no party worthy of the name!

Nevertheless, thanks to the torn shirt of a Human Resources Director, workers' anger breaks out standing proudly, refusing to bow its head. Nevertheless a school can build a rampart of mobilization around a migrant child threatened with expulsion. Nevertheless every day, thousands of union and campaign activists keep alive solidarity. Nevertheless, mobilization for the climate is proposing another system, detoxified not only of fossil fuels but also from commodity alienation ... Yet ... Yet all this energy, this intelligence, has no adequate political force. To build it, to build together a new political representation along with a new emancipatory project, this is the urgent challenge.

LATIN AMERICA

South America: end of a cycle? Popular movements, "progressive" governments and eco-socialist alternatives

FRANCK GAUDICHAUD ·

Without a doubt, in several countries where there have been crushing electoral victories for left-wing or anti-neoliberal forces, in particular when these victories are the product of years of social and popular struggle (such as in Bolivia) or a rapid politicization-mobilization from below (such as in Venezuela), the state and its regulations, domestic economic growth, the fight against extreme poverty through specific programs for redistribution and the institutionalization of new public services have been gaining ground: a noticeable difference to the infernal cycle of privatization, fragmentation and violence of the neoliberal capitalist deregulation of the 1990s. The public force has reappeared as regulator of the domestic market, redistributing part of the income from extraction profits and subsoil resources toward the more impoverished, with direct and immediate effects for millions of citizens, a process that explains in part the solidness of the social and electoral base of these experiences up until today (and in some cases more after more than 10 years of government). For the first time in decades, various "post-neoliberal" governments, starting with Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela, have showed that it is possible to begin to regain control of natural resources and, at the same time, reduce extreme poverty and social inequalities with reforms of political inclu-

sion of broad popular sector. Also the dream of Bolivar has re-emerged at the geopolitical continental level through initiatives of alternative regional integration and cooperation among peoples (such as the ALBA-TCP), trying to regain the space of national sovereignty from the big powers of the North, military imperialism and the transnational companies or the unilateral orders of the world's financial institutions.

At a time when the old world and the peoples of the European Union are subject to the financial dictatorship of the Troika (IMF, European Commission and European Central Bank) and a deep economic, political, and even moral crisis, it is important to emphasize the ability shown by several popular movements and leaders in Latin America to resist and begin to rebuild multilateralism, democratize democracy and even reinvent politics, with projects that present alternatives for the twenty-first century. When a country like Greece tries to raise its head under the onslaught of the debt and the European ruling classes, when many workers, young people and collectives in this part of the world seek emancipatory directions, we can learn a lot from Latin America, its traumatic experience with neoliberal capitalist fundamentalism and its heroic attempts to counteract it from the south of the world-system.

However, as the theologian and sociologist Francois Houtart said in early 2015 the key challenge - in particular for countries that have most raised expectations of change - remains the defini-

tion of paths of profound transition toward a new paradigm of post-capitalist civilization. That is to say not being trapped in an objective of post-neoliberal modernization and even less within a welfare-oriented neo-developmentalism or an attempt at reconciliation between national growth, regional bourgeoisies and foreign capital: it is about aiming at a transformation of the social relations of production and forms of ownership. Without doubt, the task is daunting and arduous.

In this perspective and in this historic moment, despite the democratic advances conquered with blood and sweat [1] there are multiple stresses and limits to the various Latin American "progresismos" which have emerged in the period opened in the year 2000 in the fight against neoliberal hegemony. An intellectual - today statesman - like Alvaro García Linera presents these tensions (in particular between movements and governments) as potentially "creative" and "revolutionary", as the experiences necessary to advance gradually in the direction of a "communitarian socialism" [2] taking into account the current relationship of geopolitical, political and social forces (and disregarding without much argument as "childish" all criticism coming from their left).

Within this orientation, the electoral conquest of government by national-popular forces is seen as a democratic - and "concrete" - response to the plebeian emergence of the 1990s and 2000s, and the state is considered as an essential instrument of "administration of the ordinary" faced with the kingdom of the law of value and the intensified neoliberal dissolution. In this defence of the different *progresismo* governments, very often analyzed as a homogeneous whole, we also find prominent intellectuals such as Emir Sader or the Chilean sociologist Marta Harnecker. [3]

**"Capture" of the state apparatus, and capture of the left ...
by the underlying forces in the state apparatus**

However, quite a lot of militants on the ground, some movements and critical analysts of various political horizons (such as Alberto Acosta and

Natalia Sierra in Ecuador, Hugo Blanco in Peru, Edgardo Lander in Venezuela, Maristella Svampa in Argentina or Massimo Modenesi in Mexico, among others) insist on the ever more "conservative" dimension of the state policies of *progresismo* or post-neoliberal nationalism (from Uruguay to Nicaragua to Argentina [4]) and even its character as a "passive revolution" (in the sense of Gramsci). It is a transformation "from above" that actually alters the political spaces, public policies and the relationship between the state and society, but by integrating – effectively neutralizing – the eruption of the and down in the networks of institutions, organizing a sudden realignment within the ruling classes and the system of domination, slowing down the self-organization capacity and control from beneath of the peoples mobilized [5]. From this angle the "capture" of the state by force can mean the capture of the left by the forces of the deep state, its bureaucracy and the capitalist interests it represents; seen thus the strategy of seizing power in order to change the world may end in a left seized by power, changing everything to preserve the main current of the world as such. For the Uruguayan writer Raul Zibechi:

"To the extent that the progressive Latin American cycle is ending, it seems an appropriate time to start to draw long term balance sheets, that you do not stop at conjunctural or secondary elements, to begin to sketch an overall picture. It goes without saying that this end-of-cycle is disastrous for the popular sectors and the people of the left, we are filled with uncertainties and anxieties over the immediate future, by the repressive right-wing that we must face". [6]

In the last few weeks an avalanche of articles of opinion – several of which we have already published in *Rebellion.org* – have discussed the existence or not of a progressive "end of cycle" or even of the existence of such a "cycle", this debate reaching such a level of polarization that some authors accuse others of "capitulation" or being "Cafetín leftists" (thus García Linera), while others are accused of having been converted into intellectuals

commissioned by and sympathisers in the service of the states of the region and governments which are no longer progressive but regressive. This dialogue of the deaf does little to unravel the current political situation. The notions of a possible "reflux of the change of era" [7] or, from a contrary perspective, the idea of a gradual "end of the progressive hegemony" are probably [8] more useful to begin this discussion in a more constructive manner. All while recognizing that this phenomenon occurs in highly differentiated territorial-national conditions:

"This slippage is more noticeable in some countries (e.g., Argentina, Brazil and Ecuador) than in others (Venezuela, Bolivia and Uruguay) because in these last few relatively compact progressive power blocs remain and strong cleavages to the left have not opened up. In particular, Venezuela was the only country where the widespread participation of the popular classes was given momentum with the creation of the communes from 2009." [9]

Beyond the controversy about the dimension of the exhaustion, inflection or reflux of the current period, and highlighting the variety of the processes analyzed, it emerges that at many levels the progresismo governments seem to have finally opted, under pressure from global and endogenous players, for a "modernizing realism", which is often the best path to justify a renunciation of structural changes in an anti-capitalist direction: a dynamic that could be symbolized by the meeting (July 2015) between the Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff – a militant of the Workers' Party – and the war criminal Henry Kissinger (former US Secretary of State), at a time when Dilma was looking for imperialist political support faced with a rise in opposition within civil society and a right revitalized by the amplitude of governmental corruption cases. For sure, the aim of the executive of the main Latin American power with this type of diplomatic gesture is first and foremost to support "their" dominant sectors and provide more "security" for business in Brazil. From another angle, the covert free trade agree-

ment signed in 2014 by Ecuador with the European Union reminds us of the limits of the discourse on the "end of the neoliberal night" even on the part of one of the exemplars of this perspective at a discursive level. Today, this government, faced with the right and denouncing the dangers of a "soft coup", is also faced with social and indigenous movements (and even with a weak left), to the point that we could talk about a situation of "political impasse", in the sense developed by the Marxist Agustín Cueva, where the figure of the President plays a functional role of stabilizer to capital:

"There have been recurring moments in the history of Ecuador where the intensity of the horizontal conflicts, inter-capitalist, in combination with the vertical struggles between the ruling and popular classes, were too much to be supported by the existing forms of domination. While the politicians were looking for new more stable forms of domination, instability reigned until an impasse was reached." [10]

More generally, it is necessary to mention, even if it is not the only problem, the presence in all the progressive countries of a productive model of accumulation combining, at various degrees and intensities, state capitalism, neo-developmentalism and extraction of primary and energy resources, with damaging effects on indigenous communities, workers, and ecosystems. This endogenous tension is articulated, in a combined and unequal manner, with a ferocious globalized financial context and the central fact of the current situation: the economic crisis that has hit the region heavily, causing a sharp fall in the price of raw materials and in particular of the barrel of oil (from almost \$150 to less than \$50), thus ending the previous period of booms and exposing again the dependent and neo-colonial productive matrix of Latin America, the cursed inheritance from centuries of imperialist subjection. This context corresponds in time with a clear offensive of transnational capital, from the states of the North and some giants of the South (starting with China) to capture more agricultural land, energy, minerals, water, biodiversity, labour,

in a maelstrom that seems without end. In countries like Bolivia or Ecuador where there is more political awareness of these dangers, the government and its political supporters quite sensibly defend the tactic of moving through a necessary industrialized-extractive period to build the transition with some economic strength: that is something like a "post-neoliberal transitional extractivism" to enable small countries with few resources to develop, create wealth from primitive accumulation in response to the immense social emergency which exists in these impoverished nations and at the same time begin a slow process of change of model of accumulation. However, according to Eduardo Gudynas, executive secretary of the Latin American Centre for Social Ecology (Centro Latino Americano de Ecología Social - CLAES):

"There is no evidence that this is happening for several reasons: the first is that the way in which the wealth generated by extraction is in good part allocated to programs that deepen extractivism, for example, increase fuel reserves or encouraging mineral exploration. Second, extractivism has economic side-effects that inhibit processes of autonomy in other productive sectors, in both agriculture and industry. The government would need to take precautionary measures to avoid such deformation and that is not happening, in fact, there is a drift to promote agricultural export crops while increasing food imports. Third, as the extractive projects generate so much social resistance (recent examples are the Guaranis in Yategrenda, Santa Cruz, or the Yasuni Reserve in Ecuador), that governments have to defend them so intensively that the extractivist culture is strengthened in broad sectors of society and the search for alternatives is therefore inhibited." [11]

Multisectoral popular protests

In fact, it is not by chance that the cycle of popular struggles and mobilizations that is emerging in the heart of America, announcing - perhaps - a new historical period of class struggles, is directly linked

to this depredation and repression and its consequent socio-territorial resistance:

"The resistance is centred on mining and monoculture, in particular soya, as well as in urban speculation, or in the various modes of extractivism. According to the Observatory of Mining Conflicts in the region there are 197 active conflicts in mining which affect 296 communities. Peru and Chile, with 34 conflicts each, followed by Brazil, Mexico and Argentina, are the most affected countries." [12]

This tendency is reflected in the context described previously of strong shadows over economic growth in recent years, the profound crisis of world capitalism which is still ongoing and the permanence of immense social inequalities and regional imbalances throughout the continent. On the other hand, it is necessary to emphasize the major offensive by the various business and media right wings and by the oligarchies in the region to take advantage of the end of progressive hegemony to recover the ground lost over 15 years to different charismatic and progressive leaders. The conservative and neoliberal right continues to control -at the political level - cities, regions and key countries (like Mexico and Colombia), threatening steadily the rights established in the last decade and the process of a new regional integration more independent of Washington. We know that these regressive forces were and are ready to organize multiple forms of destabilization, and even coups (as in the last decade in Paraguay, Honduras and Venezuela), with the explicit or indirect support of the imperial agenda of the US.

However, from the bottom up, popular multi-sectoral, aboriginal, student and worker protests also advance their own agendas and claims, realizing the limits of the profound transformations made in the countries where "post-neoliberal" forces rule and their absolute absence where the neoliberal right still dominates, denouncing the various forms of repression, intimidation or cooption in both cases: collective opposition to genetically modified soya or workers' strikes in Argentina; big street mo-

bilizations of youth in major Brazilian cities demanding the right to the city and against corruption; deep crisis of the Bolivarian project, violence of the opposition and reorganization of the popular movement in Venezuela; in Peru, peasant and indigenous struggles against mega-miner groups (such as the Conga project); in Chile, Mapuche, employees and students denouncing the cursed inheritance of the Pinochet dictatorship; in Bolivia, criticism by the Central Obrera Boliviana and sectors of the indigenous movement of the policy of "modernization" of Evo Morales; in Ecuador, abandonment by President Correa of the Yasuni oil project and confrontation between the executive, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador - CONAIE) and significant layers of organised civil society; in Colombia, a search for a real peace, i.e. a peace with social transformation, economic and agrarian reform and so on.

The scene is tense and shaky. But, in spite of everything the "old mole of history" (in the sense that Marx understood it) is still digging and a wide variety of experiences of social struggles, class conflicts and political debates accompanied by multiple exercises of popular power, radical alternatives and utopias in construction are visible [13]. If some critical intellectuals could believe for a time that Latin America - or better said Abya Yala - could reach the new El Dorado of "21st century socialism" thanks to a "left turn" government and democratic electoral victories, we know that the roads to emancipation are more complex and deeply sinuous, and that the power apparatuses (military, media, economic) of the Latin American and imperial oligarchies are strong, resilient, entrenched and ferocious if necessary. Transforming the social relations of production and disrupting the dominations of "race" and gender in the societies of our America is a dialectic that will undoubtedly need to start from below and from the left, from class autonomy and independence, but always in a political key, and not from an illusory change without taking power. `

Ecosocialismo nuestroamericano of the 21st century

This is without denying that these collective attempts of people's power should continue to rely on partial electoral gains or be able to consider the importance of conquering institutional spaces and supports within the state, if - and only if - the development of such new public policies are placed at the service of the "communes" and the subalterns. Can we use the state to finish with the (capitalist) state, using it for a time as barrier of containment of colossal hostile forces outside? Or, as Marx found, is the state essentially the creature of the dominant which we cannot use as tool without risking that it colonize our minds, souls and practices?

It is clear that the control of the executive represents "only" the conquest of a partial power, and even more limited if there is no parliamentary majority and a mobilized social base - let us remember the lessons of Chile and how Salvador Allende and the institutional route to socialism of Popular Unity was defeated in 1973. That's why a left-wing and popular government [14] shows its true alternative character when it serves as a lever and stimulus for the self-organised struggles of the workers and the popular or indigenous movements, favouring dynamics of real empowerment, transformation of the social relations of production, construction of self-management and emancipatory roads to "living well". In the contrary case, the political forces of the left are sentenced to manage the existing order, and even in time of instability to rise above the social classes in a Bonapartist manner to perpetuate the state Leviathan, administering domination in a more or less "progressive" manner, with more or less friction with the local elites.

Without doubt, the inflection and doubts represent current dangers and opportunities; it is also the time to go back to discuss what's new without forgetting the old and to discuss anti-capitalist strategies to build what we propose to call an "ecosocialismo nuestroamericano" of the twenty-first century: a project that is not a carbon copy, which rejects being overwhelmed by myopic electoral tactics, by

the struggles of caudillos and bureaucratic apparatuses, but without accepting the pull and the illusion of the construction of a plurality of social autonomies without common political project, a centralized minimum. With this project, it is essential that we open eyes, smells, senses and hearts to those collective experiments underway, often existing above and below the consensual media radar, no doubt still dispersed or little connected, but that make up a huge river of struggles in a permanent state of transformation, from the real and concrete, from their mistakes and successes. Experiences that allow us to understand dynamic emancipating, original collective attempts and the dangers they face or circumvent.

For sure, we cannot point to an ideal manner of successful attempts at revolt, but rather a mosaic of praxis-knowledge-actions: some focused at the agricultural and the territorial levels, others focused on production and occupied factories, others on the neighbourhood and urban community, others originating from state or institutional policies but controlled by the users: struggles by women against patriarchal violence, of the homeless, indigenous people, the working class in several countries, an example of the agro-ecological alternative in Colombia, the demands for "living well" in Ecuador, the commune councils in Venezuela, or the factories without bosses in Argentina, community media in Brazil and Chile, the community patrols in Peru and Mexico and so on.

"Local organizational initiatives to take and exercise popular power, virulent street protests of rejection of decisions taken by the national and transnational regime; but also constituent assemblies capable of re-founding utopia, recovery of the reins of the political at the level of the states; the roads to emancipation are far from univocal. As experiences, they suppose trials, hesitations, and convolutions. But also, conquests. Complex, sometimes contradictory, but profound and authentic, experiences (that) constitute a source for those who participate in the task of reinventing societies and the way of doing politics,, who act as

citizens of the countries of the region or women and men from other areas who have taken the difficult path of resistance and emancipation." [15]

This plurality of voices and of examples allows us to pick up the thread of a discussion which already runs through the veins of the continent; allows us to think beyond the progressive governmental projects, assuming that it is, at the same time, indispensable to create socio-political fronts to confront the threats of the return of the right wing and imperialism in South America. Above all, it obliges us to think against the tide, against a *"left which is contemplative, institutional, administrative, a left of aspiring officials and civil servants, a left without rebellion, without mysticism, a left without left"*. [16] And it obliges us to think critically about our own developmentalist and teleological myths, assuming the global urgency of a mauled planet on the brink of ecological and climate collapse. For sure, it is essential to recognize that these various experiences that we have mentioned here briefly on how to change the world are contradictory, or even divergent: some isolated, very localised and others, on the contrary, institutionalized or dependent on the state. Hence the interest in resuming the major strategic debates of the twentieth century, but starting from current times and remembering the balance sheets of painful past defeats: how do undertake a post-capitalist and eco-socialist transition in the twenty-first century? What will be the role of the political-party tools and of the movements in this transition? What is the role of the armed forces, the parliamentary system, and the trade unions? Do we destroy them, use them, transform them, avoid them, split them... very well, but in any case: how? And in what way can we reconstruct common senses, cultural hegemony and an anti-capitalist left *from and for* the people? How do we avoid forging illusions about small affinity groups closed in on themselves and, at the same time, avoid the state-centred bureaucratic horror of the twentieth century?

The great Rosa Luxemburg said in 1915, "advance to socialism or regression to barbarism". In 2015,

her words are all a sense even more catastrophic and premonitory: "eco-socialism or global ecocide". Without doubt, it is from the "audacity of the new" that we will be able to tear down the walls of capital, wage labour, neo-colonialism and patriarchy:

"Changing the world sounds very ambitious. What is more, it seems pretty risky if you take into account all the power groups that would never would allow you to remove capitalist civilization. But in the current circumstances, there is no other alternative. The living conditions for broad segments of the population and the land itself degrade

rapidly. We are approaching a point of no return. And the option to switch planets does not exist. (...) We must accept the challenge. We must be rebels in relation to power (and maybe even desire its destruction). We must accept our limitations as human beings in nature. We must hate all forms of exploitation. We must oppose injustices and those who commit them. We must not resign ourselves. We must continue to demand and build the impossible". [17]

The task has already started; it is our daily bread, today and tomorrow.

GREECE

Towards a pro-austerity "grand coalition"?

STATHIS KOUVELAKIS ·

Two MPs (one of Syriza, the other Anel) who refused to vote the measures were expelled from the parliamentary groups of Syriza and Anel. A third MP resigned from his seat. And not any MP: Gabriel Sakellaridis was the spokesman of the first Syriza government and a candidate for mayor of Athens in 2014 (he nearly won, achieving a surprising score). He was also in the first circle of collaborators, and even a personal friends, of Alexis Tsipras. In his resignation letter he announces that he "cannot support the policy of the government" and his withdrawal from politics, while assuming its share of responsibility for what has happened over the last ten months.

The government's majority in parliament is now reduced to 153 seats (out of 300) and voting the next

draconian austerity package, that will lead to the end of the peasantry by overtaxation and the destruction of what remains of the pension system, becomes a high-risk exercise. Tsipras is therefore reduced to begging the President of the Republic Prokopis Pavlopoulos (rightwing but elected by the Syriza-Anel parliamentary majority in February) to act as mediator to broaden the support for the government in parliament.

The way is open for a more organic form of co-management of the implementation of the Memorandum by the parties that support the parliament, ie all except the KKE and the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn.

As for Syriza, we can say that here Marx's adage in the 18th Brumaire fully applies:

"Better a horrible end than a horror without end."

CLIMATE

The reasons behind France's recurrent deadly floods

MICHEL DE PRACONTAL ·

The storm-driven flash floods that swept through towns on the French Riviera over the weekend of October 3rd left 20 people dead and caused devastation to homes and infrastructures at a cost estimated to reach hundreds of millions of euros.

But the probability of such an event was arguably as foreseeable as the return of Christmas every December. Flooding is now the most frequent 'natural disaster' recorded in France, and more than 200 lives have been lost in major, catastrophic floods over the past 27 years, beginning with that in the town of Nîmes in 1988. That was followed by the deadly flooding of the ancient Roman town of Vaison-la-Romaine in 1992; in the Aude département (county) in 1999; in that of the Gard in 2002; the town of Montpellier in 2005; the Var département and the town of La Faute-sur-Mer in 2010; the département of l'Hérault in 2012, in the western region of Brittany and the southern Hérault, Gard and Var départements in 2014, and then this year in the southern city of Montpellier, and finally this month in the Alpes-Maritimes département in south-east France.

Importantly, they demonstrate that neither fate nor surprise is involved. After taking up her post as ecology and energy minister in April 2014, Ségolène Royal, who as president of the regional council of Poitou-Charentes in western France had experienced at first hand the deaths and devastation – not least by flooding – caused in the region by cyclone Xynthia in February 2010, took steps to address the issues surrounding flood risks. In July 2014 she launched the first National Strategy for the Management of Flooding Risks (SNGRI), which allows for a series of measures and programmes to help local authorities dissipate the flooding dangers they face. While its full effects over time cannot yet

be assessed, so far it has changed little, as first witnessed by the devastation caused by flooding in south-east France in the autumn of last year, and which left 17 people dead.

In November last year, the Riviera city of Nice experienced the heaviest rainfall that was until then on record, just 11 months before the latest flooding poured through its streets earlier this month. While the intensity of the rainfall this October was higher than November 2014, the phenomenon was hardly a surprise – no lightning strike from a clear blue sky.

According to official figures supplied by the ecology ministry, one in four French people live amid a risk of flooding, representing 17 million people, and the risk of the consequences of flooding threatens one job out of every three. Furthermore, the yearly costs from the damage caused by flooding amount to an average of between 700-800 million euros. In the case of cyclone Xynthia, which notably caused 53 deaths from flooding after its destruction of sea walls in the coastal village of La Faute-sur-Mer, the total damage was estimated at 1.7 billion euros. The cost of this month's flooding in south-east France is estimated at 500 million euros.

More than 20 years after the dramatic flash flooding in Vaison-la-Romaine in southern France in 1992 in which 42 people died, France remains insufficiently prepared against the dangers of flooding. Yet there is no lack of data and in-depth analysis of the problem, nor conferences and administrative activity dedicated to the issue.

'As of 30 centimetres of water a car starts floating'

The most striking indication of the failure to meet the problem is the persistent high number of fatalities during flash floods. Of the 20 people who died

in the flooding this month in south-east France, 11 of them drowned inside their vehicles – seven of whom were caught out by the fast-rising waters that swept a carpark in Mandelieu-la-Napoule, near Cannes. The phenomenon is recurrent, and it is calculated that about 20% of all flooding fatalities are people who drown in their cars.

In 2011, Freddy Vinet, a flood risk specialist and lecturer with Montpellier University, together with his colleagues Laurent Boissier and Stéphanie Defosse, published an article about their research into the fatalities caused by cyclone Xynthia at La Faute-sur-Mer and those caused by flooding in the south-east Var département in 2010 [1].

They noted that "there does not exist in France a detailed data base concerning victims of flooding" and that "everything is as if the mortality due to inundations was residual, negligible, irreducible, and as if the epidemiological study of it is not worth attention". They underlined that perceived ideas about which parts of the population are most at risk are broadly erroneous. While old people, women and children are thought to be most at risk, it is in fact adult males who are the most often victims, notably those trapped within their vehicles.

"When the time for putting out a warning is short, as was the case on October 3rd, the only way to limit the number of victims is to develop 'good habits' among the population," Vinet told Mediapart. "There is a difficult pedagogic job to carry out. People take risks to save their belongings, one of the first causes of getting into danger. They are used to going out to get their cars when carparks are threatened with flooding. That doesn't pose a problem when there's ten centimeters of water, but as of 30 centimetres a car starts floating, and [this month] there were two metres [of water]."

In their 2011 article published in *Vertigo*, an online environmental studies review, Vinet and his colleagues underlined the negative effect of the division of responsibilities between ministries and administrations. Search and rescue and crisis management comes under the interior ministry, while

flood prevention measures are the responsibility of the ecology ministry and local authorities, and epidemiological studies are handled by the health ministry.

The dangers of urbanisation and log-jammed rivers

While there is little if any progress in reducing the number of deaths and educating local populations on flood dangers, it would appear that preparing terrain for flood dangers and limiting the consequences of flooding is even more of a challenge for the authorities.

In the case of the coastal region of south-east France it would appear at first glance to be fairly easy to conclude its high risk of flooding. The climate alternates between very dry periods and sudden and massive rainfall, and much of the land has been subjected to rapid, massive and concentrated urbanization which significantly heightens the dangers of flooding. The constructions along the coastal strips, driven in part due to the rare presence of inland plains, saw intensive development over recent decades. In 2009, a report by the ecology ministry's General Commissariat for Durable Development underlined that the département of the Alpes-Maritimes, in which France's south-east Mediterranean coast is situated, has the country's highest number of buildings standing in areas officially declared at risk of flooding [2], and in which 9,000 new homes were built between 1999 and 2006. In all, 300,000 people live in zones in danger of flooding in the Alpes-Maritimes, despite the recurrence of flooding. "The impermeability of surface ground, due to the presence of pavements, carparks, buildings and so on, means that water immediately runs and concentrates faster," said Freddy Vinet. "What's more, the capacity for [water] evacuation is insufficient in urban zones, thus necessarily making water pass along the surface."

Which is what happened in the flooding in the region on October 3rd this year. A report published in March by the local prefecture found that out of 963 small municipalities (communes) in the region, 786 (or 80%) had suffered flooding incidents that were

categorized as natural disasters (CatNat in the official jargon) [3]. The report, presented six months before the latest disaster, found the strip of coastline that runs west from Nice to Cannes and to Mandelieu, which was the worst hit on October 3rd, faces a significant risk of flooding, with 364,000 inhabitants threatened by rivers bursting their banks, and another 22,000 people at risk of flooding from sea swells.

But urbanisation is not the only factor contributing to flooding. In September 2014, four people died in a campsite at Lamalou-les-Bains, in the southern Cévennes region north of Montpellier. "There is no concrete at Lamalou," explained Pierre Leclerc, head of an association dedicated to tackling flooding risks in a part of the southern Vaucluse département. "What caused the drama was the rupture of a logjam, a natural dam created by tree trunks, branches and other natural objects [...] Generally, along small water courses, logjams are dangerous because they break up in a random manner and make the path of the water unforeseeable. To tackle this danger, there should be maintenance of river beds which in the south [of France] are often filled with trees and bushes. But such maintenance is held back by [the public authorities], who zealously apply European norms which impose the preservation of river beds in the name of the protection of the environment."

Logjams are not a minor danger, and they were partly the cause of the catastrophic flooding in the Var département in 2010.

High-speed train station to be built in flood-risk zone

The complex bureaucracy surrounding flood prevention legislation can be dazzling. An example is the presentation published by a pressure group based in the Hérault department dedicated to improving the management of water resources and supply, collectif Eau Secours 34, of the application in France of a 2007 European Union directive concerning the assessment and management of flood risks.

"The floods directive requires the management of flood-risks by hydrographic districts," it explained to its members. "Firstly, the TRIs (Flood-Risk Territories) are identified and mapped in each hydrographic district. Then, a PGRI (Plan of Management of Flood Risks) is devised for each hydrographic district by all the parties concerned and not only the public services. The PGRI is for flood risks the equivalent of what the SDAGE (the Directing Schema for the Layout and Management of Water Distribution) is for the management of water and aquatic sites. The PGRI must be coherent with the SDAGE. SLGRIs (Local Strategies for the Management of Flood Risks) are also developed to the scale of the TRIs. The SLGRIs are the equivalent of SAGEs. The SLGRI must be in coherence with the SAGEs (the Schema for the Layout and Management of Water Distribution), something that is delicate to make successful because a TRI does not always perfectly cover the basin or sub-basin of a SAGE."

It should be noted that this was a simplified presentation.

Marc Lainé is a French journalist specialised in issues related to water management, and on his blog he denounces an "incomprehensible pile of programmes, plans, prevention measures" regarding policies to tackle flood risks. He argues that the bureaucratic smokescreen hides a "Balkinisation" of the areas concerned, and that the recent reforms that have reduced the number of French administrative regions, creating larger regional councils, means that "in the field, no-one in reality knows who tomorrow will exercise what responsibilities nor how they will be financed".

But even currently the responsibilities for flood-risk planning are shared among a wide number of parties, with the result that no-one is truly responsible. Pierre Leclerc claims this is behind the startling construction of a fire brigade station in a land bowl in the southern market town of Cavaillon which he says runs a "triple" risk of flooding. A future high-speed TGV train station is to be built in Montpellier, which has suffered regular flooding, in

one of the town's flood-risk zones, along with a business park and housing estate. For Freddy Vinet, while the train station will be elevated, it would be "better to put it elsewhere".

Because the re-housing of the some 17 million people in France who currently live in flood-risk zones would be a vast and problematic programme, the

reality is that better prevention of the existing dangers is all that can be reasonably hoped for. But there remains the question as to how and why homes continue to be built in these zones, and notably despite ecology minister Ségolène Royal's drive to reduce flood risks.

English version by Graham Tearse.

DEBT

Mr. Voutsis and the ?Truth Commission on Greek Public Debt

YORGOS MITRALIAS ·

This is Senator Bernie Sanders, who in a letter to US Treasury Secretary Jack Lew, made, among others, the following proposals, which will not be unfamiliar to Greek citizens :

· **No more austerity :** "The economic situation in Puerto Rico will not improve by eliminating more public schools, slashing pensions, laying off workers, and allowing corporations to pay starvation wages by suspending the minimum wage and relaxing labor laws."

· **Audit the debt :** "[T]here needs to be an independent and transparent audit of Puerto Rico's debt... [I]f any debt was issued to creditors in violation of Puerto Rico's constitution, it must be immediately set aside."

We will stop here. We won't mention Senator Sanders' other proposals to solve Puerto Rico's huge debt problem (over \$70 billion) – not because they do not interest us (bankruptcy protection, Healthcare justice, etc.), but because Mr. Sanders has so much to say about ... Greek debt ! And indeed, it is outrageous that the many public statements and actions of an American politician of the stature of Senator Sanders against the Troika and for the liberation of Greek citizens from the yoke of debt have not only not been taken into account by the Greek government to the slightest degree, but have remained totally unknown in Greece for at least a year !

In order to appreciate what a scandal this is – for which the direct responsibility obviously rests with Greek politicians and journalists – just remember that Bernie Sanders is not one of those handfuls of foreign politicians who are so-called "friends of

Greece" so beloved of the media and the Greek rulers, but a political man (independent, and a socialist) who, as a serious candidate for the Presidency of the United States of America, is almost every day at the very centre of US and world events !

Before we move to Mr. Sanders' important positions on Greek debt, it would be useful to explain what we mean when we say that Senator Sanders' is "a serious candidate for the Presidency of the United States". According to a recent opinion poll (CNN/ORC, October 19, 2015), support for Bernie Sanders continues to rise (29%) and has lately begun to come close to that of Hillary Clinton (45%), who still leads the Democrats' preferences for nomination for the presidential election. But here is the real surprise : according to an even more recent opinion poll (ABC November 13, 2015), Sanders – a hit among young people – is the only Democratic candidate who a substantial number of Republican voters would be prepared to vote for !

The conclusion is simple : Senator Sanders is not just any nameless individual ; and that is why it is even more scandalous that the authorities, and also the Greek media, persist in ignoring him, especially when we remember that he is one of the few foreign politicians who support the Greek people and offer progressive solutions to its martyrdom.

For example, Mr. Sanders caused a sensation in the US when he gave a prompt and enthusiastic welcome to the victory of the No camp in the referendum of July 5, stating : "I applaud the people of Greece for saying 'no' to more austerity for the poor, the children, the sick and the elderly," adding : "I believe that this plan is simply unsustainable. In my view, austerity has failed, and continuing

with austerity means the Greek economy will continue to fail its people. Unemployment, poverty and inequality will increase from already obscene levels." A few weeks later, on July 20, Senator Sanders organized, inside the Senate, a public lecture on the Greek debt crisis and its international implications with well-known economists like Stiglitz and Galbraith !

It should be stressed that all Bernie Sanders' statements and actions on the Greek crisis are well documented. They reveal a deep knowledge of the problem over several years. In fact, Senator Sanders is not what we were accustomed to call – stupidly – a « friend of Greece », but someone who is interested in the Greek crisis and stands alongside the Greek people because he considers the historic Greek situation almost universal. [2] Thus he compares the Greek prolonged recession to the US crisis of 1929, noting that the Greek catastrophe is even worse. He continues by aptly warning us : "Let us not forget what happened after World War I, when the Allies imposed oppressive austerity on Germany—on Germany—as part of the Versailles Treaty. And I think all of you who know anything about history understand what happened. And that is, the Germany economy collapsed, unemployed skyrocketed, people were pushing their money around in wheelbarrows to buy a loaf of bread. And the result of all of that massive discontent was that Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party won an election and took power. And you all know the results of that". As for the Third Memorandum, his verdict is clear : "I believe that this plan is simply unsustainable. In my view, austerity has failed, and continuing with austerity means the Greek economy will continue

to fail its people. Unemployment, poverty and inequality will increase from already obscene levels."

Bernie Sanders is no more than an honest old-style Social Democrat, which is not enough to be acceptable to the US establishment. Accordingly, Mr. Voutsis and friends do not have to worry unduly that the US Senator will be elected President of the United States, and that he will put into practice everything they themselves hate, or show excessive zeal by repealing and eliminating what no Troika has demanded of them and no Third Memorandum has imposed on them. Mrs Clinton, who has the full support of big American (and international) capital, will get the nomination in the end, even if our good Bernie Sanders gathers and mobilizes huge crowds wherever he appears and inspires the « other » America which obviously refuses to accept the stupid description so confusing to the Greek Left « Americans, murderers of peoples.

However, there is still one question to which there will certainly be no answer : What will all these « illustrious mediocrities » think – all those politicians, journalists and Greek ministers, who for months did everything, usually at the behest of the government, to ridicule and ultimately abolish the Truth Commission on Public Debt – when they see not only Bernie Sanders but also Puerto Rican leaders (of the centre-right !), and the democratically elected authorities of the municipalities of Madrid, Zaragoza, Cadiz, Valencia or even the Senate and Parliament of Argentina, propose and create their own audit committees ? What will they have to tell us when the example of the Greek Truth Commission that they have dragged in the mud before getting rid of it [3] becomes an inspiration to be emulated almost everywhere in the world ?...

SOUTH AFRICA

Interview with FeesMustFall activist, Palesa Mcophela

AMANDLA!

Amandla! (A!): How did the protest start at the University of the Western Cape (UWC?)

Palesa Mcophela (PM): The protest was inspired by the national outcry over the fee increments that were happening in all the universities. At face value, the fees at the University of the Western Cape seem to be very low. However, for the students who attend the university they are very high and most of them cannot afford. The biggest problem that the students face is their debts.

Students are drowning in debt at UWC.

(A!): Very often we hear that students are apathetic and apolitical. How do you see student consciousness?

PM: The issue of the increment concerns everybody, even though politics have taken a downturn as more students are not politically conscious. However since it was a national thing, our students knew about it. We struggle a lot with coloured students [1] who are not really active. However they are starting to catch on with us and realise that they need to join us in the struggle.

(A!): So what were the main ways in which you organised and mobilised students?

PM: We went from res to res, singing and mobilising students to come join us and fight with us. We came together from different organisations and we said that now, as FeesMustFall (FMF), we are just an organisation on our own. We are not politically aligned. If our different political organisations are against free education, it's either you leave FMF or you join us and be loyal to us.

(A!): All the problems raised during this student uprising have existed for a long time.

Why do you think the uprising occurred now?

PM: Because financially our parents cannot cope. The situation of the students has deteriorated. Because management seems not to care. They turn a blind eye to the protest. Instead of addressing our problems, they criminalise them and call us hooligans.

And the students are actually coming with quite bright ideas. We are very much intellectuals and we have solutions to our problems, because we sat down and thought about it as a collective. It is not because we are bored or we have too much time on their hands.

But we want to be taken seriously, which is just something that the universities and the government are not doing: taking students seriously and actually listening to them and taking into account their solutions, which are quite creative.

(A!): Who have been the main forces behind FeesMustFall?

PM: The main forces behind FeesMustFall are the students themselves. There is no other person other than the students. It is done by the students for the students. They are the ones who will be financially excluded. They are the ones who are stressed by SMSs and emails from student credit management. They are the ones who see their parents struggling to actually get funds to get them to university.

The students want education to be free, so that everybody can get education. Because we know that we are the lucky ones who are in university. There are a lot of people who are in the townships and these are our cousins our brothers, our nephews and our nieces who would still need education which is so expensive and people cannot afford it.

The only other people are the donors, who we do not know. We just tweet and ask for food. We just tweet and ask for water and support. That is the only thing.

(A!): Who do you see as responsible for the students' problems?

PM: Our biggest problem is the government and big business for actually making education into a commodity. Everything is commercialised. Besides the high fees you also get textbooks, you also get accommodation. There is also food and leisure, because we are young people.

We have a two-tier education system and the private institutions take most of the resources from the public institutions.

So yes, we need to stop commodifying education. And the government also needs to find other ways of us accessing education, and actually decolonising education.

(A!): What do you see as the main achievements of the student mobilisation?

PM: First of all it is unity. We came from different political parties, with different ideologies. However we were able to stand committed to one thing, despite our different ideologies. It is also showing a new, let me say like, it is a new revolution where people are able to come together for an idea, where people are not waiting for political parties to actually make a difference, they actually come together and make a difference. They are not waiting for their leaders. They become leaders themselves.

Yes, that is one of the biggest achievements. It is beautiful when people come together to actually work hard for something. Because we support one another, we are there for one another and now we know about each other.

Besides students having to unite, we also united with the workers. It is the most important thing. Because the workers, we see them every day and most students did not have a relationship with the workers until now. Yes, it is the unity.

(A!): What demands still need to be achieved?

PM: First of all outsourcing, and secondly the clearing of debt. Also, just to clarify, on all the other demands we still need a timeframe. When is it going to happen? How is it going to happen?

(A!): Student demands often focus exclusively on student issues. But you have put very high on your agenda support for the outsourced workers on campus. Why?

PM: Because the workers are also the parents who actually do not afford our education. They are our parents. We often stress them, you know: "Oh mommy we need registration money". And since they are not getting paid a lot of money they can't afford it. So these struggles are very linked to one another.

The workers are the ones who also contribute to the living conditions of the students. They clean our campuses. They are always there for us when we have problems.

(A!): During FeesMustFall, student organisations have been very insistent on defending their autonomy and resisting intervention by political organisations. Why is that?

PM: Because most political organisations, when they join our struggle, it will be for political points. Next year it is local elections. When they come they will actually even confuse problems. They will make it about themselves. But it is about the students.

And this also shows the students that they have power besides political power. They are able to fashion their own power and see how far they can go themselves.

Independence is very important, because we are going to be the future leaders. So we cannot be dependent on political parties who get things mixed up. We want the struggle to be very organic and not about any political party, but about the students.

And also we want fast results. With political parties there are always processes and procedures. Within

political parties there is always politics. And, you know, politics messes up everything, it really messes up everything. And especially political leaders. When you politicise something it's not pure anymore, because there are so many other vested interests.

But now, since it is the students, they only have one interest - to get free education.

Together we have power. We have power as students. Before we did not know that. Before we did not know that we had power together. Now we have seen that we have power if we unite.

(A!): What are the main ideological influences, if any, that have shaped the students' struggle over the last period?

PM: I would say socialism, because with capitalism it is failing, especially here in South Africa. We have two economies, which are the rich, rich, rich and the very poor. As the students, we are very aware of this.

And then we see that capitalism is not working. The wealth is not trickling down very fast. It is actually taking its time. We want everything, everybody to

share in the wealth. We even say we want a pure socialist education.

So yes, the ideology we are moving to is socialism. The students want socialism.

The students want an African education. they want to decolonise.

Students want the land back. Because we see that our parents are suffering, suffering because we don't even own our land. So yes, socialism and getting our land back are at the top.

A!: Lastly, Palesa, where do we go from here?

PM: Where do we go from here? WE are taking back South Africa. Yes, we are taking out capitalism. We want socialism.

We want free education for everybody.

We want to develop South Africa and Africa. We want a United States of Africa.

Yes, we are trying to restore the African child and African society

Amandla

MIGRATION

Germany hardens its policy towards refugees

MANUEL KELLNER ·

In fact, these measures are in contradiction with the human rights guaranteed by the German Constitution, the "Grundgesetz". But on October 16, the Bundesrat (representing the "Länder" of the German federal state) approved the new law by a large majority, with the exception of the Land of Thuringia which has a left government (made up of Die Linke as the majority party and the SPD as junior partner).

This decision is in flagrant contradiction with a decision of the German Constitutional Court ("Bundesverfassungsgericht") of July 18, 2012, which formally forbade pushing refugees below the minimum income. But the pressure of xenophobic agitation and mobilizations on official policy is producing results that are step by step leading the federal government presided over by Chancellor Angela Merkel to destroy what remains of the right of asylum and promises of «welcome».

The idea of «transit zones», preventing the refugees from setting foot on German soil and making it possible to sort them out quickly, so as to be able to repatriate all those who have little chance of obtaining a status that would enable them to remain in Germany for a certain time, had been put forward by Horst Seehofer (president of the CSU, the sister party of the CDU in Bavaria). It had led to many protests, but Chancellor Angela Merkel had ended up accepting the idea, more or less, under the pressure of many Christian Democrat leaders.

The SPD opposed it, and the compromise that was adopted stipulated that the reception centres would be on German soil –although they met more or less the same criteria as the «transit zones» demanded by Seehofer.

The Minister of the Interior, Lothar de Maizière of the CDU (Christian Democratic Party, in the majority in the governing coalition, with the SPD as junior partner), had, a few days earlier, publicly proposed to worsen the status of Syrian refugees. Up to now they can obtain a status that allows them to stay in Germany for three years and to bring their husbands or wives and their children ("Familienzusammenführung") into the country.

De Maizière wants them to have only a «subsidiary status» that would only give them the right to stay in Germany for one year and would forbid them from bringing in their husbands or wives and their children. Many protests, carried by the mass media, seemed to be blocking de Maizière, but now Angela Merkel, under pressure from many CDU leaders has agreed with his proposal. The SPD, so far, is opposed to it, but on the other hand many of its leaders say they agree with the Minister of the Interior. So it is very probable that Lothar de Maizière's idea will be adopted in the coming days.

The mobilizations of the far right are in full swing again. Pegida mobilized about 8,000-9,000 people on November 9, a symbolic date (the anniversary of the anti-Jewish pogrom in 1938) in a symbolic square, which was called «Adolf-Hitler Platz» under the Nazi dictatorship. Yes, there were 4,000 counter-demonstrators, and the same evening, in Erfurt, 6,000 who called publicly for solidarity and a welcome to the refugees and against the racist and Islamophobic demonstrations. But the agitators of the right are becoming more radical. Already, there are calls to mobilize at the border to block the refugees who want to come and live in Germany.

It is also true that the movement of solidarity and practical help to the refugees continues to develop in Germany. So mass consciousness in Germany re-

mains polarised. But the wave of solidarity must become generalised on the level of society as a whole. Only if the «losers» of the "German model" unite with the refugees – losers in the capitalist system on a world level – will there be a real change in the relationship of forces: the capitalists, the hugely rich, the great trusts and the big banks must pay for the consequences of a world order that generates the crying inequality and dire poverty of the millions and billions of the disinherited.

• Manuel Kellner is a member of the leadership of the isl, which is one of the two public factions of the section of the Fourth International in Germany, and also a member of the editorial board of *Sozialistische Zeitung* (SoZ), a publication that represents the views of the isl. He was from May 2010 to May 2012 scientific advisor to Michael Aggelidis, a comrade of the isl, who was at that time a Die Linke member of the Land parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia.

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SYRIA

Response to Tariq Ali 2015, or the need for internationalist solidarity

JOSEPH DAHER ·

Once again, as these words came out from an important figure of the International left, I feel it is necessary to answer and contradict them and for others to see that this is not an opinion shared by all among progressive groups and personalities. Above all, it is also necessary to defend the Syrian revolution and the millions of people that have suffered for their struggle for freedom and dignity against all forms of tyrannies: firstly against the Assad regime and its allies, and then against Daech and Islamic fundamentalist forces such as Jabhat Al Nusra and others. This is why I will deconstruct several moments of the speech of Tariq Ali and demonstrate that not only his analysis and information on the Syrian revolution is plainly wrong, but that also his so called strategy to fight Daech is wrong and doomed to fail.

I had to add several other points after Tariq Ali posted on facebook a TV conference in response "For all those who have been deliberately misinterpreting my speech outside Downing Street on Wednesday, here is my position on Syria, explained at length". [3] On many aspects this has not changed the key elements he expressed in the rally.

Tariq Ali started his speech by saying that we need to "get rid of the conditions that created Daech". On this I agree completely, but I disagree strongly with Tariq Ali's strategy, that I believe will ultimately only reinforced Daech.

He rightfully describes the US -British invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 and the crimes and per-

secutions committed by the Maliki governments against vast sections of the Iraqi Sunni population. [4] I would add several other reasons, which I think are important as well:

It must be remembered that the country was under the bloody dictatorship of Saddam Hussein's clan that caused the death, exile and imprisonment of tens of thousands of people from all ethnicities and sects, not to mention the gassing of Kurds in Halabja in 1988 and the harsh repression against Shi'a population in the south of Iraq in 1991. This regime was built on a totalitarian repressive apparatus that accepted no political opposition and independent trade unions, and on a clientelist, tribal and sectarian basis.

In addition, former officers of Saddam Hussein have been massively present within the Daech. This is linked to an older process of iraqisation of al-Qaeda's command 'Mesopotamia', which was part of the strategy of the Jordanian jihadist Abu Musaab Az-Zarqawi and his advisor, Abu Anas ash-Shami in the mid 2000s.

Thus, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, the predecessor of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as head of Daech, was a former Iraqi colonel of gendarmerie, killed in 2010. Hajji Bakr, killed in January 2014, was a colonel. Abu Abd Ar-Rahman Al-Bilawi, killed near Mosul in June 2014, was a captain of the Republican Guard. Abu Muhannad Suwaydawi, killed at the end of 2014, Lieutenant Colonel of the Air Force Intelligence Service. All four are former officers of the Baathist regime. Finally, at a more local level of command, the nephew of Saddam Hussein, Sab'awi Ibrahim al-Hassan, killed in May 19, 2015 by a US drone strike near Baiji, also exercised responsibilities within Daech. [5]

The membership of this category of officers to the Ba'ath was purely utilitarian: under Saddam Hussein, no officer could seriously hope to make a career without his party card. It is this category, devoid of Baathists convictions and much more permeable to religious fundamentalist ideology, especially after the "campaign for the strengthening of the faith" launched in 1993, that moved over to occupy leadership positions within Daech. Officially launched in 1993 by Saddam Hussein, the "campaign for the strengthening of the faith" has notably led to the implementation of prison sentences for drinking in public space, religious programs on the TV, a reinforcement of learning the Qoran, whose study was valued, in all social milieu and finally to an Islamization from all sectors of the state, including the army and the intelligence services. Saddam Hussein used to talk in the media about building the biggest mosque in the world and about writing the Quran in his own blood. The officers mentioned above joined jihadist groups in the aftermath of the fall of the Iraqi regime from the beginning of the US occupation. [6]

The Maliki government's responsibility is indeed crucial in the rise of Daech, but it would be wrong not to talk about the role of the **Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI)** as well as in its role in Iraq in supporting the successive Iraqi governments and Shi'a sectarian fundamentalist movements that committed massacres against Sunni population and continue to do so in some areas in Iraq and in Syria. Just as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the IRI has supported sectarian and reactionary fundamentalist groups to promote their own political interests, like in other countries elsewhere in the region, especially in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria.

The IRI has been the primary weapons-provider to the Assad regime. The security and intelligence services of the IRI have been advising and assisting the Assad regime since the beginning of the uprising. These efforts have evolved into an expeditionary training mission using Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Forces, Quds Force, intelligence services, and law

enforcement forces. The IRI has been providing essential military supplies to Assad and has also been assisting pro-regime shabiha militias. The extent of IRGC-QF involvement in Syria became clearer in February 2013 when Iranian Brigadier General Hassan Shateri was assassinated in the Damascus countryside while traveling to Beirut, after having travelled to Aleppo. Shateri was a senior Quds Force commander. [7]

In June 2015, Alaeddin Boroujerdi, chairman of the Committee for Foreign Policy and National Security in the Iranian parliament, declared in Damascus that the IRI's support for the Syrian regime is "stable and constant" and stressed that there were no restrictions or limits to cooperation with Syria and providing support.

The IRI's allies also have been key actors in the repression in Syria. The Lebanese Shi'a Islamic fundamentalist movement Hezbollah has notably been instrumental in assisting the Assad regime. Hezbollah has intervened militarily alongside the Syrian regime's armed forces, while providing technical and logistical support to Damascus and helping some of Syria's Shi'a population to develop their own self-defence militias. [8] Veteran Hezbollah fighters were also commanding squads of Syrian soldiers, essentially acting as Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO), to the less experienced Syrian regular troops in street fighting in Homs. [9] They also took care of the training of some pro regime militias known as "popular committees" [10] and of some of the new recruits in the army. [11]

Estimates at the end-2013 of Hezbollah fighters in Syria number between 3,000 and 4,000, including elite fighters, experts and reservists, at a time and rotating in and out of the country on thirty days deployments. [12] These numbers might probably remain the same until today.

Iraqi Shi'a fundamentalist groups allied to IRI have also been fighting in Syria in support of Assad.

And contrary to what Tariq Ali said in his TV conference, these actors did not enter Syria following

the involvement of foreign interventions from Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar but prior to them.

This is not to deny that these regional countries (Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar) have on their side funded various groups, in their far majority Islamic fundamentalist groups that oppose the objectives of the revolution, for their own selfish political interests. Qatar for example have been a key supporter of Jabhat Al Nusra (Al Qaida branch in Syria) and Ahrar Sham, while Turkey have also supported directly or in a passive way various Islamic fundamentalist groups, such as Jaysh al Fatah coalition led by Jabhat al Nusra and Ahrar Sham and the IS by providing a complete freedom of actions on both sides of borders for a very long period, in northern Syria against democratic FSA forces and especially to oppose any autonomy of Kurdish regions in Syria under the umbrella of the PKK. Private networks of the Gulf Monarchies on their sides have been acting and funding with the approval of their ruling classes various Islamic fundamentalist forces in the perspective of transforming the popular revolution in a sectarian war.

Moreover and more importantly, the **Assad regime** helped as well the development of Daech and other Islamic reactionary forces by first **being guilty of massive crimes, creating millions of refugees, and causing the destruction of Syria**, and secondly by releasing from the prisons of the regime the different individuals who would become the heads of these fundamentalist and reactionary forces. In various amnesty decisions during the start of the revolutionary process, leaders of various Islamic reactionary forces were freed, while democratic activists were imprisoned, tortured, and oppressed. We should realize that the Assad regime targeted and still targets mostly the democratic and progressive activists as well as the Free Syrian Army, while it allowed Daech to grow.

The jihadist presence in Syria was actually increasing in the years prior of the revolution, especially after the US-UK war on Iraq in 2003, reaching up to 8,000 prior the revolution. Many of them were operating freely in Syria following the invasion of

Iraq by the USA in 2003. The regime let them go through Syria to fight in Iraq. The rise of Islamic fundamentalist actors in Syria was not only the result of support of Gulf monarchies but above all of the regime policies and repression tactics that targeted popular and democratic organisations, trade unions, etc. prior to and during the revolution. In addition, what is less known is that prior to the revolution the regime, since the era of Hafez el Assad, developed and encouraged religious conservative discourses and practices in total contradiction with the picture conveyed by a so-called secular regime.

This has actually been continued with Bachar Al-Assad as he has increased the collaboration with religious associations and conservative segments of the society. Bachar Al Assad promoted, as explained by researcher Lina Khatib, notably the idea of "takrees al-akhlak wa nashr thaqafat al-tasamuh, wa isal al risala al-haqiqiya lil-islam" (**diffusing morality, spreading the culture of tolerance, and communicating the true message of Islam**) in many of his addresses, interviews and conference presentations. [13] He presented himself and the Syrian regime increasingly as patron of moderate Islam against "Islamic extremism", and therefore effectively legitimizing the Islamic discourse engulfing the country.

These elements are to say that it is not enough to condemn western imperialism, but also authoritarian regimes in the region, which are an equal source in the growth of Daech by their repressive and economic neo liberal policies. The prisons and the torture chambers of Tunisia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the IRI, etc...are also to be condemned completely and no serious defeat of Daech can be imagined without the fall of these regimes and a democratic alternative.

The solution is of course to oppose the jihadist and fundamentalist reactionary forces of Daech but also to oppose the authoritarian regimes, all of them, with their sectarian and authoritarian policies and the reactionary forces that support them. These two actors feed each other and have to be overthrown and defeated if we ever want to hope to build a de-

mocratic and progressive popular movement enabling the region to end a nightmare that has lasted too long.

As written on a placard of a revolutionary in Bustan Qasr, Aleppo, in January 2014, "Assad will not be overthrown if ISIS is not overthrown". Yes, no destruction of Daech and of a similar phenomenon can be expected without the overthrow of the Assad regime.

This is why the following sentence of Tariq Ali is very problematic to say the least **"If you want to fight ISIS, you should be going in and fighting alongside Russia and alongside Assad"**

This dated strategy of choosing a so called "lesser evil" over another, while not tackling the conditions that led to the rise of groups such as Daech, only replicates the same problems over and over again. A solely military solution is in addition definitely not the solution to put an end to Daech or to the conditions that created it.

In 2010, the IS in Iraq was nearly destroyed following the participation of the "Sunni awakening" councils, which fought the IS in Iraq. The refusal of the integration of these groups, the "Sunni awakening" councils, in the Iraqi army and the continued application of the anti-Baathist law established after the U.S. invasion against former leaders close to Saddam Hussein (but mainly used by the Iraqi Prime Minister to suppress all Sunni political forces) together with the repression of popular movements that occurred in various regions of Iraq in the wake of the popular uprisings in the region in 2011 and in 2013 in the Sunni-majority areas (who led a mass campaign of non-violent resistance against Maliki's government, and particularly its sectarian and authoritarian policies) allowed for the renewed growth of Daech who was then able to mobilise for its own political interests some of the popular frustration among the Iraqi Sunni population.

However, contrary to what was then declared by Daech, the support it enjoyed was far from 'massive'. If it was massive, why would 500,000

people have left Mosul directly after the takeover of the city in June 2014? In the beginning, it might have been viewed by some in the city as a liberation because the Iraqi army was considered corrupt, sectarian and was oppressing the people of the city. However, as soon as ISIS crushed the rest of the coalition (Baathist and other Islamic fundamentalist groups) with which it occupied the city, it became deeply repressive. This has been the case wherever IS expanded. It has been based not on a popular movement from below, but on a military perspective with harsh repression.

This is why the biggest threat for both Daech and the Iraqi authoritarian and sectarian regime is the massive crowds of protesters in Baghdad and elsewhere in the country we saw this summer and continuing until today challenging both of them with slogans in opposition to the sectarian state, against the division between Sunni and Shi'a populations, for women's rights and equality, and clear condemnations of sectarian political parties with placards notably saying "the parliament and the Islamic State are two sides of the same coin", "Daech was born out of your corruption", etc... [14]

This would be the same in Syria, if we followed Tariq Ali's logic of allying with the Assad regime to crush Daech. Assad's regime is the main source and reason of the crimes and massacres in Syria. Large sections of the Syrian revolutionaries have repeatedly say that they want to get rid of Daech, but that this latter is the consequence of a much greater evil: the Assad regime.

The establishment of the IS in Syria was in autumn 2013. Already before that, the UNHCR declared that the number of Syrians forced to flee as refugees in foreign countries had exceeded two millions. Over 97% of Syrian refugees were hosted in countries located in the surrounding area. In addition, some 4.25 million people were displaced within Syria, according to statistics dating from August 27, 2013 published by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Taken together, these figures totalled more than six million displaced people.

The reason that prompted millions of people to flee their homes was the Assad regime that killed, bombed and repressed large parts of the Syrian population who had risen against its tyranny and barbarism.

But what about after the establishment of the IS in October 2013 in Syria? Was this still the case? Let's look at the facts for the first six months of 2015. The helicopters of the Assad regime dropped 10.423 barrels bombs on various regions of the country, while the regime forces killed almost 90% of the total civilians dead over the same period, seven times more than the IS. The Islamic State group has executed more than 3500 people in Syria, including nearly 2000 civilians, since declaring its 'caliphate' in June 2014, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. [15]

Barbarism has many faces in Syria and that of the Assad regime is the worst. The Assad regime and its allies (Iran, Russia and Hezbollah) are responsible in its vast majority of the more than 250 000 people killed in Syria and of the around 10 million of refugees and IDPs since the uprising began in March 2011.

So while Tariq Ali explains that foreign interventions in the region have led to mass displacement, which is true especially in Iraq, he should also condemn the Assad regime and authoritarian regimes that are also as much responsible for the millions of refugees of the region.

Tariq Ali goes on saying that **"the West created the vacuum in the Middle East: occupation of Iraq, bombing of Libya, while plans to invade Syria and destroy the regime had long been in motion before any activity in Syria according to ex socialist Minister Rolland Dumas"**. He adds that **"American general Wesley Clark describes how he walked in the pentagon during the Afghan war and that a long list of other countries were also on the USA's list of countries to launch wars against such as Syria Libya, Iran, Somalia, Soudan, and they 've been waging wars**

against these countries through various ways".

Did plans exist to invade Syria? Maybe, or most probably, yes. Were they implemented? Definitely not. Any kind of serious progressive personality must analyse the Syrian uprising according to the materialist interests that led to this situation. The Syrian uprising is part of the revolutionary processes of the region, which is based on the will for freedom and dignity in the absence of democracy and increasing social inequalities and corruption of the elites. This point, which was mentioned in the rally, is acknowledged in his conference "World Today: Syria Disaster", but I disagree with him is when he describes about the changing nature of the revolution into a religious one demanding "a Sunni ruler" and "religious system" nearly from the first months of the revolution, this is simply wrong. Democratic slogans and activities remained dominant in the popular movement and is still is in many aspects although much weakened and have indeed less activities, but it still exist. Mass campaigns with democratic aims were still very much present in 2013 and 2014. [16]

Religious fundamentalist movements were above all increasingly present in the militarization of the revolution in armed groups. Jabhat Al Nusra only appeared end of 2011, while Daech appeared in Syria in the autumn 2013, but they were not the one to organise massive demonstrations.

Organised armed resistance only started in July 2011 with the establishment of the Free Syrian Army and Movement of Free Officers. Several elements fostered the emergence of armed groups after more than seven months of demonstrations and peaceful resistance. In the first place, the violent repression of the regime against peaceful demonstrators and against the leaders of the popular movement, killed, arrested or forced into exile. This radicalized the movement and helped to push forward activists more inclined to resist with weapons. More and more groups of citizens took up arms to defend their demonstrations and their homes against the chabihis [militiamen paid by the

regime, perpetrators of countless abuses], the security services and the army.

In the second place, the increasing number of desertions from the army, in particular of ranking soldiers refusing to fire on peaceful demonstrators. The reluctance of soldiers to fire on peaceful protests provoked many mutinies and desertions. It is also necessary to mention the willingness of the regime to militarize the revolution by leaving weapons on the fields of battle or by increasing the number of weapons on the market and/or lowering the price of weapons to justify the discourse of the regime that they were fighting against armed extremist groups.

And finally, there was the willingness of political currents and/or states, notably private donors in the Gulf monarchies, to fund specific armed groups to strengthen the support they had or establish relays on the ground.

Regarding the objectives of the USA and Western powers since the beginning of the uprising in Syria, they have never been seriously willing to assist and help the Syrian revolutionaries or to overthrow the Assad regime. The USA has tried on the opposite to reach an agreement between the Assad regime (or section of it) and the opposition linked to Western and the Gulf regimes, which are not representative of the popular movement and are completely corrupted. In October 2015, even Senator Lindsey Graham challenged Defence Secretary Ashton Carter and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chair General Joseph Dunford on the U.S. strategy in Syria. He asked about the possibility of overthrowing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, saying, "This is a half-assed strategy at best". [17]

As a reminder, according to the Geneva guidelines of June 30 2012, agreed to unanimously by the Permanent five members of the UN Security Council, it would be permissible for Assad to serve on the transitional governing body. Indeed, he could preside over it. All that was required was the consent of the opposition delegation. Similarly, delegates representing the Syrian Arab Republic—the

regime and the government—could withhold consent to persons nominated by the opposition.

In addition to this, the absence or the lack of any kind of "large", organised and decisive military assistance of the USA and/or Western states to the Syrian revolutionaries is another proof of this lack of will for any radical change in Syria. The Wall Street Journal published an article in January 2015 on the CIA aid saying:

"Some weapons shipments were so small that commanders had to ration ammunition. One of the U.S.'s favourite trusted commanders got the equivalent of 16 bullets a month per fighter. Rebel leaders were told they had to hand over old antitank missile launchers to get new ones—and couldn't get shells for captured tanks. When they appealed last summer for ammo to battle fighters linked to al Qaeda, the U.S. said no".

Barack Obama's plan, which was approved by the U.S. Congress, of \$500 million to arm and equip 5,000-10,000 Syrian rebels, was never implemented and was not aimed at overthrowing the Assad regime, as we can read in the text of the resolution:

"The Secretary of Defence is authorized, in coordination with the Secretary of State, to provide assistance, including training, equipment, supplies, and sustainment, to appropriately vetted elements of the Syrian opposition and other appropriately vetted Syrian groups and individuals for the following purposes:

- Defending the Syrian people from attacks by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and securing territory controlled by the Syrian opposition.
- Protecting the United States, its friends and allies, and the Syrian people from the threats posed by terrorists in Syria.
- Promoting the conditions for a negotiated settlement to end the conflict in Syria."

Until today this program is a failure. "The program is much smaller than we hoped," conceded the

Pentagon's policy chief, Christine Wormuth, saying there were between 100 and 120 fighters currently being trained, while adding that they were also "getting terrific training". A top military general told Congress that the US had successfully trained just "four or five" opposition soldiers.

The chief of staff of the US-trained Syrian rebel group Division 30 actually resigned from his position and withdrew from the program, on September 19, 2015. Citing problems such as "the lack of sufficient numbers of trainees," and "the lack of seriousness in the implementation of the project to establish the 30th brigade". The other problem faced with the United States to constitute armed groups in Syria loyal to their interests was and is also thwarted by the reality on the ground. This is because of the decision of a large majority of opposition groups to cooperate with Washington only if they are able to maintain their independence and autonomous decision-making, and if the collaboration includes a clear plan for the overthrow of the Assad regime.

Israeli military sources have also repeatedly declared the existence of a consensus within Tel Aviv's decision making circles over the importance of the continuation of the Assad regime. Military affairs commentator Alon Ben-David quoted a source within the Israeli Joint Chiefs of Staff as saying: "Although no one in Israel can say this publicly and explicitly, the best option for Israel would be for the Assad regime to remain and for the internal fighting to continue for as long as possible." This has been a consistent position in Israel since the beginning of the revolution in Syria contrary to what Tariq Ali advanced in his TV conference.

This is without forgetting that prior to and at the beginning of the revolution, Western states were mostly sympathetic to the Assad regime. Former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton characterised at the beginning of the uprising in Syria the dictator Bashar Al Assad as a "reformist" and added that "many of the members of Congress of both parties who have gone to Syria in recent months have said they believe he's a reformist".

[18] This is without forgetting the invitation to the national palace of the Elysée by French President Nicolas Sarkozy in 2008.

The Assad regime has actually collaborated with western imperialist governments on many occasions in the past. It was actually Hafez Al-Assad as Minister of Defence who refused to assist the Palestinians and progressive Jordanian groups in overthrowing the conservative Hashemite regime in Jordan during the popular uprising in 1970, known as Black September.

This is the same regime that crushed the Palestinians and the progressive movements in Lebanon in 1976 with the tacit agreement of the Western States and Israel by supporting the fascist groups of the Lebanese Phalange, putting an end to their uprising, and participating in the Palestinian massacre of Tal El Zaatar. It then supported the Fatah al-Intifada's split from Fatah in 1983 and supported the Lebanese Shi'a movement Amal in the War of the Camps between 1985 and 89 against the Palestinians.

The Assad regime participated in the imperialist war against Iraq in 1991 with the coalition led by the US.

They also participated in the 'war on terror' launched by President George W. Bush by collaborating on security issues. Israel has actually several times called on the US to ease the pressure on the Syrian regime, which has not shot a single bullet for the occupied Golan Heights since 1973.

Syrian officials have repeatedly declared their readiness to sign a peace agreement with Israel as soon as the occupation of the Golan Heights ended, while nothing was said on the Palestinian issue. Rami Makhlouf, Bashar Al Assad's cousin, went so far as to declare in May 2011 that if there is no stability in Syria, there will be no stability in Israel, adding that no one can guarantee what will occur if something happens to the Syrian regime. As a result, it is not hard to understand Israel's satisfaction with the status quo under the current Syrian regime.

When Tariq Ali speaks of the tragedy of Palestine, for which he's right, he nevertheless forget the history of repression of the Assad regime against the Palestinian national movement, as mentioned above, and Palestinians within Syria, especially since the beginning of the uprising.

The Assad regime has actually been targeting Palestinians in Syria since the beginning of the revolution. In the first week of the uprising, Buthaina Shaaban, Bashar al-Assad's adviser, held responsible Palestinians for the crisis and accused Palestinians in the Deraa and Latakia camps of responsibility for the anti-regime protests and spreading chaos in those towns... [19]

The Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk has been suffering from a strict siege imposed on it from the summer of 2013, with the prohibition of movement of persons and foodstuffs, to the rebel neighbourhoods south of Damascus by the Assad regime and the Palestinian organizations linked to it, especially the Popular Front of the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), controlled by Ahmad Jibril. [20] There was between 15 000 and 20 000 people in the camp in November 2014, before 2011 Yarmouk had a total population of 250,000 people.

The Assad regime has also killed and imprisoned thousands of Palestinians in Syria, while more than 20,000 are wanted by the security services. [21]

The next statement made by Tariq Ali that needs to be deconstructed is the following:

"Think why they are so desperate to come and bomb European cities"

Firstly, the identity of the two 'Syrians' and their active participations in the terrorist attacks in Paris are still to be confirmed. However, even though their participation would be confirmed and they turned out to indeed be Syrians who came from Syria, we should remember that the far majority of terrorists who perpetrated the Paris attacks were French and Belgian nationals, and did not come from far away. So of course imperialist wars attack-

ing and destroying countries with a majority of the population being Muslim is a reason, but so are the political and socio-economic context in which these groups and individual live. In other words, French and Belgian societies, which are characterised by racism, social inequalities, acts of police brutality are an important factor to include in our analysis of these terrorist attacks. [22]

"The Russians have gone in Syria to fight ISIS, and they are fighting ISIS."

This statement is also very problematic, and although the last terrorist attacks of Daech in Paris and elsewhere might change this in a near future, this is simply not true.

A report published by the Center for Documentation of Violations in Syria has shown that civilian casualties rose to 526 civilians after 45 days from the start of Russian air strikes in Syria, that is, to the date of November 15th, 2015, including 137 children and 71 woman. [23] In addition to this, "almost 80 percent of Russia's declared targets in Syria have been in areas not held by Islamic State", a Reuters analysis of Russian Defence Ministry data showed on November 21 2015, undermining Moscow's assertions that its aim is to defeat the group." [24]

On November 19, 2015, the bread oven in Atareb, a town roughly 25km west of Aleppo city, which served an estimated 120,000 people in and around an opposition-held western Aleppo town has been completely out of commission after a reported Russian airstrike. [25]

On November 28, 2015, Russian airstrikes in central Idlib province destroyed an aid dispensary containing a bakery that produced over 300,000 pounds of bread per month and a well providing safe-drinking water to an estimated 50,000 people. [26] On the next day, a new massacre was committed by the ?Russian air forces the city of "Ariha" in the countryside of Idlib.. They bombed a popular market and as a result more than 40 civilians died and 70 wounded.

The objectives of these airstrikes are clear: save and consolidate the political and military power of the Assad regime. [27] In other words, crush all forms of opposition—whether democratic or reactionary—to the Assad regime under the so called "war on terror". Most targets are civilians and factions of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) still existing, in addition to Islamic fundamentalist forces such as Jabhat Al Nusra and Ahrar Sham.

About 100,000 civilians have been forced to flee their regions because of Russian bombings. Russian bombings also destroyed dozens of hospitals and doctors and patients were killed in these raids. In areas such as the outskirts of Aleppo, the bombings in some cases even benefited the IS, thanks to a lightning breakthrough against factions of the FSA disoriented by Russian strikes. Moreover, Russian strikes are operated with the direct collaboration of the US and Israel, which Tariq Ali apparently didn't consider important to condemn.

The Russian intervention in Syria has been and is an imperialist one in order to preserve a regime that is allied to it, which denies Tariq Ali. Accordingly, we should also condemn the massive interventions of the IRI and Hezbollah in Syria alongside the Assad regime to crush the revolution. **"There are several wars in Syria...but the idea that there are 70,000 non-jihadist in Syria is a lie, it's not true."**

The Syrian revolutionaries, including Kurdish forces, have been resisting, whether militarily or through peaceful means, against Daech for more than two years in various areas of Syria. [28]

For instance, just recently, in the eastern Deir e-Zor town of al-Bukamal, Daech has faced resistance from the inhabitants, while in the city of Raqqa, a small band of Syrian resistance fighters are carrying out secret guerrilla operations in IS strongholds. [29] The city of Manbij has also witnessed opposition from within against Daech. [30]

The numbers put forward by Charlie Lister in his article [31] seem quite close to the reality and seem

rather convincing in my view. It is rather Tariq Ali's job to demonstrate the contrary. [32] This does not mean that we should think that their strength is massive or have any illusions of their capacities to face on their own the Assad regime, Russia, IRI, Hezbollah on one side and Daech and Jabhat Al Nusra on the other, but we should not at the same time deny their presence on the ground as Tariq Ali has done.

But then, the issue of knowing how many exact numbers of revolutionaries in Syria fighting both Assad and Daech is really kind of secondary when in the first place you are not totally in support of the uprising and you have tried to dismiss and delegitimize it for years now.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, Tariq Ali's position regarding the Syrian revolution has been problematic for a while now as he has repeatedly tried to delegitimize the popular revolution in Syria. [33] The Stop the War Movement in the UK has not been different. [34] Moreover, while claiming to crush the roots of Daech, they actually support them by not condemning clearly and completely the Assad authoritarian and criminal regime.

In addition, we have to understand that Russia's military expansion, in addition to Iranian's expansion, is a clear offensive to put a complete end to the popular uprising in Syria by wanting to save and consolidate militarily and politically the Assad regime and to crush all forms of opposition. This is done with the passivity and some acceptance of Western powers, which want to stabilize the region at any price and therefore Assad's resignation is not a pre-condition to a transition period. This situation has been strengthened with the terrorist attacks in Paris and elsewhere as we can see with French government seeking more collaboration with Russia.

The different world imperialist powers and regional bourgeois regimes, in spite of their rivalry, have a common interest in the defeat of the popular revo-

lutions of the region, and the most obvious example is that of Syria. The multiple peace initiatives on Syria, supported by all the global and regional powers without exception, had the same objectives since the beginning of the revolutionary process in 2011: to reach an agreement between the Assad regime and an opportunistic faction – linked to the Western States, Turkey and the Gulf monarchies – of the opposition coming together in the Syrian Coalition.

The issue is not refusing any kind of solution to an end of the war: the Syrian people have suffered too much and most of them want a form of transitional period towards a democratic Syria, but any kind of "realist solution", as officials and analysts like to speak, on a mid and long term cannot include Assad and other criminals with blood on their hands of the regime, otherwise we will see a continuation of the military conflict in Syria and the conditions that led to the creations of Daech.

Assad and his various partners in the regime must be held accountable for their crimes, and a similar process could be put in place as well for the crimes of the Islamic fundamentalist forces and other groups as well. In addition to this, we have to understand that to expect any kind of minimum change, not only Assad should be overthrown but the whole team of officials controlling security services, the army and various state apparatus should be dismantled and held accountable. The patrimonial nature of the Syrian regime needs to be included in any understanding for real change.

Any kind of serious movement opposing foreign interventions in Syria cannot only oppose Western interventions, but should as well oppose the interventions of Russia, Iran, Hezbollah and various Iraqi Shi'a fundamentalist groups, which have only caused more deaths and destructions in Syria, in addition of crushing a popular uprising. In the same time, we also oppose the interventions of Gulf monarchies and Turkey in the past, which were for their own self-interests and to change the nature of the revolution into a sectarian war and they supported Islamic fundamentalist groups that at-

tacked, and continue to do so in many regions, revolutionaries, civilians and soldiers from the FSA.

No lesser evil should be chosen, because this is the road to defeat. No to Assad and no to Daech, no to Jabhat Al Nusra. No to the USA and no to Russia. No to Teheran and no to Riyadh, no to Doha, no to Istanbul. Yes to the people in struggle for democracy, social justice and equality. This is our political compass.

In my opinion, we must also support the delivery of arms and weapons with no political conditions attached from the West to democratic sections of the FSA and of the Kurdish forces to increase their possibilities for self-determination and fight and struggle against the Assad regime and Islamic fundamentalist forces.

But most importantly, any kind of movement claiming to be internationalists should support the pockets of hope that still exist and resist in Syria composed of various democratic and progressive groups and movements opposing all sides of the counter-revolutions, the Assad regime and Islamic fundamentalist groups. They are the ones still maintaining the dreams of the beginning of the revolution and its objectives: democracy, social justice, equality and no to sectarianism. [35]

When Karl Liebernecht said in 1915 that the main enemy is at home, he also added that this must be done by "cooperating with the proletariat of other countries whose struggle is against their own imperialists". [36] Well in some ways, the cooperation with the popular masses in Syria has not been on the agenda Tariq Ali and Stop the War, neither actually really opposing the policies of their states and others to crush the revolution. In this perspective this section of the left, including Tariq Ali, has not been different in their speeches to various imperialist powers in the world.

The cooperation with the international proletariat means that we must support Syrian revolutionaries against the various international and regional imperialists forces and against the Assad regime, all trying to put an end to a popular revolution for

freedom and dignity. And not denying the struggle and sacrifices of the popular masses in Syria and elsewhere.

As written on a placard of a revolutionary in Syria in a demonstration in November 27, 2015, ""Histo-

ry will remember that the scribbles of the children of Deraa moved the fleets of the world". We could add against the Syrian revolution.

November 30, 2015

Syriafreedomforever

DENMARK

The Red-Green Alliance on the referendum in Denmark

RED-GREEN ALLIANCE ·

A question of democracy and transparency

We are campaigning in favor of democracy and transparency. We want to keep the opt-out model so that the people continue to have democratic access to formulation of legal policies. We do strongly believe in European cooperation, but we find it decisive that the cooperation is based on democracy, legal certainty and self-determination.

It is about much more than Europol

The yes side has chosen Europol as focus of their campaigns, but it is important to underline that the referendum is about much more than Danish participation in Europol. The 22 specific EU legislative acts is about as different subjects as marriage, parental custody, legal rights, police cooperation etc.

If we change the opt-out EU will have decisive power over important parts of Danish legal policies. More and more power will be transferred from the Danish parliament to the EU without the population being asked.

For international cooperation

It is urgent that we cooperate in Europe and internationally. We need to find international solutions to international crime, the climate crisis and not least to find a solution based on solidarity to tackle the current refugee crisis. But the cooperation should always be based on democracy and local decision-making. This is possible through intergovernmental cooperation as we know it from The

Council of Europe. If we keep the opt-out Denmark are in no way hindered in participation in a strong European cooperation nor in intergovernmental juridical cooperation.

We have seen how the EU-elite has blackmailed the Greek population, while not recognizing the Greek democracy. We are very worried about this development, and find that it is utmost urgent to say no to further restrictions of the democracy in the European countries.

Securing legal certainty

The opt-out model is an important guaranty of legal certainty for the citizens. If we change the opt-out new rules will be applicable in Denmark and courts of other European countries will be able to make decisions that Denmark has to apply without taking them to a Danish court. This will mean a lack of transparency and thereby limit legal certainty. Today no one has a full overview of all the rules in the EU countries, therefore, Danish citizens will not know which rules apply.

Furthermore, the so-called Passenger Name Record (PNR) scheme, which will include mass surveillance of citizens, is a serious violation of fundamental freedoms, the right to privacy and to freedom of movement.

The PNR scheme requires storage of all data collected by airlines about passengers including information such as email, credit card details, travel routes, phone numbers, fellow passengers, meals e.g.

We believe that it is important to keep the opt-out if we want to secure democracy and legal certainty.

The Danish opt-outs: Denmark has four opt-outs from the EU cooperation following the rejection of the Maastricht Treaty in a 1992 referendum. The opt-outs concern the Economic and Monetary

Union (EMU), the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) and the citizenship of the European Union.