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FEATURE

POLAND

'We're not in politics to win'

FEATURE

MEXICO

Six years of resistance by electricians

Fabrice Thomas

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

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MEXICO

Six years of resistance by electricians

FABRICE THOMAS ·

The Mexican Union of Electricians (SME) has in recent years been at the forefront of the social and popular movement in this country. In struggle for more than six years against the closure of the public company Luz y Fuerza del Centro, which had 44,000 employees when the neoliberal government of Calderón (Parti Acción Nacional - PAN) decided to privatize the electricity sector in the Federal District of Mexico City, the EMS has developed mobilizations at all levels, both social, political and judicial. Since 2009 it has participated in many struggles, in particular those opposed to new privatizations and the destruction of the Labour Code. Its spirit of resistance and its capacity for mobilization, which is exceptional in recent years in the trade union movement in Mexico, give the SME a political responsibility that transcends the immediate demands specific to electricians. Today the members of the union (more than 16,000 of the 44,000 workers at Luz y Fuerza, the others having renounced the union in exchange for the liquidation of their contract) are faced with a dual task: on the one hand, to find a solution in terms of employment in the short term - and end six years of layoffs and insecurity - and, on the other hand, to help construct the tools that Mexican workers lack: a new combative and democratic union confederation, and a unitary anti-capitalist political organization.

These objectives are all the more fundamental since the Mexican people are confronted daily with a disastrous situation, particularly after the political crisis opened by the abduction and disappearance of 43 students at Ayotzinapa in September 2014. Massive mobilizations organized a few weeks ago on the occasion of the first anniversary of this terrible repression hatched by the political regime have shown that the caste who govern the country will inevitably face popular indignation and the requirement of truth and justice. But it has also revealed the significant dispersion of social movements (and the radical left) who, even if they agree on the denunciation of the neo-liberal government of Peña Nieto (Institutional Revolutionary Party - PRI), and of violence and generalized corruption, still fail to define the unitary path to an alternative political outcome.

We talked about these different challenges with Humberto Montes de Oca Luna, Secretary of External Relations of the EMS and the one of the coordinators of the New Confederation of Workers (NCT). Humberto is a trade union activist of long standing and one of the figures of the resistance of the EMS, both in Mexico and on the international scene. We met in October in one of the offices of the EMS in the heart of México City as an agreement was finalized with the federal government to put several electricity production plants in the hands of the EMS in the form of a workers' cooperative, in return for the liquidation of the collective employment contract of the Luz y Fuerza company. The first such plant is in Nexaca, in the north of the state of Puebla, where the first plant to provide electricity to Mexico City was created at the beginning of the twentieth century. As Humberto acknowledges, this solution is only partial and transient (only the current members of the union will

be able to find work in the project being negotiated, a project which of course has many uncertainties and challenges for the EMS), but it constitutes a first victory after six years of tenacious resistance, and a glimmer of hope for the labour movement in Mexico.

Humberto, before addressing topical issues, we would like to know what have been for you the key moments in this long struggle that the EMS has had to engage in.

For us, the first objective throughout these six years has been to avoid the death of our union, which was the real objective of the neoliberal President Felipe Calderón, who wanted to finish off our organization, a historic trade union, one hundred years old. Our second objective was to keep our jobs. The third was to continue the fight against the privatization of the energy sector which is one of the reasons which has led to our collective mass dismissal – 44,000 workers - after ten years of rejecting privatisation of the sector and the defeat of at least two constitutional reforms of privatization.

What are you currently negotiating on to keep your union alive?

I must first say that the solution we have found is for us "partial and transient": we cannot recover 100% of what was taken from us in October 2009. It is a political solution in the sense that, at the legal level, we do not have clear support which would give our fight a more long-term perspective. Another essential element is that the situation of the working class in Mexico is very difficult, the relationship of forces is totally unfavourable. The central government is imposing a whole set of structural reforms to aggravate the neoliberal model and there is no coordinated social movement, or a visible alternative policy to reverse this situation in the short term. We are therefore obliged to find a political solution which allows us to recover in part our jobs and the collective agreement that existed previously. It is very important to obtain the rehiring of the 16,599 workers, all the more so since for six years they have had no income.

You are resisting in very difficult conditions...

Yes, we live in precarious conditions, which are getting much worse, situations of family breakdown, disease, death and even suicides. There remains a core of resistance which has survived all the tests of this frontal assault against the Mexican state: there has been the complicity of the legislative power which abstained from intervening in the controversy against the decree of dissolution, passing the buck to the Supreme Court which has been associated with this dissolution and with the annulment of a measure of protection that we had been granted by a collegiate tribunal, which sanctioned our victory and offered a legal solution with the rehiring of workers and their right to collect unpaid wages. Our resistance has been able to go to the end with the solidarity of the social organizations that have supported us at the national and international level.

You will create a co-operative that will reinstate some of the workers who are members of the SME. How will you organize yourself concretely?

The government has a debt in our respect: the money from the provident fund which was registered in the collective agreement and belongs to the workers constitutes a liability of the company in dissolution. In fact, the company may not pronounce its dissolution if it does not pay these amounts to the workers: we have negotiated so that, instead of paying us this sum in cash, we are granted the management of fourteen hydroelectric plants that belonged to the company Luz y Fuerza del Centro and we will also be given a set of production centres with their land, their buildings and infrastructure, so that they are managed by the workers themselves.

At the political level, for some years you have argued for the need to create a political instrument to overcome the fragmentation of the popular classes: you have therefore called for the creation of the Organization of

the People and the Workers (OPT). Up to now the development of the OPT has remained modest. What are the challenges facing this organization at a time when the government of Peña Nieto is collapsing and throughout the country brutal violence is spreading against those at the bottom?

Our fight has primarily been a struggle for the defence of jobs but it has been transformed into a mass social struggle against the privatization of energy, against the government and we have made a national political struggle. This is the reason for the creation of the OPT, an organization that aspires to represent politically workers in struggle and which is articulated with a set of social movements and left political currents of the left. The objective of the OPT is to fight for social emancipation, which means in an anti-capitalist perspective, of profound change of the power and economic relationships in our country. It wishes to contribute to the accumulation of strategic forces to finish with this neoliberal caste which exploits not only all the natural resources but also us, human beings.

At the tactical level, what is the position of the OPT in relation to the government and to the next presidential election?

Before 2012, at the beginning of the construction of our organization, we tried to obtain the 'political party certificate' (issued by the Mexican electoral institute, which decides who can contest elections), but we were refused through the mechanisms in force in Mexico which prevent the expression of a class position of class in the fight electoral policy. Then there was a major event, just one year ago: the abduction and disappearance of 43 students of Ayotzinapa.

We currently have a debate in our ranks on the viability of the participation in the electoral political struggle. We believe that the Mexican state has been in a process of profound and accelerated decomposition which is notably expressed with the disappearance of our comrades in Ayotzinapa, a drama that highlights the responsibility of the local

authorities, the police and the army. It is a proof of the existing connections between organized crime and the Mexican state, the neoliberal political class and the institutional political parties (which are very often funded by the drug cartels). There is an interaction between these two mafias: the political mafia and organized crime. That is why, in the last elections, we have called for abstention, spoiled votes and in places the active boycott of the electoral process.

With this terrible situation symbolized by the disappearance of the 43, we find that the violence in Mexico comes not only from the drug cartels but that there is also a widespread political violence against the leaders of social organizations and the popular classes. The number of deaths each year is terrifying. How do you see the situation of social movements in this conjuncture?

Social movements in Mexico are faced with a major challenge. It is true that there are a lot of actions to oppose the spoliations, repression, the challenge to established rights, the restrictions on democratic freedoms, but it is a resistance which is dispersed. These are regional or local movements that remain isolated in the national context, and articulating this resistance is therefore a major challenge. Some current processes are going in this direction, such as the construction of the National Popular Assembly and the National Popular Convention which have emerged from the mobilization for Ayotzinapa. This Convention has adopted a nine-point program which revolves around the claim that the missing students are returned alive, which obviously remains essential. But I think that we also need to broaden the range of the demands to include other questions that help precisely to achieve the unity of all.

Another objective, more difficult still, is to broaden the social basis of the resistance by offering national political alternatives. We need clear positions in the face of the political crisis in our country. We need to organize those without organization. One of the factors that contributes to the stability of ne-

oliberal governments, in addition to the electoral process, is the politico-cultural and ideological domination of the people. The role of the media is overwhelming. The disinformation and the political control over the popular organizations are incredible. This hampers collective mobilization, reduces the spaces for discussion and slows down the entry into struggle of new sectors. Yet, if we do not manage to converge all these forces in the political struggle for power, we will have a lot of difficulty in getting rid of these neoliberals.

A further question: arising "from below and from the left" Zapatismo embodied a project of indigenous resistance which has shown a lot of rebellious dignity since 1994; and somewhere "at the top and to the centre left" there is the electoral project of Manuel López Obrador (former head of government of the Federal District) around the organization Morena (Movement of National

Regeneration). Between these two poles which have crystallized discussions on the left in recent years, how would you characterize the political situation?

So far as we are concerned, our project is a third option but we have good relations with our Zapatista comrades: we have known periods of distancing and rapprochement and we share a lot of ideas, but not all. In the case of Morena, we cannot say that it is a structured political movement with a clear perspective. It is rather a movement around a caudillo, Manuel López Obrador, with a quasi messianic project which aims to save the country but without Morena involving itself in social and popular struggles. What we want is to build a real alternative, an alternative which fight against neo-liberalism, an anti-capitalist alternative which is based on the role that must be played by the workers in the social and political struggle of our country.

PORTUGAL

Presidential Elections : Victory for the media-austerity candidate

JOÃO CAMARGO ·

The new Portuguese President of the Republic is the right-wing backed Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, professor of Law, eminent TV commentator and previous leader of the Social-Democratic Party (right-wing liberal conservatives previously in government). He is a figure directly linked to the previous dictatorship – he is stepson of Marcelo Caetano (who took over after the dictator Salazar died) and son of the minister for the colonies. He is known for his unconventional friendly personae, after 10 years of weekly political comment on Sunday night. His candidacy was supported by the two pro-austerity parties who formed the previous government, under the troika intervention. He won with 52% of the vote. The voter turnout was 48.84%, the worst first mandate turnout in Portuguese presidential elections ever, making Marcelo the president elected with the least votes ever. The impact of media, namely TV, on the election was paramount, with the candidate having a stroll in the park with little to no scrutiny and a campaign based on him being followed by reporters on his everyday chores.

The left candidates were unable to prevent this widely known public figure from winning in the first round. The Socialist Party didn't openly support any candidate, as its former president Maria de Belém went against the actual leadership of prime-minister António Costa, who were going to support an independent, Sampaio da Nôvoa, for-

mer dean of the University of Lisbon. As such, the party split between a more left-wing leaned faction (supporting Sampaio da Nôvoa) and a right-wing faction, that opposes the Government parliamentary agreement with the left-wing parties, by which the Socialist Party is in power (which supported Maria de Belém). In the end, the actual leadership of the Socialist Party lost the election but won the internal strife, as Sampaio da Nôvoa obtained 22.9% of the vote and Maria de Belém didn't go beyond 4.24%. The opposition to the governmental solution inside the Socialist Party was widely defeated.

The Communist Party had announced its presidential candidate immediately after the legislative election where it had been surpassed by the Left Bloc (it had 8.25% vs 10.19% from Bloco), as a way to ascertain its identity and its independence, as at that moment the possibility of a government supported in Parliament by the left (Communist Party, Left Bloc and the Greens) was gaining momentum. Edgar Silva, known activist for social causes in Madeira was chosen, but the election went sour. Unable to detach itself from jargon and relying heavily on party logistics, the candidate ended with only 3.95%, the worst result ever for a Communist backed presidential candidate. These results will have impact inside the party, which is still trying to adjust to the new reality of the government and the rise of the Left Bloc. Stern orthodoxy will face the new reality with outcomes yet to be known.

Finally the Left Bloc was, inside the left, the most relevant result as the 39-year-old MEP Marisa Matias won 10.1% of the vote, which amounts, to some degree, to a stabilization of the party's elec-

torate (it was a close result to the Left Bloc's previous election). Matias was an impressive candidate in relevant debates (namely the final one, between all candidates, where she was able to crush PS candidate Maria de Belém's support of lifetime subventions for MPs), bringing important issues to the campaign, namely the need to stop austerity and challenge the EU and its treaties, and opposing the latest bailout of bankrupt bank BANIF. Her popular background and friendliness in the streets and rallies was also an important aspect to this result. She was the Left Bloc's supported candidate who achieved its best result ever (previously it had had 3% in 2001, 5.3% in 2006, and a multi-party backed candidate in 2011), and the woman candi-

date to achieve the best presidential vote yet, with 479 thousand votes.

The general result is bad as the reliability of the new President of the Republic to support an anti-austerity government is low. It is expected that in the first times, he will keep a neutral position, but with expected confrontations with the European Commission and the European Central Bank, the situation is now worse for the Portuguese governmental solution externally. Despite this, internal dissent inside the Socialist Party will definitely lower and the pressure from a more solid Left Bloc may also have good impacts. Social mobilization will be needed in short term, as the austerity advocates have now placed one of their key players in the presidency.

INDIA

Remember Rohith Vemula and cry death to Brahmanism

RADICAL SOCIALIST ·

The background is the screening of Muzzafarnagar Baaqi Hai by the ASA — (a documentary which shows, using footage of speech made by BJP leaders, that the riots in Shamli and Muzaffarnagar were orchestrated for electoral gains in the run-up to the 2014 elections)—which was resisted by the goons of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the student arm of the RSS. They attacked the ASA and also used verbal violence. The ASA response compelled them to apologise in public. This "public humiliation" of Hindutvavadis before dalits, whom they treat as subhumans, resulted in sustained attacks. A fraudulent complaint was lodged, which resulted in an inquiry in which the ASA members could not be found guilty. Thereafter, several letters came from the Union Ministry of Human Resource Developments, in flagrant violation of the least autonomy of institutions of higher education, demanding action against so called anti-nationals. One issue currently being held up against the ASA is its opposition to the hanging of Yakub Memon. Anyone opposed capital punishment on principle are deemed anti-national by the current government and its MPs.

Eventually, after a change of Vice Chancellor, the Centre's handpicked man, Appa Rao Podile, took action against five ASA members, all PhD scholars. Despite the fact that the Proctor's report actually said: "The board could not get any hard evidence of

beating of Mr. Susheel Kumar either from Mr Krishna Chaitanya or from the reports submitted by Dr. Anupama. Dr. Anupama's reports also could not link or suggest that the surgery of the Susheel Kumar is the direct result of the beating.", by decision of the University Executive Council, the five were denied access to hostels on the campus except their classrooms and workshops related to their subject of study. This amounted to a social boycott with the students being denied access to hostels and forced to sleep in a makeshift tent.

While carrying on agitations, Rohith clearly felt devastated by what was happening to him, as his suicide note tells us. His suicide note also recounts that his Junior Research Fellowship was stopped for the last 7 months and he had contracted debt, by borrowing from his friends. Rohith grew up in Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh and his mother is the sole breadwinner of the family who did sewing to support the household. This is the tale of a majority of dalit's including the Vemulas who have to bear heavy economic burden. In this context we need to understand that this is not a one off incident, and that institutional murders of Dalit students, and at a lesser level the institutional and systemic attacks in their attempts to be educated, have been rampant in India. The UoH alone has seen nine Dalit students committing suicide in a decade. One remembers Dalits constantly failing in IITs, violence on Dalits and adivasis in numerous ways everywhere, such as the threats and the conscious failing and abuse of Chuni Kotal in West Bengal (resulting in her suicide), and other incidents.

In India, no genuinely revolutionary Marxist organisation can be built; no real social emancipatory struggle can be generated, unless it also makes opposition to Brahmanism and the real overcoming of the exploitation of Dalits and Adivasis a core component. Indeed, no struggle against communalism will be complete unless we realise the tacit bonds between wider savarna circles and aggressive communal-fascists, and unless we consciously seek to become parts of Dalit struggles as well as anti-communal struggles.

Radical Socialist accordingly joins the militants of ASA, and all militant students in Indian campuses, [1] in condemning Brahmanism on campus, the in-

stitutional murder of Rohith, and demands:

- Resignation of Smriti Irani and Bandaru Dattatreya as Union Ministers
- Resignation/sacking of Appa Rao Podile
- Immediate revocation of the punitive action on all the other Dalit students
- Action against the police for snatching Rohith's body and disposing of it instead of handing it over to his family
- Thorough judicial inquiry into the complicity of persons in abetting Rohith's suicide.

January 21 2016

Radical Socialist

USA

A Michigan City Poisoned: Governor's Apology Can't Get the Lead Out

DAVID FINKEL ·

An hour's drive north up I-75, in the poisoned city of Flint, the National Guard, emergency workers and volunteers delivered thousands of cases of bottled water and filters to households as Michigan governor Rick Snyder tried to deflect growing calls for his resignation or arrest.

Just weeks ago, Flint's lead-poisoned water was a local story as the state's coverup of the disaster crumbled. Today it's a national and international headline, and most people know the basics: how the state's appointed "Emergency Manager" for Flint ordered the switchover from Detroit's clean and safe water system to Flint River water. How anti-corrosive chemicals weren't added to the heavily polluted and toxic river water, causing it to leach lead from aging pipes directly to the taps and into the bodies of the city's men, women, and children. How the state's Department of Environmental Quality falsified its own test results and lied to the people, telling them that the rust-colored, foul-smelling-and-tasting water coming out of their faucets was perfectly normal and safe.

Flint water.

Snyder has conceded that the Flint water disaster is his "Katrina," but the comparison is unfair. George W. Bush spectacularly bungled that emergency, but after all he didn't cause Katrina, which was a massive hurricane compounded by decades of coastal erosion and negligent maintenance of the New Orleans levee system. Governor Snyder directly caused the poisoning of Flint, through the arrogant and cynical exercise of power by an emergency manager who knew nothing and cared less about the most basic issues of running a water system.

(Astonishingly, the very same emergency manager Darnell Earley who presided over the Flint catastrophe is now the emergency manager of Detroit Public Schools.)

Michigan voters knew that dictatorship couldn't be trusted. When the rightwing state legislature first passed the law enabling emergency managers to be appointed over "financially distressed" cities, the voters overturned it with a ballot referendum. Then Snyder's allies reintroduced it, along with a \$5 million appropriation that made it constitutionally immune to ballot challenge. With one exception, the municipalities placed under emergency management—and in the case of Detroit, forced into federal bankruptcy—have been majority African American, including the 52% Black post-industrial city of Flint.

It's a case of what can be called "cynical racism." It's obviously not that Snyder thinks that Black people are genetically inferior. That's old-fashioned. Rather, it's a political calculation that their needs and concerns can be ignored in order to cut a few financial corners.

"You were failed by federal, state and local authorities," Snyder intoned in his "apology" to Flint's residents. Hold it there, Richard. Whether or not local politicians approved the switch was irrelevant, because you had stripped their power. And the federal involvement was basically one EPA bureaucrat who backed the state agencies' criminal coverup of the lead poisoning of the water.

That coverup lasted almost a year from 2014 till Fall 2015, when the combined efforts of one heroic homeowner who refused to shut up, one pediatrician who was told her findings of lead levels in chil-

dren made her an "unfortunate researcher," a Virginia Tech research team, and the investigative reporting of the Michigan ACLU blew it into the open. The Flint water supply was switched back to the Detroit system, but the irreparable damage to the pipes by the untreated Flint River water means it remains unsafe for drinking, bathing or any other human purpose. Replacing the gutted infrastructure alone might carry a \$1.5 billion price tag, according to Flint's new elected mayor Karen Weaver.

In the name of saving a few bucks, Snyder has effectively bankrupted the state and inflicted incalculable harm on the population, especially the children, of a major city. Whether the concurrent outbreak of Legionnaire's Disease, including ten fatalities, is also linked to the water crisis is suspected but still under investigation.

So will Snyder be forced to resign? Not a chance really, considering his accomplishments. Under his ruinous rule, Michigan has become a "right-to-

work" state, welfare has been shredded, Detroit's city workers have had their pensions cut and health care gutted, and the post-bankruptcy city laid open for real estate speculators, house flippers, and billionaire developers to buy up huge tracts of land for a song. And Snyder has just signed a new law—complete with another referendum-proofing "appropriation"—that eliminates the option of straight-party-ticket voting in elections, which will have the benefit of increasing lines and wait times at overcrowded urban polling stations where Black Michiganians mainly vote. No wonder the elites love him!

Politically he's too damaged to run for a third term, but no matter because state term limits rule that out anyway. So the Big Richard can go into retirement and back into business, leaving behind the broken and poisoned city of Flint.

[Against the Current-<http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/4569>>

January 21, 2016

SPANISH STATE

Two Years of Podemos

MIGUEL URBÁN CRESPO ·

At this point it's worth reflecting on our original intent: to reverse the train of austerity and design a tool of "popular and citizen leadership" as we stated in our original slogan. This is not for nostalgia, but is a necessity—there's little room for nostalgia or for posturing after two years. Otherwise we produce a binding new cycle of mobilization that breaks with our most precious and vulnerable asset: the circles [1] and our means of communication with other sectors and comrades. We run the terrible risk of turning into just one more party.

In these two years Podemos has been a model in the construction of innovative party structures. There is, for example, our economic independence from banks, and our communications capability, discursive and in social networks. But already there is a consensus in the heart of the organization that the two disconnected paths along which we have moved so far—direction from the center and building from the grassroots—must be synthesized into something superior. Self-satisfaction is a bad counselor for any great undertaking. We must reinvent ourselves and fight bureaucratic inertia, and we must develop tools for collective control over and participation in our decision making process and responsibilities, and for implementation in different areas and among different groups.

We ought to be conscious, so as not to die from our own success, that the "machinery of electoral war" is performative, and it generates a certain political culture, certain vices and habits and inertia. The responsibilities of elected position, representation as well as moments of liberation—the daily temptations to adapt to the fabric of power necessitate a

counterweight, an antidote if these things become toxic. An organization based only on its elected positions seems insufficient, if not counterproductive, to take up the challenge of transforming the reality of a system in which power is not located solely in the formal spaces of institutional representation. Power is exercised in the aggressive and anti-egalitarian management of the commons in every neighborhood, every town, every village, every region; power is exercised in the relations between men and women, adults and children, center and periphery, north and south and, in what continues to be the crux of the matter, between capital and labor.

Either we accumulate real social victories or the best written agreements and antieviction protocols, the most poetic social pacts, the most melodic constitutional reforms remain nothing but ink on paper in terms of everyday relations between those who carry their families on their backs each morning and those who make a lifestyle out of the accumulation of wealth. Not even the existing laws protecting the most vulnerable and majority sectors of society, insufficient and diminished as they are, are implemented today. We must alter relations of power everywhere. We must win everywhere. And for that we need strong and well formed bases of power, articulate leadership, and deep roots, because only strong roots keep us going in spite of the furious attacks from above from those who aren't willing to give up their privileges. Plant and grow seeds, knitting alliances with all social and political sectors that see the need for change. Plant and grow.

During the first months of Podemos's existence, Pablo Iglesias used to mention a fundamental idea: "power does not fear the left if the left isn't doing

politics." Podemos was born as a tool for the "empowerment of citizens" and that task has a permanent reality. The elites are more or less afraid of us. They may even hate us expressly as they have demonstrated before our breakthrough in institutional spaces, but what the elites truly dread is the thought of people who are unafraid, people creating spaces for selforganization, breaking into social and political life, collectively fighting for their rights. Of workers, unafraid, defending what is theirs. Of women without fear of men. Of neighbors organizing together to build common spaces of solidarity. Of our immigrant and refugee brothers and sisters unafraid of xenophobic and exclusionary laws.

Podemos was born as a sort of continuation of the "Down with the Regime!" politics that were shouted (and painted) on the streets in the most intense moments of the anti-austerity demonstrations. Today that regime, severely wounded since 15-M, [2] is trying to recompose and stabilize itself. They should not see in Podemos an ally for that. In our opinion, there is no possible reconciliation with the regime of amnesia, austerity, limits on democracy, and submission to the Troika. For us, the purpose of Podemos as an instrument had (and has) an obvious objective: to end politically the regime of 1978 [3] and open a new era that, under the leadership of the popular classes, allows the development of constitutional processes.

Two years ago the uncertainties were enormous, the challenges massive. Today they are no less so.

We must keep pushing this process of change so that we don't have to march backward. A process of change that should not be limited to Podemos and the necessary "assault on the institutions." It ought to go beyond electoral politics and messaging. For this we need to restart a phase of mobilization fighting for a social agenda in the near future, one that exerts real people power against the inevitable institutional barriers. In this sense, we should not lose sight of the broader European dimension of this process of change—a dimension that, as shown in the case of Greece, is a fundamental leg of a strategy for real change that takes on the powers that be and the blackmail of the European institutions. After two years we know that the battle against the ruling class is here and now, but the war is, at a minimum, European.

Two years of Podemos. Five years of indignation. [4] Eight years of capitalist financial crisis. Not a second for complacent celebration. Our adversaries don't rest, our need for change remains urgent, if not even greater, after two years of work to translate the "yes we can!" of the streets into a categorical "We can!" [5] Forward, with all the forces of history!

This article was published in Spanish by Viento Sur Dos años de Podemos and translated Two Years of Podemos for Solidarity by Alex Fields. Footnotes are from the editor, not the original text.

Sunday 17 January 2016)

MIDDLE EAST

The Islamic State, symptom of a crisis of regional domination

JULIEN SALINGUE ·

The cradle of Daesh: a ravaged Iraq

The development of Daesh cannot be understood as the mere expansion of an ideology advocating a particularly reactionary vision and application of Islam. Islamic fundamentalism, including its most violent and retrograde versions, was not born in the last few years: to understand that, it is enough to take a look at the Arabian Peninsula, where Saudi Arabia and the Gulf emirates have for decades made it an instrument of domestic and foreign policy.

Understanding the development of Daesh means taking into account the material conditions that made it possible, observing the changes at work in the region.

And one of the first things to consider is of course the impact of external intervention in Arab countries, whether military expeditions or the unfailing support given by Western countries to authoritarian regimes that have systematically eliminated all progressive opposition and promoted, directly or not, the fundamentalist challenge.

The destruction of Iraq is thus one of the key factors explaining the development of Daesh, which was not born in Syria or Saudi Arabia, but on the ruins of a country ravaged by military interventions. It is in fact in the US-run prisons and the Sunni towns and villages attacked by foreign armies or their Iraqi Shiite auxiliaries that the first cells of what would become Daesh were formed in the mid-2000s.

In the summer of 2014, when the Islamic State quickly took control of several Iraqi provinces, we thus "discovered" the significant presence of former officers of Saddam Hussein in the political-military apparatus of Daesh, from Abu Abdu Rahman al-Bidawi, in the leadership of military operations, to Abu Ahmed al-Alwani, who was appointed "governor" of the province of Al Anbar, and Saddam al-Jamal, appointed "governor" of the province of Deir el-Zor in Syria.

A crisis of domination in the region

This considerable presence indicates that the driving force behind Daesh is not only religious radicalization, but also the desire to oppose the policies imposed by the West and its regional allies. The pro-Western Iraqi regime installed in 2004, through its policy of marginalization of the Sunnis (dominant under Saddam Hussein), its bloody repression of any contestation and its alliance with Iran, was instrumental in legitimizing the rhetoric and the actions of Daesh: some Sunni regions even welcomed the Islamic State as a liberator.

So although religious ideology is at the heart of the project and the discourse of Daesh, it actually in fact overlaps with other dimensions: social, political, economic. The development of the Islamic State is the expression of a crisis of domination in the region, as evidenced by the 2010-2011 uprisings, and of the inability of the existing regimes and their imperialist sponsors to restore calm and stability. Daesh has thus built on a double failure: that of the Arab uprisings confronted with the counter-revolution, but also that of the institutional

counter-revolutionary forces, both the regimes and political Islam.

It is for this reason that we cannot fail to notice that the Islamic State finds part of its force of attraction in its rejection of borders and of politico-administrative centres that originated in a colonial carve-up and of "independences" that do not challenge imperialist hegemony in the region. Thus, and even though the Islamic State has adopted the worst local forms of domination (reactionary ideology and authoritarian practices), it appears to tens of thousands of young people frustrated by the failure of the uprisings in 2010- 2011 as a "novelty" in a regional system frozen for decades.

Until when?

Daesh now boasts a real and considerable war treasure. Its annual budget is estimated to be between 2.5 and 3 billion dollars. Raising taxes, fleecing traders, hostage taking, human trafficking ... These are all sources of funding for the Islamic State, which also has oil resources which provide a guaranteed rent at little cost. All the same, contrary to some fantasies, the oil is basically sold within the territories controlled by the Islamic State: a captive market, with people forced for their daily needs (petrol, heating fuel, etc.) to deal with the smugglers of Daesh or their intermediaries.

Furthermore, the Islamic State also continues to benefit from the more or less discreet support of notables and informal groups in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, who see the expansion of the Islamic State as a way to counter the Iranian (Shiite) rival. This is the other tragedy faced by the peoples of the region: even though the imperialist countries claim to want to put an end to Daesh, their regional allies are far from considering it as the enemy to be defeated. From Erdogan's Turkey, delighted to see the Kurds confronted by the Islamic State, to the Gulf states, whose ideology is close to that of Daesh, and to Iraq ruled by Shiites who see little interest in reconquering hostile Sunni areas, the regional powers are, de facto, playing the game of the Islamic State.

So we should reject any schematic vision: an enemy of the peoples of the region, Daesh is the expression of the bankruptcy of a system of domination in the service of Western countries and their regional allies. Unwavering opposition to Daesh cannot ignore the socio-historical conditions of its development: to ally with authoritarian regimes in the region and perpetuate the military chaos is to render service to the Islamic State. So, although it means swimming against the stream, only a policy of support for the peoples and for groups fighting against both Daesh and the authoritarian regimes can make it possible to see a glimmer of light in a regional sky that is decidedly dark.

CHINA

Caught in China's crackdown on labor radicals

During your recent trip, you were detained amid the crackdown on labor NGOs. Can you tell us what happened?

I've been working in China for about 10 years, teaching labor studies and participating in various parts of the labor movement. I'd received many warnings before, but they had always been indirect, and passed along through colleagues. This was the first time that police came to question me directly.

They came to my hotel and interrogated me for about two hours—quite politely—but warned me to stop "meeting people" or risk legal consequences. They said I was violating the terms of my visa.

It's hard to know if I was detained as part of the crackdown on activists. It happened in the same period of time, but one never knows the reason that things happen in China. Certainly when I was detained, they didn't give me any explanation for it. So I think at best we can guess.

The context for this is that, since the start of the Xi Jinping administration in China three years ago, the state has taken a very definitive turn away from tolerance of any kind of activism and organizing in civil society. In the previous administration of Hu Jintao, there seemed to be a good deal more space for the development of NGOs and critical discourse and research. All of this under the Xi Jinping government has been very severely curtailed.

Since Xi came to power, the state has harassed labor NGOs, criminalized labor resistance, and detained and charged worker activists. The government has also conducted an "anti-foreign influence" campaign. And so, since I've been active in the labor movement in China during this period of time, and since I'm a foreigner, we can only say it's consistent with their policy.

What's the scale of the crackdown? Who is being targeted?

The most recent event was a high-profile detention of about 20 activists on December 3, all in Guangzhou, which is one of the largest cities in China. It's on the southeast coast across from Hong Kong. It's the capital city of Guangdong province, which was the birthplace of capital and labor markets beginning in the 1980s.

Since then, it's undergone a vast amount of development. Tens of millions of migrant workers have moved there to get jobs. The area has also experienced an explosion of labor resistance. Around a dozen or so labor NGOs have been operating amid this worker activism.

The government targeted the activists associated with four of these labor NGOs. Some of these NGOs are pretty benign service organizations that do things like assisting injured workers to file worker's compensation claims. Some of them are more actively involved in helping workers to develop skills for leadership and collective bargaining among those who have taken the lead in strikes and so on.

Most of the people were questioned and released within a day, but seven people are still detained and facing criminal charges. The most prominent person who was caught in the sweep is named Zeng Feiyang. He's the founder and director of the oldest and best-known labor NGO in China, Panyu Workers' Center.

The government has accused most of the detainees of disrupting public order, which is the usual allegation made against labor activists. They have charged one person with embezzlement. Solidarity activists have arranged for them to have attorneys—in fact, there is now a 60-member attorney team that has volunteered to represent them—but

so far, they haven't been able to contact the detained activists. So we still don't know the specific charges against them.

Is this crackdown in response to an increase in strikes in China?

I think so. There has certainly been a notable rise in strike activity, which may be largely in response to China's slowing economy. This has led to a high number of factory closures and relocations, which means job losses for workers. Bosses have also run away from their legal obligation to pay severance compensation when a factory shuts down.

Workers who have lost their jobs are also discovering that their bosses had not been paying for their social insurance—that is, social security or pensions. Many of these workers are in their 30s and 40s and are now facing the prospect of returning to their home provinces, towns and villages with no pension. All of this is the source of a lot of the recent protests and strikes.

But it's also part of a longer-term pattern of rising labor militancy over the last 15 years. All of these strikes and protests have remained relatively atomized. Workers have not been able link up their struggles, but people have, of course, started learning from all of the experience.

As a result, the strikes have changed in character. They have become more confident and more strategic. Workers are learning more about collective bargaining. They're learning more about how to interact both with capital and the state. That has definitely posed a threat to the government.

It's also impacted the state's official union, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU). It's not really a union at all, but mainly a tool used by the government for labor control. It doesn't represent workers, but mainly the employers. Workers don't trust it all. So workers, especially migrant workers, now really understand that they have to build their own organizations.

So there's more discussion than I have seen in the past about the need for something like an indepen-

dent trade union. Of course, that's crossing a line in China. The government won't tolerate that, so this may also be a reason for more harsh repression.

What is the situation of the Chinese economy, and how is that shaping worker's struggles and consciousness?

The economy of the country is very big and complicated. There's no question that the collapse of exports in 2008 led to an immediate and very, very sharp recession. It was said that something like 75,000 factories closed their doors in a two-month period in 2008—just in Guangdong Province.

There was recovery in the Chinese economy because of the government's vast stimulus plan. The state pumped a lot of money into infrastructure development, particularly in the inland provinces. So there has been lots and lots of construction of roads and dams, power facilities, ports, trucking depots and so on.

But all of this was predicated on the expectation that the country's export sector would recover. That didn't happen. So now all of this infrastructure development, based on the idea of continued export manufacturing, is now just overcapacity. China already had a problem of overinvestment, overproduction and overcapacity. After the stimulus, it's far worse than before.

On top of that, the state has been largely unable to stimulate the kind of domestic consumer demand to compensate for the drop in exports. A middle class has developed, which is buying lots of cars and luxury apartments. But it isn't very broad, and it certainly can't make up for the drop in international demand.

So with the economy slowing, people, even much of the middle class, are scared to spend money if they have it. Instead, they're saving it to pay for necessities like housing, health care and pensions, which the state doesn't provide. As a result, the state hasn't been able to stimulate domestic consumption to replace the drop in exports.

Finally, the state has developed a long-term plan to drive investment and development inland from the East Coast cities, with the hope that many migrants would return to their former homes.

But because the government is also loosening the household registration requirements, a lot of migrants aren't going back home. They're staying in the coastal cities. As a result, the state's inland development push has built ghost cities, with giant housing complexes standing empty and unused.

Have workers started to build new organizations to mount resistance amid the slow-down and repression?

Yes, but it's very early in the process. It's very, very difficult for workers to network, for activists to network, for students to network. The state is vigilant in disrupting such efforts.

Here's an example. I've been associated with Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou for the last 10 years. In the period of relative liberalism under Hu Jintao, we managed to start an international labor center within the School of Government. We conducted research involving labor scholars, trade unionists, economists, historians and labor lawyers, including both Chinese practitioners and foreign practitioners. That produced a lot of really wonderful research, classes and workshops.

The authorities shut it down last year. They gave no reason—they just closed it, all of sudden. The scholars, students, activists and workers who knew one another through the program have tried to stay in touch and continue our work. But we can't do it in a formal way any longer.

The Labor Center clearly provoked concern among the authorities. When I was detained and interrogated, they asked me about the Labor Center, as if it was still ongoing. I said to them, "You know it was closed last year. There is no more Labor

Center." But they persisted. They asked me, "When you were in Guangzhou, who did you talk with? Did you meet with your colleagues? Why did you meet with former students?"

That gives you a sense of the scale of scrutiny that activists are under. People's e-mails, phones and meetings are all surveilled. Even when people use social media, which they do a lot, it suffers almost immediate censorship. So while there is a robust international solidarity campaign on behalf of the detained labor activists, there is nothing like this going on inside China itself. It's virtually impossible to even get information about the detentions there.

What can unionists and activists in the U.S. do to help with the defense campaign?

People can do a number of things.

There are several good websites for more information. You can follow the solidarity efforts on Free Chinese Labour Activists, Red Balloon Solidarity or Chuang. There are also petitions circulating, including one for organizations and individuals that was initiated by the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions and picked up by LabourStart.

For those at universities or foundations with connections to China, there are opportunities for people to work through them to raise questions about the detentions.

There are some key organizations in various cities that activists can reach out to help with solidarity actions. In San Francisco, the key organization is the Chinese Progressive Association. There's a group in Seattle called the Pacific Rim Solidarity Network, or PARISOL, which is also doing some important work. In New York City, there is the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence.

Transcription by Rebecca Anshell Song

Source socialistworker.org.

TAIWAN

New president, old elite – assessing Taiwan's forthcoming 2016 election from a working class viewpoint.

MAO YI YU ·

To compare the situation now with four years ago, we see a very different scene. In 2012, the KMT's presidential candidate, Ma Ying Jeou, beat his then opponent, Tsai Ying Wen, and obtained 51% of the vote. His party won over 64 seats in congress (out of 113 seats), which was definitely an overwhelming victory. So, why have things turned so bad for the KMT? What has happened in the past four years?

To discover the cause of the KMT's deteriorating popularity, we need to go back to the year 2014. In this year, the Taiwanese masses started a strong occupation protest –the Sunflower Movement. The primary aim of this movement was to protest against the passing of the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA) by the ruling KMT. The CSSTA means more neoliberalism for the working class and further economic ties with China, which might enable the autocratic Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime to diminish Taiwanese democratic rights. The challenge from below is two-fold. First, opposition to the free trade agreement implies worsening wealth distribution. Second, the protest against closer cooperation with China's authorities means Taiwanese people are afraid of the CCP regime, while the CCP disapproves of the right to self-determination for Taiwanese people. This is why the KMT has become more and more unpopular and people feel disappointed with the KMT regime.

Nevertheless, it is also interesting to ask about the stance that the DPP takes. Is the DPP capable of solving these difficulties? By observing the policies of the KMT and DPP presidential candidates we can gain a thorough understanding of their nature as capitalist political parties. When they express the need for Taiwan to "reform" and point out the "crisis" of our society, what are their true concerns?

The KMT tried to increase its degree of support by appearing to defend the "ROC" identity (the official name of our country: Republic of China). The DPP accused the KMT of the treasonous act of "selling Taiwan to our enemies", and surrendering to the CCP regime. Both of these declarations are either false or oversimplified. The elites of the KMT and DPP are merely trying to manipulate Taiwanese people for their own advantages.

For Taiwanese capitalists, the crisis exists. They urgently need the future government to help them increase their profits and competitiveness. Concerning the growing profitability of China's market, Taiwanese capitalists wish the cross-straits relationship could remain "stable." Nonetheless, the word "stable" in this sense means subordinating to the CCP's brutal denial of Taiwanese sovereignty and democratic rights. For Taiwanese working people, the stagnation of wages and living standard is also a crucial issue. People are looking for a government that can redistribute the wealth of our society in the face of increasing inequality. We can take a few of their administrative blueprints as examples to illustrate the KMT and DPP's political nature.

The KMT candidate Eric Chu proposed a policy that the future administration should raise the minimum wage from NT\$20008 to NT\$30000 in four years. He said that this is new strategic thinking in economic development; to take increasing wages instead of increasing profits as a motor for growth. There is no doubt that this is a relatively progressive measure, but if we consider the long history of KMT's policy of suppressing labor then this announcement seems extremely deceitful.

In the past eight years of the KMT being in power, it has strongly opposed the increase of the minimum wage on more than one occasion. The KMT, as an old right-wing political party, cannot convince Taiwanese people that this sudden change of tone is sincere.

As for Tsai Ying Wen, by refusing to make any promises she avoided the challenge of Eric Chu on the minimum wage issue. This demonstrates the pro-capitalist and conservative stance of Tsai Ying Wen. She believes that the state should mobilize resources to strengthen Taiwanese firms' competitiveness. If the firms get more profitable, then it will be able to raise the employees' wages. This is nothing but right-wing Reaganomic thoughts with a new face. The cause of wage stagnation is not insufficient profits for capitalists, but the unbalanced distribution between social classes. This is what pro-capitalist politicians such as Tsai Ying Wen will never acknowledge.

Tsai Ying Wen's cross-strait relations policy is more than worth mentioning. Stating that she will maintain the status quo, use Taiwan Consensus as her guiding principle and abide by the Republic of Taiwan's current constitutional system, Tsai Ying Wen's stance on cross-strait relations has rapidly shifted from pro-independence to maintaining the status quo during the 2016 campaign. It is now hard to distinguish her cross-strait policy from that of the KMT. Why is this happening?

Because Tsai Ying Wen knows that if she stands for Taiwanese capitalists, she should not be hostile towards the CCP regime. Insisting on Taiwanese peo-

ple's right to self-determination against the CCP endangers Taiwanese capitalists' profits. This is a dilemma for administration. We are convinced that both the KMT and DPP as capitalist political parties will favor the latter. They will make concessions to the CCP to protect the bloodline of Taiwanese capitalism, even if that cost the country's sovereignty.

In the aftermath of Sunflower Movement, the problems antagonizing Taiwan such as the uneven distribution of wealth and the threat to democratic rights have become even worse under the KMT's rule. This is why people disdain the KMT and turn to supporting the DPP. Some people see these problems as an administrative failure of the KMT, not as an indispensable effect of the development of Taiwanese capitalism. Other people reluctantly support the DPP because they want the KMT to step down. They all share one thing in common, which is that they are deluded about the DPP. Falsely believing that the DPP will solve the problems mentioned above, DPP supporters might become deeply frustrated in the future because they did not expect the pro-capitalist and opportunist nature of Tsai Ying Wen. Undoubtedly, social struggles such as the Sunflower Movement will continue. Real change will not come with the electoral victory of the DPP.

Further explanation and the results (written after the 2016/1/16 election):

In addition to the KMT and the DPP, there are two other emerging political forces, originating from the 2014 Sun Flower Movement, which took part in the election. They are the "New Power Party (NPP)" and the "Social Democratic Party (SDP)." The NPP formed a close electoral alliance with the DPP. The NPP's legislative candidates supported Tsai Ying Wen and Tsai Ying Wen supported them as well.

The SDP chose to mark itself out as critical of both the KMT and the DPP in the beginning. However, one of the most prominent figures of the SDP declared her support for Tsai Ying Wen right before the vote. Although there is a trade unionist candidate in the SDP, who promotes progressive labor

demands and enjoys extensive grassroots support, the leadership of the SDP is to some extent opportunist.

The result of the presidential and congress elections held on January 16, 2016 is unsurprising. Tsai Ying Wen got 56.1% of the vote, surpassing Eric Chu's 31.0%. The DPP is going to be the new ruling party of Taiwan.

It is worth mentioning, the voter turnout hit its historical lowest record this year, which is only 66.2%. Since Taiwan's first presidential election, the voter turnout was never lower than 70%. This might be a

sign that people are becoming disappointed with both the KMT and the DPP more than ever. As for the result of the congress election, the new structure of congress seats is – DPP 68, KMT 35, NPP 5, PFP 3.

The NPP got 6.1% of the vote. For a newly formed political party such as the NPP this result was a great victory. Unfortunately, the SDP got only 2.5% of the vote, below the 5% threshold, meaning that they did not get any seats. The political structure and voter's mindset is still constrained by the KMT-DPP system.

PAKISTAN

The Awami Workers Party prepares for its second All Women's Convention

AWAMI WORKERS' PARTY ·

In 2016, as the party prepares for its second All Women's Convention, many political realities remain unchanged but the events of the preceding year serve as an opportunity for the AWP's diverse cadre to engage with these conditions and allow the party to set goals that seek to transform these conditions by offering pro-people alternatives.

In 2015, the Awami Workers Party participated in local government elections in several cities of Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the Punjab, with some successes and several defeats. Baba Jan, the party's candidate for Gilgit-Baltistan legislative assembly, also ran a popular campaign. At the same time, the party's chapter in Rawalpindi, where its activists have organised against evictions from informal settlements, faced a crackdown by the CDA in August when the authority demolished hundreds of houses and displaced even more families.

AWP's women activists were at the forefront of all these efforts and their dedication encouraged more young women towards the party. The party is proud of these comrades who helped develop a grassroots presence in these areas. The diversity of women associated with the AWP is a reminder that women are not additional pools of voters, as all mainstream parties of Pakistan treat them. Rather, they are grassroots sources of radical social change.

Many political leaders of Leftist formations have often overlooked this value of gender as a forceful tool of political analysis and have ignored patriarchal structures not only in the society but also within their own organisations. This oversight has prevented many well-intentioned leftists from evolving

a political programme that caters to all marginalised social groups, including women.

At the societal level, this disregard is reflected in the absence of electoral campaigns focusing on women's issues, lack of enforcement of laws that intend to protect women and relegation of women mostly to token positions in the parliament. Thus, women's concern do not qualify as a core subject of electoral and parliamentary politics in the country.

Emphasis on the political roots of economic and social deprivation permeates all public positions of the AWP. Its stance on women's issues is also informed by this attitude, i.e., that the conditions women face are a direct result of the barriers that prevent them from effectively mobilizing as a political force: a mass women's movement with a clearly defined agenda.

The Awami Workers Party hopes to build on this discourse as it believes that women's struggles are fought on both an ideological, representational level and an experiential and everyday level. The value of this belief lies in its political effectiveness and for All Punjab Women's Conference 2016, the party not only reaffirms its commitment to the March 2014 communiqué, it resolves to become a platform women across the country can truly own.

1. Wage policy: The Constitution of Pakistan contains a range of provisions with regards to labour rights. Article 11 of the Constitution prohibits all forms of slavery, forced labour and child labour. Article 17 provides for a fundamental right to exercise the freedom of association and the right to form unions. Article 25 lays down the right to equality before the law and prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sex alone. Article 37(e)

makes provisions for securing just and humane conditions of work, ensuring that children and women are not employed in vocations unsuited to their age or sex, and for maternity benefits for women in employment.

Despite these constitutional safeguards, it is no secret that millions of workers - men, women and their entire families - work and live in terrible conditions. The AWP believes that lack of enforcement of legislation under these constitutional provisions has facilitated exploitation of labour, a large part of which are women who are overlooked as productive members of the country's workforce. This neglect can be traced in all of Pakistan's labour policies enacted by various political regimes whose visions for economic prosperity have lacked pro-women objectives. Its effects can be seen on the living standards of working class families, where women dedicate long hours at home and at work because of the exigencies of the family and the national economies.

The Awami Workers Party believes that women's rights and economic development are correlated and that there can be no social or economic progress until the state makes efforts to address structural inequalities that prevent women from realising their full potential as one half of the country's citizenry.

In 2015, the government of Pakistan announced Rs13,000 minimum wage for unskilled labour. The minimum wage policy and its enforcement require a critical study, as thousands of women are employed in the informal sector and there is no mechanism for ensuring their mental, physical and economic well-being. Women have historically struggled against a gender-based pay differential and work conditions but the situation is particularly dire in Pakistan. The AWP demands implementation of minimum wage across the board, for women and men. It particularly calls to attention the work conditions of women employed in factories, kilns, handicrafts. The party also calls to attention the plight of domestic workers, many of whom are young girls from low-income households. The party's Wage Action Committee, formed in 2015, will

focus on these issues as part of its broader campaign for enforcement of minimum wage.

2. Tokenism: While many political parties boast of women leaders, women's issues continue to be ignored in parliamentary forums. Parliamentary caucuses have few women with backgrounds in advocacy and legislation. Moreover, there is poor enforcement of laws enacted by these leaders, which is why the state continues to fail women of the country in terms of protecting their economic, social and political rights. The party believes that these women leaders fail to represent working class women because they are not empowered within their own political spaces and their political goals are dictated by patriarchal party leaderships.

The AWP is weary of state feminism and rejects depoliticisation of women's issues. The party seeks to create an enabling environment for its activists which it hopes will allow original political initiatives that bring the problems of women (working, unemployed, housewives, victims of violence) to the fore of public discourse.

3. Harassment: Women in all spheres of life face harassment of varying sorts. These includes their workplaces, homes, varsities and their political spaces. These instances are not limited to a particular space or time and the behaviour that facilitates such instances is a by-product of socialisation of men and women based on patriarchal gender norms. The AWP envisions a society free of such tendencies and its political program is geared towards this objective. It recognises that any such program cannot be implemented overnight and requires a long-term vision and commitment. However, a long-term program of progressive political change alone is not sufficient to address concerns emerging out of the everyday life, in general, and the party's activism, in particular. To this effect, the AWP acknowledges the need to put in place mechanisms that discourage and check such behaviour, penalising it when and where needed, in society at large as well as within the party's own organisation.

Borrowing from the Protection of Women Against Harassment of the Workplace Act, 2010, the AWP resolves to form a committee to evolve such a mechanism. The committee will also develop also develop sensitization training for the party cadre. It is hoped that such measures will strengthen camaraderie between men and women within the party and create an empowering environment for women in which they can organise and mobilise for their issues. The AWP, as the only Left party in the country, recognizes the need for formidable and concrete measures to create inclusive political spaces for women.

4. Mobility and public spaces: The AWP recognizes the structures that restrict women's mobility and presence in the public sphere. The party believes there is need to push for greater mobility of women and their presence in public spaces. It welcomes collaborations and ventures with autonomous groups in this regard.

5. Civil-military relations: The AWP recognises the crucial linkages between exploitative economic relations (between capitalists and wage labourers) and patriarchal social structures. Modern capitalist state as a historical entity has emerged out of these patriarchal structures and exists in a symbiotic relationship with such structures. This relationship is particularly strong in post-colonial societies where civil and military bureaucratic elites, in cahoots with their imperialist paymasters, routinely suppress democratic forces and social movements of the marginalised groups, including women.

In this backdrop, the AWP believes the National Action Plan against terrorism is just another attempt (by the military establishment, its junior partners in the civil bureaucracy and capitalist political class) to consolidate its 'fractured hegemony' over the society. In spite of the presence of an elected government, the military establishment enjoys de facto control of all key decisions pertaining to national security and foreign affairs in the wake of the NAP. Democracy exists in the country in name only. The anti-terrorism laws passed under the NAP serve to inhibit political rights and civil liberties of the people and, if and when needed, may provide a pretext to the state to crackdown on populist and democratic efforts. Opposition to the NAP and the military establishment's control of statecraft should, therefore, be a core concern for any left-leaning effort towards the emancipation of the working classes as well as the women.

Meanwhile, opposition to the NAP should not be confused with support or sympathy for Islamist terrorism. The AWP strongly opposes right-wing extremism represented by Islamist and traditionalist political forces and their militant-wings. It just does not trust the existing state structures with efforts to overcome such forces. It believes that the only viable way to counter right-wing extremism is through mobilisation of marginalised social groups and their organisation into a movement for progressive social and economic change.

Awami Workers Party (AWP)

GERMANY

On Cologne New Year's Eve Massive Attacks on Women

ANGELA KLEIN ·

According to the police up to thousand men were assaulting women on the square in front of the central railway station between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. The women were surrounded by groups of men, insulted, sexually harassed and robbed. An assaulted woman spoke of "fingers in all holes of the body". The stockings and the slip of another woman were torn off. A woman told that around thirty men had surrounded her, had called her a "slut" and had touched her on the breasts, her bottom and between her legs. There were reports of panic and screaming — and of one case of rape.

The mood in front of the station is reported to have been aggressive. This might have been in part due to the fact that in the course of the evening people, for fun, were throwing fireworks around, partially with the aim of hitting other people.

The local police was present with 143 officers, the federal police inside the station with 70 officers. They were not able to cope with the situation. According to an internal police report, which has been played into the hands of the media, the police obtained the personal data of 71 men, took 11 men in custody and laid a charge against 32 persons. According to the report the overwhelming part of the persons could prove their identity only by showing a registration card of the Federal office for migrants and refugees. Among the 32 men that have been charged are — according to the report — 10 Algerian, 10 Moroccan, 4 Syrian, 5 Iranian, 1 Iraqi, 1 Serbian and 1 US citizen; 22 are asylum seekers. In the meantime over 600 people have

been charged, 40 to 45 per cent of them with sexual harassment, the rest mainly with theft. Both offences were often committed at the same time.

The police had cleared the square at 11.35 p.m., but they were not in control over the situation and could not prevent hundreds of men chasing women. Therefore the police direction has been massively attacked and the Chief Constable of the Cologne police had to go.

Especially three issues should be raised:

- 1) Had the police already known at 9.30 p.m. of riots of young men on the square? No precautions were taken. The police direction of Cologne and the Ministry of the Interior of the federal state of North Rhine Westphalia are blaming each other for this failure.
- 2) After the event the police tried to conceal what really had happened at New Year's Eve.
- 3) The police responded, if at all, above all to acts of theft. Women reported that the police in case of sexual harassment merely "watched". Even a female officer who had been sexually harassed in the crowd got no help from her fellow officers. This is in accordance with the general behaviour of police and legal authorities towards sexual harassment, which in Germany is still regarded as a "peccadillo" that is not punished under criminal law. This issue is in the centre of the critique by women's groups.

The political left responded first of all by protesting the instrumentalization of the events for a further aggravation of the refugee policy, which is the aim of the right-wing AfD and Pegida. This is of course correct but the left find it difficult to acknowledge that since the last years (already before the actual

wave of immigration!) North African gangs are operating in German cities. This has been suggested by an internal police report ("Casablanca report"), which has become gradually known to the public. We are not sure what we should think of it. However, it would be unrealistic to think that Germany in this matter could remain an exception. Why should the hopelessness of North African societies not have effects on German city streets?

We will have to learn to condemn such deeds without connecting them to cultural identities as people do for who exclusion is the main purpose. Against those people we should affirm that the varnish of a "civilized behaviour towards women" is quite thin. The times where women were the victims of unrestrained sexual harassment do not date back very long. It was the new women's movement that had pushed patriarchal behaviour into the background.

With the growing right-wing backlash it could gain ground again.

It is therefore encouraging that after the New Year's Eve many women were ready to lay charges and that many women's groups and initiatives criticize the belittling of sexual harassment demanding its punishment under the criminal code and above all that they — almost unanimously— condemn all attempts to stir xenophobia in the name of women's rights and to aggravate the asylum laws. One week after the events a manifestation of women in Cologne joined an anti-Pegida protest. For the next weekend (16 January) Syrian migrants are calling for a manifestation in solidarity with the assaulted women. These are encouraging examples for a solidarity between the most discriminated parts of the population.

Angela Klein, 14 January 2016

PORTUGAL

An unlikely deal for the Left begets victories and exposes all contradictions

JOÃO CAMARGO ·

Left Bloc's pressure to drop the right-wing government and sustain a Socialist Party's government with the help of the Communist Party and the Greens paid off when the Socialists, with 28% of the vote, and the left, representing close to 20% of the vote, joined in Parliament and failed the right-wing's coalition government program, forcing the right-wing president to call on Costa to constitute a government against his expressed will.

The multilateral agreements established by the Socialist Party with each of the other parties determined an important part of the new government's program: the socialists binded themselves not to cut anymore spending on the welfare state, returning wage and pension cuts, increasing the minimum wage, stopping any privatizations and reinstating collective bargaining for workers. Furthermore, fighting labour precarity, prohibiting home evictions, stopping standardised exams for children, giving full rights of adoption for gay and lesbian couples, reversing the previous government's restrictions on abortion, as well as reversing many of the policies by the previous government led by Passos Coelho.

Since taking power, on the 26th of November, the Socialist Party's government, supported in parliament by the left, has upheld the agreements signed with the Left Bloc, the Communist Party and the Greens. The reversal of the privatization of the public airline TAP (which was privatised in the Council of Ministers of the previous government in the few days that it was in office) is on the table, while public transportation concessions to private companies

in Porto and Lisbon have been fully reversed. Gay couples can now adopt, the restrictions on abortion have been removed, there is new legislation to protect debt-ridden families from foreclosures and evictions, children of 8, 10 and 12 will no longer have mandatory exams in Math and Portuguese, the extra tax the previous government had implemented will be reduced by two-thirds for most middle income wage earners, and erased for those earning less than 801€. The rise in the minimum wage was negotiated and, against employers' associations, there was a deal to raise the minimum wage to 600€ by 2019 (it was 485€ in 2015, it has risen to 505€ in 2016 and will rise at least 5% each year). This was one of the first disputes in the agreement, as the Communists and also Bloco wanted an immediate increase in 2016. A committee on fighting labour precarity has started to work, focusing mainly on independent workers.

The Left Bloc has named former party's spokesman Francisco Louçã to the Council of State, a council that advises the President of Republic (the presidential election will be on the 24th of January). It is the first time that the party is represented in this council. The Communist Party, the Socialist Party, and the now dissolved right-wing coalition of Social-Democrats and Popular Party have each appointed a councilman.

The violent attacks by the right on the new government have lowered to practically nothing, specially since the scandal of a new bank debacle has risen. The previous government had injected 1,1 billion euros in BANIF, a private bank based in Madeira and managed by a former Socialist Party minister, Luís Amado. In 2012 it received the 1,1 billion from

the troika "loan", of which bank it repaid only 275 million (still owing 125 million euros since December 2014). In December the bank stocks crashed to near nothing values, when it was finally disclosed that the bank was bankrupt. It had been bankrupt, defaulting since the "clean exit" of the troika programme, triumphantly announced by previous PM Passos Coelho. In collusion with head of the Bank of Portugal (Portugal's Central Bank) for electoral reasons, the situation was hid until it finally exploded three weeks after the new government took power. There was open pressure by the European Central Bank on the government so that the bank should be bailed out (less than one month before the new bail-in policy by the EU was implemented) for 2,2 billion euros. After that the European Commission forced the delivery of the bank to Spanish giant bank Santander for a mere 150 million euros, and a fiscal pardon of 289 million more. The European Commission ordered the Portuguese government to give money to Santander, refusing its proposal of adding BANIF to the Caixa Geral de Depósitos, Portugal's public (and biggest) bank. In Parliament, the Left Bloc, the Greens and the Communist Party voted against the new bailout. It was the Socialist Party's yes vote and the right-wing Social-Democrat's abstention that fulfilled, once more, Euro's policy on saving banks as usual, with public money, instead of keeping the bank in public hands once it was paid for with public money. This first important crack in the new government's support is very relevant, and it also marked the end of the right-wing coalition, with previous CDS-PP (the minor partner in the coalition) leader and previous vice-Prime Minister Paulo Portas resigning, signalling the end of a cycle for the right.

But when it comes to banking and finance, the Socialist Party has displayed its consistency on supporting the European rules of crashing the people while bailing the banks. Again on the issue of another previously bailed-out bank (previous Banco Espírito Santo, now Novo Banco) in the government's hand, it was decided to clear its newly formed toxic assets (now with private money) before redelivering it into private hands. The EU presses permanently for a complete delivery of the Portuguese financial system into the hands of the giant European financial groups. The Left Bloc expressed its opposition to this decision, supported by some rebel Socialist Party MPs.

The first weeks of the new Portuguese government have enabled important advances in some social issues, allowed a temporary halt on continued policies of impoverishment and even some advances, but the pressure exerted by the EU, this time not in the Eurogroup but from afar, coming from the European Central Bank and the Directorate-General for Competition, from the European Commission, show how far from and end to the troika years we still are. The Socialist Party's acceptance of the ever damaging European policies will keep exposing the contradictions between European rule, the social welfare and the Portuguese Constitution. Undoubtedly these contradictions will come, sooner or later, to produce a clash with the agreement made with the left, leaving the Socialists to face the same situation of the day after the October elections. Hopefully, before that we will see major changes in Spain and Ireland, in which the elections may prove to be the end of the hegemony of the European Popular Party and the interests of the 1% they represent.

| ENVIRONMENT

California Drought and Global Warming – Present and future impacts

BARRY SHEPPARD ·

In recent years the wet season has become shorter and with less rain and snow, while the dry one has lengthened and grown hotter. This reached the point four years ago that the state was officially declared to be in a drought, which has continued to the present and become more extreme.

Global warming is not only exacerbating the drought, it has likely transformed the ecology of the state well into the future, as I'll discuss below. I'll first survey the effects of the drought so far.

The dry season is marked by wildfires, which have become progressively worse in the course of the drought. The year 2015 has seen twice the number of such fires as usual, with one especially destructive that virtually wiped out a small town, burning down to the foundations nearly 500 homes. It spread so fast that seasoned firefighters said they had never seen anything like it.

Reservoirs are at historic lows, most down well below half of the historic average. Scientists also report a groundwater emergency. Jay Famiglietti, a senior water scientist at the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California, warned last March that there is only one year's worth of water left in the state's reservoirs, and that groundwater also is in danger.

At the end of the wet season last April, which was hardly "wet" at all, the snow pack in various parts of the Sierra Nevada, the runoff from which is key to supply water to the state in the summer, was between 16% and 22% of normal levels.

Devastating Impacts

Agriculture is big business in the state, concentrated in the Central Valley that runs between the Sierra Nevada and coastal mountain ranges. More than half of the state's crop value comes from fruit and nuts, and about a quarter from vegetables.

These commodities amount to over 60% of total U.S. fruit and nut production and 51% percent of vegetables.

Agricultural losses due to the drought are in the tens of billions. Some crops have been abandoned. As growers scramble for the depleting water supply, they have turned to pumping up more and more groundwater from ever deeper wells. A result is that the surface ground level in the Valley has dropped by over one foot.

There are many smaller effects of the drought. One example is that black bears have been coming down from hills into a small town, looking for food, as their regular food supplies are dwindling. This includes acorns these omnivores rely on, as oak trees in these hills have died or become so weak they cannot produce acorns.

California Governor Jerry Brown has declared a state of emergency and called for a 25% reduction in water use, a target aimed at individuals and small businesses — not agribusiness, which sucks up 80% of California water. There have been small cutbacks imposed on this sector by necessity.

Also let off the hook is Big Oil. California is a major oil producer. An article in the San Francisco Chronicle reports:

"A typical Central Valley oil well pulls up nine or 10 barrels of water for every barrel of petroleum that reaches the surface. In addition, companies often

flood oil reservoirs with steam to coax out the valley's thick, viscous crude, which is far heavier than petroleum found in most other states. They pump high-pressure water and chemicals underground to crack rocks in the controversial practice of hydraulic fracturing. They use acid and water to clear up debris that would otherwise clog their oil-producing wells."

All that leftover contaminated water has to go somewhere. According to the Chronicle, state regulators allowed oil companies to fill 170 aquifers that could be suitable for drinking or irrigation with fracking waste. Companies drilled another 253 wells close to aquifers, and the waste can seep into them.

So not only does Big Oil use up a lot of water, it poisons the water it does use, which contaminates more water sources.

Who Conserves? Who Wastes?

In addition to favoring agribusiness and Big Oil in the emergency, among individuals there is a big discrepancy between those who are conserving and those who aren't.

Ragina Johnson writes: "Forty-eight percent of wealthier homeowners with incomes above \$100,000 a year say it would be 'difficult' to conserve water. While many people with more modest means have replanted with indigenous and drought-tolerant plants, the well-to-do appear to be resisting with vigor.

"Conservative talk show host Steve Yuhas is a case in point. He recently ranted on social media that rich homeowners 'should not be forced to live on property with brown lawns, golf on brown courses or apologize for wanting their gardens to be beautiful....We pay significant property taxes based on where we live. And, no, we're not all equal when it comes to water.'

"That's true, unfortunately. We aren't 'all equal' when it comes to access to vital resources, like water — or food or housing, for that matter. Rancho

Santa Fe, where Yuhas lives, is a gated community with multi-acre estates, country clubs and ranches. There, water consumption has gone up by 9 percent since Brown's mandatory 25 percent reduction went into effect....

"One example from the Bay Area: The historically Black and work-class city of Oakland uses 57 gallons per person per day, compared to Diablo, an elite community a 30-minute drive away, where use is at 345 gallons per person." (Socialist Worker, July 28, 2015)

Will El Niño Be the Savior?

El Niño refers to the Christ Child, because the weather phenomenon of that name (a warming of Pacific coastal waters) appears near South America first around Christmas. The story goes that it brings a Christmas present in the form of abundant fish off the Pacific coast.

Noah S. Diffenbaugh, associate professor of earth system science at Stanford, and Christopher B. Field, director of the department of global ecology at the Carnegie Institution for Science, wrote recently in *The New York Times*, September 18, 2015):

"As wildfires rage, crops are abandoned, wells run dry and cities work to meet mandatory water cuts, drought-weary Californians are counting on a savior in the tropical ocean: El Niño.

"This warming of the Pacific occurs about every five years, affecting climate around the globe and bringing heavy winter precipitation to parts of California. The state experienced two of its wettest years during two of the strongest El Niños, in 1982-83 and 1997-98.

"Now climatologists have confirmed that a powerful El Niño is building, and forecasts suggest a high likelihood that El Niño conditions will persist through the next several months. So we in California expect a rainy winter.

"But before everyone gets too excited, it is important to understand this: Two physical realities vir-

tually ensure that California will still face drought, regardless how this El Niño unfolds.

"The first is that California has missed at least a year's worth of precipitation, meaning that it would take an extraordinarily wet rainy season to single-handedly break the drought. Even if that happened, we would most likely suffer from too much water too fast, as occurred in the early 1980s and late 1990s, when El Niño delivered more rainfall than aquifers could absorb and reservoirs could store.

"The second is that California is facing a new climate reality, in which extreme drought is more likely...

"Our research has shown that global warming has doubled the odds of the warm, dry conditions that are intensifying and prolonging this drought, which now holds records not only for lowest precipitation, but also for the lowest spring snow pack in the Sierra Nevada in at least 500 years. These changing odds make it much more likely that similar conditions will occur again, exacerbating other stresses on agriculture, ecosystems and people."

The research establishing that this past year's snow pack was the smallest in 500 years was based on studies of tree rings in centuries-old Blue Oaks, which strongly correlate with summer runoff from the Sierra snow pack.

The study indicated that present drought conditions are a once-in-a-thousand-years event. In the context of global warming, it boggles the imagination to believe that this rare event is a random coincidence with global warming. The authors add:

"At the same time, extreme wet periods may also increase because a warming atmosphere can carry a larger load of water vapor. In a possible preview, persistent El Niño conditions this year could force Californians to face both flooding and drought simultaneously. The more rainfall there is, the more water will be lost as runoff or river flow, increasing the risk of flooding and landslides. Add in the fact that the drought and wildfires have hardened the ground [increases that likelihood]."

They caution, "We are not arguing that the drought has been caused by climate change alone, or that all weather disasters have a link to climate change....As with the California drought, climate change is an important thumb on the scale, increasing the odds of particular extremes in specific places [worldwide]."

Present and Future Danger

Diffenbaugh says that his and Field's study, combined with previous studies, "provide strong evidence that global warming has substantially increased the probability of getting these extremely low snow conditions."

This and other studies indicate that while El Niño is likely to increase the snow pack for 2016, which will ameliorate somewhat the drought next summer, the drought will not be over. If this projection is correct (and this is the scientific consensus), the drought will continue for years to come.

The California Drought Update on November 25, 2015 commented:

"(E)xperts caution that heavy rain and flooding in some parts of the state will not necessarily end California's four-year drought. State and local water managers are urging the public to prepare for possible floods and extreme weather events, while still conserving as much water as possible." [1].

To understand the impact all this is having and will have in the future on California's economy, it is useful to look at the state's water use structure. The importance of the snow pack in the Sierra Nevada is indicated by the fact that its melt runoff fills reservoirs that provide a third of all the drinking water for the state, as well as water to fight fires and generate electricity.

The Central Valley is naturally a desert. It has become fertile only through massive irrigation from water pumped from the rivers that depend on the snow pack.

The snow accumulates well north of the Central Valley. Water pumped from the rivers that depend

on the snowpack not only irrigates the farms in the Valley, but is an important source for Los Angeles and all of southern California.

The clear present and future danger resulting from the disruption of this water use system is obvious. To carry through the large-scale revamping necessary to cope with this disaster runs directly into the obstacle of the big capitalist firms involved, which are driven by the iron necessity of maximizing their profits, no matter the costs to society at large.

As is the case with all the problems caused by the burning of fossil fuels, no long-term solutions are

available under the capitalist system.

Partial reforms can be fought for and won, but such struggles will pit the working people against powerful capitalist interests, opening the door to understanding that the system itself must be changed — along the lines of the slogan that has become popular in the environmental movement: System Change Not Climate Change.

January 1 2016

Against the Current

POLAND

'We're not in politics to win'

Q: How did Razem happen?

It was a long process, going back at least 10 years. Many of those who would become members of Razem were for several years involved in the non-parliamentary Left, in social organisations, or in the youth wings of Left parties. Early in 2015, there was a call from some of these entities for the Left to unite. An open letter was circulated, inviting people to join a new, genuinely Leftist entity. Hundreds of people signed up. They now constitute the core of Razem. In May this year, some 300 participants joined the first ever convention of the Razem Party, in Warsaw. The party was officially registered in July 2015.

Q: What was it like to make the jump from academia to politics?

I've been involved in politics for much longer than in academia — since I was a kid, in fact. I grew up in a family that was very active politically. My father was involved in the Solidarity movement of the 1980s in Gdansk. I went to my first demonstration when I was three, carried by my dad. I participated in the earliest protests against neo-liberal politics when I was 14. You could actually say that I jumped from politics to academia.

Q: How was your experience in campaigning, asking people to vote for you?

Being a bit reserved and modest, I could never ask anyone to vote for me. I mostly maintained an active social media profile, counting on the fact that people might remember me from my publications, political activism, and television and radio appearances in the early 2000s. My activist background helped some people to understand that even as a political party, Razem could represent the typically excluded — the poor as well as the queers, the

trans, the gays, the lesbians, the artists, and the cultural producers.

Q: What was your politics before you joined Razem?

I come from a section of the radical Left where the power of the state is as much criticised as the phallogocentric powers of capital. This radical, anti-authoritarian, queer-feminist position is, I think, necessary for any left wing party today if it is not to surrender to authoritarian tendencies. This also brings on board a human rights orientation and a sharp feminist optic. I have been active in the alter-globalist movement, and in grassroots queer and feminist networks.

Q: How would you rate your party's performance in the recent parliamentary elections?

I think that for a party that was born in May and registered in July, crossing the 3 per cent vote share mark (5,50,000 votes approximately) in October and qualifying for the state subsidy of €3 million is a tremendous achievement. Whenever I have doubts about party politics, I always repeat to myself that we need this money — while all kinds of right wing parties have used these funds to strengthen their conservative politics, progressive politics could also do with this support.

Q: What do you think is the reason for the failure of the Left parties in Poland?

I do not think we have had Left parties in Poland since the collapse of the Polish Socialist Party, which was forcibly dissolved in 1948. We've had great socialists in the anti-communist opposition (I know how paradoxical this sounds), in the liberal Social Democrat party, and above all, in the social movements, workers unions, and academia. Now

all these people have come together within Razem, and hopefully we will overcome the last 25 years of neo-liberal brainwashing and institutionalised neglect of human rights.

Q: How do you see the future role of Razem? Is there a realistic chance of it forming a government, as the Syriza did in Greece?

The Law and Justice Party that won the elections had showcased its moderate leaders during the campaign. But after winning, it appointed hardliners to the prime ministership and other key posts. This could alienate their voters and fuel conflict, which could destabilise the government. It may be somewhat impolite, but for the sake of my compatriots, our country and myself, I sincerely hope this scenario comes to pass. If we manage to continue the current growth in popularity, we could end up rallying a great number of people behind us.

Q: I understand that Razem does not have a leader as such. How then is the party structured? The media feels a need to identify every party with a personality. How do you address this requirement?

The Razem Party's 'management' consists of 30 people — a 10-member Board and a 20-member Council. This is the largest leadership team for any party Poland has seen, and also the most egalitarian. There is no chief or president of the party. During the electoral campaign, there were press conferences practically every day in many Polish cities, precisely to showcase the many different 'leaders' to the public. There are also many brilliant people in the party who did not become candidates in the parliamentary election. But they are great activists and workers.

Q: Razem's candidate selection policies have also attracted a lot of attention.

Yes, apart from our consciously egalitarian approach, I am also proud of the fact that our electoral list had as many women candidates as men, and they were from every social stratum. There were single mums running small businesses, teach-

ers, computer programmers, workers, academics, local activists. We had no 'professional politicians' — people whose only domain of expertise is institutional politics — for we believe that this kind of professionalisation has a destructive impact on the quality of political life.

Q: With the Left in India proving ineffectual, there is no real parliamentary alternative at the national level to neo-liberal politics. How is the scenario in Poland?

Frankly, my knowledge of contemporary Indian politics is limited. Therefore, all I can offer is a historical perspective. While Poland and India have little in common, the various systems of what Immanuel Wallerstein aptly called 'European universalism' apply to both countries. Many aspects of the Western ideologies embraced by these two countries can be identified as forms of this 'universality', which structurally maintain the economic and political hegemony of the West.

The West's use of resources and labour from Poland and India is actually similar. But there are important differences: Poland has never been a regular colony, and colonial prejudice has not been unleashed on such a brutal scale here as in India, or the other countries colonised by the West. As much as both countries could be seen as semi-peripheral, they also differ in scale, social divisions, and forms of political exclusions.

Q: So what are the options for the working classes and minorities when the only electoral alternatives on offer are varying shades of neo-liberal politics?

There has always been one option for the working class and the excluded anywhere in the world: to organise; to work across artificially built ethnic, religious and gender differences; to fight for their rights, and build new forms of production and redistribution, so that capital is tamed in its anti-social effects.

Q: A recent Left political formation in Europe that raised a lot of expectations,

only to disappoint its supporters, is Syriza. How can Razem ensure it avoids the same pitfall?

I must say I am quite concerned about the all-too-easy satisfaction that some on the Left take in Syriza's failure to embrace the political responsibility for Grexit. I think this satisfaction is a perverse symptom of some Leftist frustration, wherein the biggest celebrations are always in the moments of failure. Syriza has shown that another election is possible, that another politics is possible, that a non-corrupt government is possible in Greece, which really is a caste society for European standards.

I can't help smiling when I think of Yanis Varoufakis' first statements in the EU negotiations, when I remember the moment when Syriza first entered the Greek parliament, and I was there interviewing their shadow education minister, the great academic and architect, Theano Fotiou. I was so proud to see that someone from a similar socio-political background as mine was actually capable of doing state politics in another European nation. I would rather cherish these aspects of Syriza's political presence than seek to compensate my frustrations with the easy pleasures of looking at the failures of others.

Coming back to Razem, we are currently in this comfortable position where we do not have to worry about the country's budget deficit. We have another problem: people living in austerity that's far worse than in Greece or Portugal, and practically since 1989. While Poland does not have a sovereign debt crisis like Greece does, the price paid for it was to adopt the kind of sharp neo-liberal policies that south-western Europe hasn't seen until now. In this context, it needs to be stressed that the poverty, instability, and precarisation in Eastern Europe surpasses anything known in Western Europe in the last 40 years.

It should be said over and over again: we are not in politics to win. People who only want to win should take up some sport, join the army, or participate in

beauty contests. For us, politics is a domain in which equality is at stake in a highly mediated world of conflicting value systems, and diverse traditions. In these conditions, politics should be perceived not as a popularity contest but as a field of work, one in which the perspective is always in plural.

After years of neo-liberal brainwashing that has sent all centralised forms of state management to the dustbin of history, we embrace anew the vision of the state as a way of mediating differences in order to bring about equal rights and access for everyone. This is a revolutionary change in itself, but to also see people mobilising around such ideas, especially in Poland, where state communism was rejected as totalitarian, and where the media, universities, and churches smashed any remnant of socialism, is a revolutionary moment.

Q: In a world where national sovereignty is increasingly undercut by global capital — via international trade agreements and entities such as the WTO — is there much scope for a party like Razem to make a difference?

Our party has not yet worked out the details of our international policy. However, we are against these so-called "international trade agreements", which in fact constitute an official acceptance of the hegemony of corporate capital, and should be confronted with democratic resistance and harsh critique from legal, political and environmental standpoints. We are in favour of taxation of 'big capital', especially in Poland, where several multinational companies operate without paying their due taxes in our country. We are for a responsible and egalitarian wage system, and protection of workers' rights, which contradicts practically everything the WTO has opted for.

Q: Some critics have argued that the age of Keynesian reformism is over and there is no going back to it for Europe. But Razem's political programme is broadly social democratic — will it work?

Our supposedly moderate agenda is the most radically egalitarian political option ever realised — I am thinking of the short period of 30, perhaps 50 years, when the West was able to protect workers' rights, offer reasonable pay, and social and health insurance. My choice to join this party does not exclude my firm belief in a much more radically egalitarian political program. However, unlike my many colleagues on the Left, I do not believe in eternal life. I believe I only have a few decades to try and change the world, not just by ideas, but also by actual political practice. And if this modest agenda can be achieved, and with Razem I do believe that some things can be changed, I want to participate and put some of my work in it.

Q: Do you think the Left can sustain itself as a political movement within a nationalist framework or does it need to be necessarily international?

I think this is a very artificial way of speaking about the Left, and we should find more complex tools for analysis. Any Left, even if it tries to be the most international in the world, has participants embedded in local contexts. The nationalist framework is not a leftist framework. It is a fascist one, and I think this notion should be taken out of Left politics for good.

However, we live in nation states. We speak different languages. Our states differ in economic position, in access to power, in stability, in institutional tools for upholding human rights. We have to aim at an international formula without forgetting where we come from. We have to unlearn our privilege while at the same time being capable of putting pressure on our local governments, not just on some far away government somewhere else. We need to retain a very strong sense of responsibility

for the abuses done by our own state institutions against the citizens of other states, where such abuses have occurred. Of course, we should hold accountable any power that exploits or attacks us. But none of it should take place under a nationalist paradigm.

This is particularly important, for supporting gay rights in Ukraine is not enough; one must at the same time address the centuries of Polish abuse of Ukrainian people and resources. We need to be local and international at the same time, trying to undermine nationalism and yet allowing people from oppressed ethnic groups to enjoy autonomy. This is not a simple matter altogether.

Q: Would you recommend that more writers and artists and academics should get into politics?

I want single mothers to get more involved, and also the unemployed, and retired people. And writers, too, and anyone who wants to contribute toward a more egalitarian world. I see no point in promoting artificial solidarity with particular professions or groups.

Q: Any final words for readers back in India?

Well, I would like to thank them for their interest in the politics of a minoritarian leftwing party in a country as distant from India as Poland. I am excited by the possibility of sharing some of our experiences and hopefully trying to make a similar connection with the Left in your country in the future. This is one of the many ways of practicing solidarity, and I really appreciate this opportunity.

November 25 2015

The Hindu

SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi's Secret Uprising

SYRIA FREEDOM FOREVER ·

It is the duty of all revolutionaries in Syria and elsewhere to be in solidarity with the people in Saudi Arabia struggling against the reactionary and authoritarian dictatorship of the Saoud. Just like in Syria and Egypt the protesters demanding Freedom and Dignity are accused of being terrorists by their regimes. Our struggle is their struggle, our destiny are links. The road to freedom and dignity is linked to the liberation of all the people of the region, and this includes of course the liberation of the Palestinian people from Israel Apartheid's State.

The attempts by ruling dictatorships and reactionary and opportunists sectarian groups will not be successful to divide people according to their sect, ethnicity or gender. We should fight against these policies and groups promoting these policies and feelings. People in struggle are one.

The people struggling in the city of Qatif and in the various cities of Saudi Arabia and demanding the fall of the Saoud regime are actually the best allies of all the revolutionaries throughout the Middle East and North Africa who are themselves struggling for radical change from below in order to achieve democracy, social justice and secularism. The revolution must spread to Saudi Arabia and the other reactionary Gulf monarchies, which are the centre of counter revolution in the region. Solidarity is needed with all the uprisings in the region and elsewhere to free the people from dictatorships, neo-liberalism and imperialism.

One of the leader of the protests, Sheikh Nimr Nimr, who still being imprisoned by the Saudi Kingdom, actually said in a demonstration that he wanted the overthrow of the dictators Al Saoud, Al Khalifa and Al Assad. This is true internationalist solidarity.

I have not heard yet a single leader of the Syrian National Coalition, presided by George Sabra or from the Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, headed by Ahmed Jarba say such things. This is actually because they have done quite the opposite by seeking at any price the support of respectively Qatar and Saudi Arabia... They could learn a bit from Sheikh Nimr Nimr rather than kissing the feet of these dictators that were close allied of the Assad regime before the revolution and that have tried with all their efforts to transform the Syrian popular revolution into a sectarian war after its outbreak by funding reactionary and sectarian islamist and jihadist military groups. The greatest fear of these reactionary monarchies, especially Saudi Arabia, is to see a successful revolution in Syrian and the establishment of a democratic, social and non sectarian State at its borders.

Someone cannot claim to fight for freedom and dignity in one country while allying with dictators repressing their own people who are demanding the same things as the Syrian people.

Solidarity with all the people in struggle!

Down with Assad! Down with the Saoud! Down with all dictators!

Wealth and power to the people!

Source.

FEATURES

In-depth analysis from International Viewpoint's Features section



TURKEY

Erdo?an's Victory by Violence

GUNEY I??KARA, ALP KAYSERILIO?LU, & MAX ZIRNGAST · 8 January 2016

However: this was not a normal election as much of the Western media seems to be pretending it was, accepting the results and only pointing out some minor Election Day incidents as a side note. The Turkish liberal media is not much different, buckling before the restored power of the forces of reaction before the official results came in.

So what's a more accurate picture of yesterday's election and the Turkish political landscape more broadly? And after the electoral defeat of Erdo?an and the AKP and the great triumph of the leftist pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) in the June 7 elections, how was the AKP able to turn defeat into victory?

Taking the Initiative

It's first important to note that the official results are not yet in and that the words "electoral fraud" are being thrown around. There were plenty of incidents in the western, predominately Turkish part of the country. But in the Kurdish regions, accusations of electoral mischief abounded: reports of the army stationed at voting sites; threats and active attempts to block people from voting; ballot boxes moved with voting in process; electricity going out in a couple of very critical voting areas; observers kicked out of polling places, some even arrested.

Regardless, the general picture is clear : the AKP increased their vote by drawing from the pool of people who stayed home on June 7 and, even more importantly, by gaining many votes from the extreme right, anti-Kurdish Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). The HDP lost about a million votes (though they did pass the 10 percent parliamentary threshold), presumably from conservative Kurdish voters who returned to the AKP and from Turkish

protest voters who shied away from the Kurdish movement in an atmosphere of renewed war.

The AKP accomplished this by regaining the initiative it had completely lost. The low-intensity warfare against the Kurdish movement that was already taking place before the June 7 elections was escalated into an open war in Kurdistan against the militant Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Kurdish youth forces, the YDG-H. At the same time, state terror and (presumably) ISIS terror escalated in the west of the country. All this, of course, while the AKP was technically not in power and leading coalition talks, which — surprise, surprise — ended without any tangible results, thus enabling Erdo?an to call for snap elections.

On July 20, an ISIS suicide bomber blew himself up in Suruç amid a group of young socialists on their way to Kobanê, killing thirty-three. Immediately after the Suruç massacre, the government launched massive operations across the whole country, targeting the HDP, the Kurdish movement, and the revolutionary left.

According to the Human Rights Association (?HD), in the month following the attack, 2,544 people were detained; of those, only 136 were associated with ISIS — the rest were mainly from the organized left and the Kurdish movement. A few airstrikes against ISIS in Syria constituted the entirety of the Turkish state's contribution to the struggle against ISIS.

Only four days after the Suruç massacre, the government began airstrikes against the PKK, thus launching an open war. In the course of less than a week, the AKP completely changed the political dynamic of the country.

The war in Kurdistan also continued. Yet it seemed the majority of people saw these warmongering tac-

tics for what they were: the cheap use of human life for political currency in the snap elections. While AKP politicians sought to use the funerals of soldiers and police killed in battle with the PKK for political gain, they often were chased away by furious family members and friends.

After anger against the Kurdish movement failed to ignite as expected, Erdoğan and leading AKP cadres used a PKK attack in Diyarbakır to unleash an openly fascist mob of MHP supporters, the Ottoman Hearths (Osmanlı Ocakları) close to the AKP, and presumably some state forces (i.e. intelligence agencies) on September 8. Hundreds of HDP buildings were attacked — and in some cases burned — all over Turkey, and Kurdish civilians (or people who "looked Kurdish") were targeted.

But the worst was still to come.

Ankara and the Aftermath

The last and bloodiest chapter of Turkey's summer of violence came in Ankara on October 10, when two suicide bombers blew themselves up in a massive rally organized by different unions and leftist organizations for "Labor, Peace and Democracy." Over one hundred people — from the HDP, socialist organizations, and even from the mainstream Republican People's Party (CHP) — lost their lives, and several hundred were injured.

The massacre marked the first time such massive violence had taken place in broad daylight outside of Kurdistan and outside of the regions bordering the war in Syria. The message was clear: even non-Kurdish progressive and revolutionary forces, should they provoke the ire of the AKP, would suffer the same fate as the Kurdish movement.

The official culprit was a Turkish sub-group of ISIS. However, ISIS never officially took credit for the attack, and the actions of state apparatuses and the statements by leading AKP politicians were more than suspicious. It immediately became clear that the suicide bombers were very well known to security forces and were under close surveillance by the secret services. Indeed, a couple days before the at-

tack, one of the suicide bombers was taken into custody and released immediately.

In addition to the tragic human toll, the massacre devastated the HDP's campaign. For a significant period after the bombing, the HDP abandoned their electoral campaign entirely, focusing all their efforts on identifying the dead, regrouping their forces in an attempt to boost morale, and attending funerals for the fallen.

We still don't know if the government was directly involved in the attack, and we will never find out so long as the AKP is in power. What is apparent, however, is that the state has no intention of protecting the political activity of everyone in Turkey; indeed, it gains strength from the terror attacks that aim to crush the opposition.

After the Ankara massacre, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu admitted that the government has a list of ISIS-linked suicide bombers, but said the state cannot take legal action until they put their plans into action (a due process not afforded to the country's journalists, regularly arrested on trumped-up charges). He also took the opportunity to attack the HDP and boast of the AKP's gains in country-wide opinion polls.

This behavior is not a new development. It is deeply inscribed into the anti-democratic Turkish state. It is why the history of the Turkish Republic is riddled with massacres against minorities (Alevi, Kurds, etc.): authoritarianism and the politics of fear have been used to lethal effect.

After June 7, the AKP laid out the stakes in similarly repressive terms. President Erdoğan's senior advisor Burhan Kuzu said the election results showed that people had opted for chaos rather than stability, and would have to deal with the consequences. Deputy Prime Minister Yalçın Akdoğan accused the HDP of abandoning the peace process for entering the parliament with eighty members. And just days before Sunday's election, Davutoğlu warned that the state would return to disappearing Kurds, as it did in the 1990s, if the AKP's showing wasn't satisfactory.

A majority of the population, including many Kurds, seem to have bowed in the face of these threats. In the media, and among a major part of the population, the AKP are being accepted as saviors from the chaos of the inter-election period — ignoring that the AKP itself created this chaos.

For their part, the HDP, who dominated the debate in the leadup to the June 7 elections and forced the AKP into an ever more desperate and defensive position, was neither able to shape the political discourse nor formulate an appropriate response to the AKP's provocations and violence following the June 7 elections.

Part of the HDP's weaker showing in this election was the paradoxical result of the party's emphasis on electoral campaigning over the past two years, such that its extra-parliamentary mobilization was significantly weakened during this period. The HDP has allowed itself to be pushed on the defensive by the AKP's war and terror politics — so much so that party co-chair Selahattin Demirtaş once even called on both the state and PKK to silence their guns, as if the violence wasn't purely the result of the AKP's power politics.

The HDP, as a unification of various progressive elements in Turkey, draws its primary appeal and strength from movements and organizations active in the street, such as the LGBTQ movement, the Kurdish liberation movement, and various socialist parties. The co-chairs of the party, Figen Yüksekdağ and Demirtaş, reemphasized this in their speeches as preliminary results came in, stating that the struggle was to be carried on in workplaces, in the squares, all across the country. And they're right: the fight against the brutal repression and violence of the state cannot be conducted on a purely parliamentary level.

However, HDP's political praxis of late has been one of retreat: in the face of war and terror, in a country where parliament isn't even working according to minimal liberal-democratic standards, the party has restricted itself to parliamentary action. If the HDP's approach does not change swiftly

and take the battle to the streets, chances are high it will lose its democratic mass potential as a result of ultra-nationalist pressure from the outside, and liberalism and defeatism from the inside.

What Is to Come?

The AKP will very likely intensify its white terror. And as it stands, they have the advantage over a fragmented, uncombative opposition. In this environment, blaming the PKK for the HDP's electoral defeat rather than the weakness of the opposition — as some leftists in the opposition are doing — only aids the violent state and the far right.

Going forward, what is needed is broad organization and mobilization, particularly among the poor and the working class.

The Turkish-Sunni bloc in Turkey constitutes a clear majority, and the AKP effectively mobilizes this portion of the population through its use of the "Turkish-Islam Synthesis." However, it is possible and necessary to forge a politics of democratization that appeals to broad swaths of the population — even social conservatives in the west — by articulating solutions to the socioeconomic concerns of the majority. In short, redoubled efforts on class and street politics in the west of the country could well provide the key to uniting the oppressed masses against the Turkish state and its divisive, blood-thirsty politics.

The task ahead for the revolutionary forces is thus quite clear. Yes, there is a good chance that Erdoğan will use his restored power to take revenge and further weaken the left opposition with police operations and further repression of any oppositional media. Times will be rough. But there is no way forward other than radicalizing the struggle across society — in the streets, in the workplaces, in the schools and universities.

The AKP will seek to solidify their position with repression and by carrying on the war against the Kurdish movement. Yet they will also have to manage an increasingly dire economic situation; the war and the established polarization serve to divert

the focus from the social question. This, then, is the task that lies ahead: to bring the social question to the fore, and to unite the Kurdish people, religious

minorities, and all oppressed and marginalized groups together in struggle.